

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» *Getting to Know COPA Pilots*



LAURIE EINSTEIN KOSZUTA has been a freelance writer for many years and along with her husband, John, now owns a Cirrus SR22. With John as the pilot-in-command and Laurie as the partner, they regularly travel to see family, visit friends and enjoy our beautiful country. You can read more of Laurie's work on her website: www.laurieeinsteinkoszuta.com.



The Steners are Something Special in the Air

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta



***The Steners** picking up their 2018 G6 SR22T in 2021. Gavin says Sabine was supportive of owning an airplane again since they were unable to travel the year before due to COVID.*

COPA member Gavin Stener loves flying to Paris, which he does regularly in his SR22T. Of course, he doesn't fly to *that* Paris, the one with the Eiffel Tower, but rather to Paris, Texas, just a short 30-minute flight from his home airport in McKinney, Texas (TKI). He likes to take that trip to escape and clear his head from the day-to-day demands of running a manufacturing business.

Gavin developed his passion for aviation at the age of six when he and his family lived in Adelaide, Australia. "My family attended airshows every summer," said Gavin, who is originally from the UK. "I was fascinated by what I saw and told my parents I'd like to try that someday." His parents took note and gifted him a flight around Adelaide in a Cessna 172 for his birthday, a trip he took with his

best friend. The experience was one that he remembered long into his adulthood. Years later, faced with a 10-hour round-trip drive to the family's ranch in the Texas Hill Country, it was clear that he had to reignite that boyhood experience and get a small aircraft. "During construction on the property, I would sometimes drive 10 hours a day for a one-hour vendor meeting and be back



≡ **The Steners** enjoy flying as a team as they can support each other in gaining hours and experience.

to work the following day in Dallas. It was clear that flying a Cessna would easily cut that time in half and would be even faster in a Cirrus.”

Shortly after that realization, Gavin decided to begin taking flight lessons. “I knew,” he recalled, “that when you reach a certain point in your life, you want to do it right with a seasoned instructor. I wanted the right instructor and a well-maintained aircraft or aircraft fleet.”

After researching the options, Gavin engaged a certified flight instructor (CFI), one that came highly recommended, to teach him the skills he needed to earn his private certificate efficiently. For each lesson, he rented a Cessna 172.

“I’m forever thankful that I did it that way,” he says. “To begin with, it was more personalized. My CFI had the right personality to match my learning style. I didn’t want to deal with a newly minted instructor punching the sky on his way to the airlines. With

my CFI’s guidance, I earned my private certificate in about 70 hours at the Addison, Texas, airport (ADS).”

Shortly after receiving his private certificate, Gavin wanted to continue training to become instrument rated. “I immediately transitioned to renting a Cirrus aircraft and engaged an instructor through Plane Smart, a company headquartered at the Addison airport. They had a fleet of Cirrus SR20s and SR22s. It was a wonderful experience, and I was awarded my instrument rating in short order.”

Gavin was introduced to the Cirrus initially after one of his neighbors offered him a chance to look at the one he owned. Its sleek design, Avidyne avionics and CAPS made it an obvious choice of aircraft to own someday.

Gavin’s “someday” for Cirrus ownership came in 2021 when he purchased a 2018 G6 SR22T. “My wife, Sabine,” Gavin recalled, “was 100% supportive of



purchasing a Cirrus, particularly given our lack of travel during COVID. It is a totally different experience when you own a plane compared to renting one. You know how it is flown, maintained and cared for, which allows Sabine and I to focus on flying and having fun. When I first bought the airplane, I aimed to practice and fly every week. I thought I'd have more time during the week than I do. However, knowing the plane is there to fly at any time we want is priceless."

He added, "One thing I loved about the Cirrus was the Cirrus Airframe Parachute System (CAPS). Anyone who says that the parachute is not a needed backup system is probably not being honest about its value in case things go wrong. It is a proven lifesaver and an insurance policy of sorts."

It is obvious that Gavin is happy that he has a Cirrus. "The Cirrus is a beautiful aircraft and arguably the best in class

on the market, as proven by sales year after year."

After Gavin bought his plane, Sabine initially wanted to learn more than just how to pull the CAPS handle in an emergency. She wanted to learn how to land the plane if the need ever arose, but during her first lesson, she decided to invest the time to get her pilot's license.

"I am extremely proud of her," Gavin said, "because it is easier to learn to fly in a high-wing, slower aircraft like the Cessna 172 and then progress to a Cirrus. Sabine didn't do that. She jumped straight into learning to fly in an SR22. Sabine and I have sailed in many parts of the world, and she is a phenomenal skipper and navigator. Translating teamwork on the water to flying has been easy. It works when you have complementary and often redundant skills to keep each other in check. It is wonderful to fly as a team

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After Gavin was introduced to the Cirrus by a neighbor, he knew he would own one one day – it's sleek design, avionics and CAPS made it an obvious choice.



and support each other as we gain hours and experience.”

Gavin and Sabine use their plane to fly to interesting and fun destinations. “We enjoy longer trips that take four or more hours, such as from Dallas to Arizona, Colorado or Florida. Of course, we stop to stretch our legs at fuel stops along the way.”

One of the things that the Steners enjoy while taking those long trips is interacting with air traffic control (ATC). “To us, talking to ATC is great,” Gavin offered. “It’s one of the most significant resources pilots have available. These remarkable individuals help us navigate the skies and keep us safe, a dedication I always deeply appreciate.”

Through his company, 67 Designs, Gavin has merged his interests in adventure vehicles and industrial design. “I am an industrial designer and engineer,”

he said, “but I noticed in 2012 that the market had no premium quality options for holding iPhones and iPads in place for Jeeps and other adventure vehicles. The iPad was fairly new then and difficult to hold for any length of time. I wanted to create something lightweight, with Apple-like simplicity that could move to any desired orientation and be locked in place. The few products on the market then were of lesser quality and utility and would vibrate due to their choice of materials. That’s when I decided to design a mounting system made of carbon fiber, aluminum and nylon that would work. In 2016, we found that people also used our products in boats and airplanes. When I bought my airplane, I noticed that we needed better-performing mounting solutions, so I went to work to design and produce those aviation products in my company. One example is the Halo™ which is a

product that every Cirrus G3-G6 pilot or flight school can use to record and debrief every flight. A proper Designed-for-Cirrus SR platform for up to two action cameras that do not need tools and, therefore, no sign-off by an A&P is required. We focus on making our products here in America that are safe, robust and suitable for use in certified or experimental aircraft.”

“Aviation is a niche,” Gavin commented. “In niche markets, there are many hidden resources and tribal knowledge that must be passed down to generations of pilots who fly or buy a particular platform. The forums and resources that COPA has are invaluable to newbies and others. The forums are the best place to get qualified knowledge and experienced viewpoints, which I can access as a member. It is a great resource.” ⊕