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SPOTLIGHT

» Getting to Know
COPA Pilots



Arjun with Cirrus Aircraft's Anthony Bottini, who accompanied him on his first flight of 718SA.



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.

Arjun Gururaj Has a
Heart for Medicine and
a Passion for Aviation

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta

When Arjun Gururaj was growing up in New York and later in Texas, he had a bucket list. At the top of the list? Being a pilot. With no pilots in the family, his dad would ask what he planned to do with a pilot's license if he ever got one. Arjun's answer was always the same: "I'd fly!" Despite his parents' skepticism about aviation safety, he remained determined. Arjun didn't just want to learn to fly someday, he

wanted to fly into John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK), one of the country's busiest and most complex airspaces.

Though his early career path seemed to point toward becoming a commercial airline pilot, Arjun took a different route and decided to pursue medicine. He became a cardiologist and began practicing in Las Vegas, but his love of aviation never faded.

First Flight Lessons

About 20 years ago, Arjun decided the time was right to revisit his dream and began taking flight lessons at First Flight Aviation out of North Las Vegas Airport (KVGT). "I trained in a Cessna 172 with six-pack steam gauges," he recalled. "Those were the days before ForeFlight or electronic flight bags; everything was done on charts. I remember trying to

fold those old sectional maps into the proper shape and trying to figure out the airspace I was in."

As a young cardiologist balancing a demanding career in Las Vegas, Arjun took his time with his flight training. "I got to know the instructors well at the flight school and am still friends with them today," he noted.

Building Skills Not Just Hours

After logging about 70 flight hours, he obtained his private pilot certificate. "The moment I got my ticket, I started logging flight time in rented 172s," Arjun said. "When the flight school acquired a Cirrus, I transitioned to flying their SR20 and fell in love with the airplane. It is easier to fly, more advanced and aerodynamically designed than what I had flown before, and the side stick is just so cool."

» **Through the Cirrus Xi Design Program**, Arjun was able to match the exterior color of his SR22T to his Lamborghini SUV (below left with 718SA) and include it in the interior (below) as well.



Though he always intended to become instrument-rated, Arjun prioritized mastering stick-and-rudder fundamentals and avoiding rushing to the next level. He logged another 100 hours of VFR flight time before starting his instrument training, a step he strongly recommends.

Today, Arjun is IFR-rated and a devoted Cirrus pilot. “I have flown Cirrus airplanes for a long time,” he said. “I’ve flown every generation of Cirrus from the G2 to the G6, including others’ turbos and non-turbo models, SR20s and the SR22s.”

A Cirrus All His Own

Owning a new Cirrus had always been Arjun’s long-term goal. “I was very fortunate when I was offered the chance to take the spot of someone who dropped out of the Cirrus Xi Design Program,” he said.

Through the program, Arjun was able to take the design of his SR22T to the next level. As a self-described “big car guy,” he wanted the airplane to reflect elements from his Lamborghini SUV. “I brought color and leather swatches from my Lamborghini to the design studio in Knoxville, Tennessee. The design team thought it was really cool and was able to match the vehicle’s exact eye-catching Italian blue hue on the exterior and carry it through to the upholstery and stitching.”

The entire process took about a year, resulting in a one-of-a-kind Cirrus. In 2021, when the aircraft cleared production and flight testing, the delivery was beyond red carpet, as the team had a dyed-to-match Lambo blue carpet ready for him to walk on.



Mastering Class B Airspace

For his first flight in the new plane, Arjun asked Anthony Bottini, director of media development at Cirrus in Knoxville to go up with him. “Anthony agreed to go, and we completed some short field landings around Tennessee. I was a bit intimidated by him and thought, I gotta get this right.”

Building Skills

One of Arjun’s ongoing personal aviation goals is to fly into every Class B (Bravo) airspace in America, and he is close to achieving this milestone. “I have seven left out of the 37 total,” he said, noting that Class B airspace surrounds the busiest airports in the country. “Most general aviation pilots feel a little intimidated and avoid them, but I fly into them all the time.”



