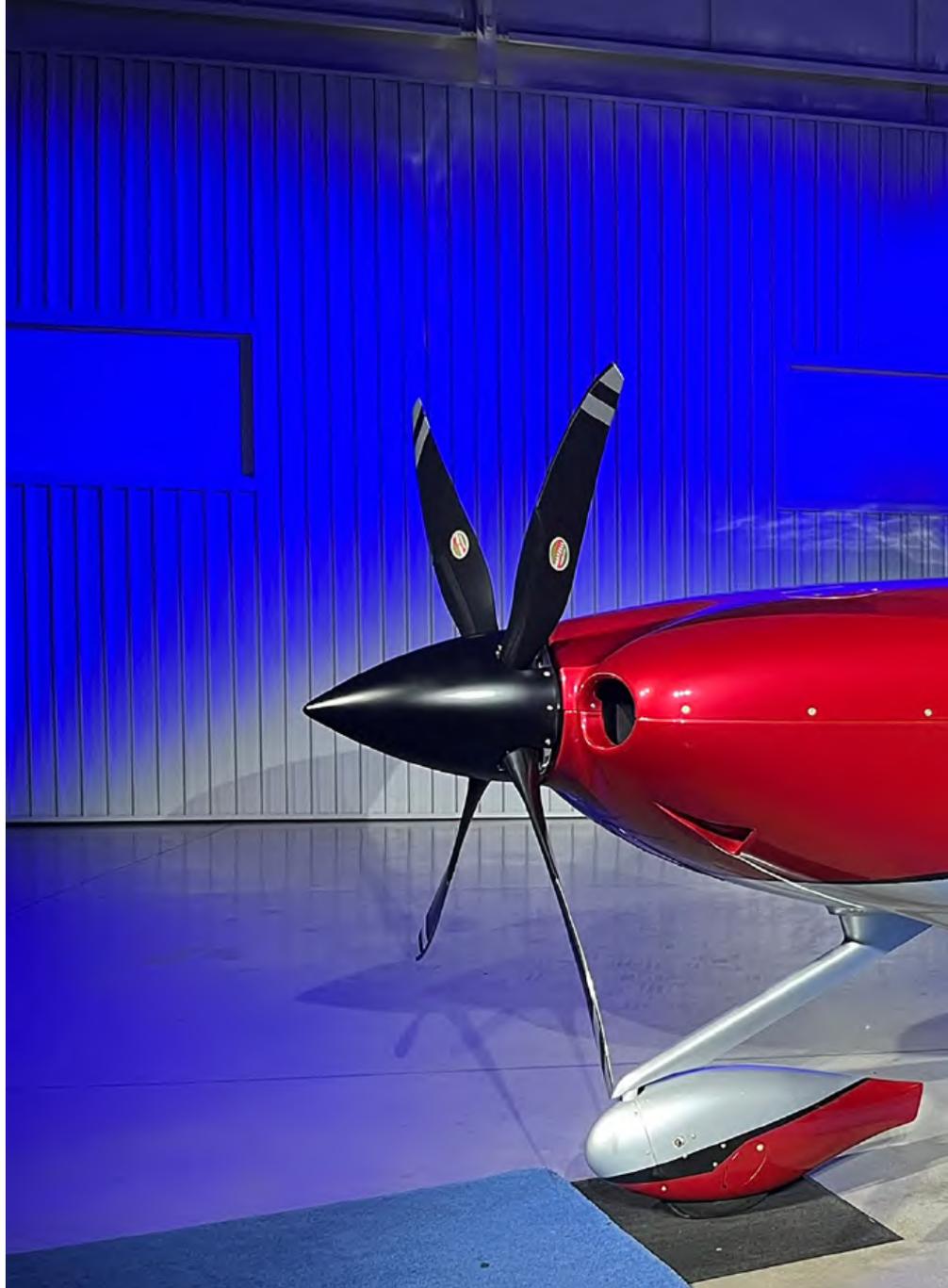


MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» 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.



From G1 to G7: Derek Rowan Has Had a Long Relationship with Cirrus

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta

According to Derek Rowan, there are two kinds of people in the world: those who look up when a small airplane flies overhead and those who don't. He's always been the type to look up. Even though he long had an interest in flying, it wasn't until he was in his 30s that he began taking lessons.



⤴ **Delivery** of Derek's new SR22T G7, April 2025 in Knoxville.

The nudge came from one of his employees who was already a pilot. “You’re not getting any younger,” the employee told him. “Why don’t you do it?”

It was a suggestion that Derek took to heart and in December 1995, he signed up for lessons at a Part 91 flight school at the Manassas airport (KHEF) in Virginia. By July 1996, he had finished and received his private certificate.

Six months after earning his private certificate, Derek bought his first airplane, a 1977 Cessna 172 that was almost 20 years old. The plane had been featured in AOPA magazine and described as “better than new” thanks to a factory-new engine upgrade.

A Family Connection, Found in Flight

It was around that time that Derek learned that he hadn’t been the only pilot in his immediate family.

“My father had been a pilot and had owned a Piper Warrior,” he said, noting that his father and mother didn’t live together and that he never had much of a relationship with him, which is why he never knew.

Aviation helped Derek and his father reconnect. They went to Sun ‘n Fun together once and hoped to make it to Oshkosh.



⤴ *Derek picking up his 2015 SR22 G5 in Duluth.*

Although they never made that trip to AirVenture together, the event stayed on Derek's bucket list and later became part of his own story.

Soon after earning his private certificate, Derek used the Cessna 172 to get his instrument rating. "I flew a lot to build hours and gain experience," he said. "I also flew often for my computer consulting and tech support business. I started that business in the mid-1980s and it's still running today."

An Early Bet on Cirrus

By early 2000, Derek was ready for a more advanced plane. That's when he discovered Cirrus.

"I had a partner who was interested in going in with me to purchase a Lancair/Columbia," he said, "and we decided to place a deposit on a new one."

However, when the projected price rose sharply, they canceled their deposit and turned to Cirrus instead.

"I believed in Cirrus long before many other pilots had even sat in one," he said. Buying a Cirrus was even more notable because Derek had never flown in one before making the purchase.

"The first time I flew in a Cirrus was during my factory training after picking it up in Duluth," he said. He was supposed to get his SR20 G1 in September 2001, but the events of Sept. 11 delayed delivery until October.

"They started numbering the planes at 1001," he recalled. "My serial number was 1152." That made his airplane one of the earliest off the assembly line. "I loved that plane," he said. "I kept it for 14 years before selling it and upgrading to a 2015 SR22 G5."

From Fisk to Formation

After upgrading, he often thought about joining the G2A (COPA to AirVenture, now called