» **Arjun’s SR22T at KSFO** with San Francisco in the background. He says this airport’s Bravo airspace is the most demanding to navigate due to parallel approaches.

Due to his consulting work in Northern and Southern California, many of Arjun’s flights into Class B airports are work-related. “I have flown to meetings in Boston, Detroit, Chicago O’Hare and Chicago Midway,” he noted. “As a single pilot, I am very comfortable flying into Bravo airspace.”

Over time, Arjun has developed a wealth of experience and insight into flying in and out of Bravo airspace, so much so that he shares insight with flight instructors on navigating high-density airspace like Los Angeles International Airport (KLAX). “These skills make you a better pilot,” Arjun explained. “Many pilots fly the same mission repeatedly to the same airport. That’s fine, but at some point, you need to challenge yourself. You don’t become a better pilot by flying into the same uncontrolled airspace all the time.”

When asked which Bravo airspace is the most demanding, Arjun stated, “I’d say that San Francisco International Airport (KSFO) is probably the most difficult to navigate properly due to the parallel approaches. You’re flying very fast with the jets, which forces you to be precise, and the radio communications

have to be just right. There’s no room for mistakes. However, the Cirrus is incredibly capable of handling these missions; I feel there are very few piston aircraft that could do this.”

A Dream Realized

Arjun recently fulfilled his childhood dream of flying into JFK Airport. “It is one of the busiest airspaces in the world, and I was able to fly sequenced into it without any problems,” he said. “But the speeds are high due to all the traffic. You can’t approach JFK like you would a small airfield; it just won’t work. You have to adjust your flying technique and stay alert. Flying at that level also means thinking like a meteorologist – you need to anticipate the weather conditions; you can’t just hope for the best.”

Although Arjun flies nearly every week and logs about 300 hours a year, his medical career is thriving. He sees patients in his private practice and teaches cardiology and electrophysiology to residents and fellows at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). He is also a go-to Federal Aviation

Administration resource in Las Vegas for cardiovascular issues. “Many pilots from Southwest, United and American Airlines come to me when they have cardiac problems,” he shared. “I used to review charts for the FAA medical panel in Oklahoma City, and I plan to get back on that panel this year.”

Arjun often finds deep parallels between flying and medicine. “A lot of my analogies go both ways,” Arjun said. “In aviation, as in medicine, it requires anticipation, good decision-making and understanding the consequences of any action. Mastery only comes with practice.”

In the future, Arjun hopes to pursue further training to obtain his commercial license and possibly become a certified flight instructor. “I think it would be a great challenge,” he said, “and one that I would enjoy.”

While Arjun often flies for work, he also flies for pleasure, including visiting friends, seeing family in Texas and Illinois, and exploring mountain towns like Aspen and Telluride, Colorado. He’s interested in flying Angel Flights and supporting medical transport missions. “Those kinds of things are something that I would like to do because I’d like to give back,” he said.

Flying With Family

He often enjoys taking his daughters, 21-year-old, Anya, and 15-year-old, Kavya, to places they want to go. “My wife is a bit more nervous about flying,” Arjun offered. “She won’t usually fly with me unless we have a second pilot. It’s OK; I respect that. I want to get her into one of COPA’s non-pilot classes.”

Outside of medicine and aviation, Arjun is an accomplished pianist, passionate cyclist and landscape photographer. “If I’m not flying, I’m cycling. Work is just a means to fuel my passion,” he said. “I love to load my bike into the back of the Cirrus and take off for new adventures.”

Arjun strongly believes in COPA membership. He has attended several CPPP events, including one in Las Vegas, and hopes to attend others soon. “I get on the forum and peruse to see what’s happening,” he said. “I don’t post a lot, but I am always looking to learn something new.”

He’s also planning to attend this year’s COPA Migration in Amelia Island, Florida, and said, “Cross-country trips – that’s what the Cirrus was made for.” +



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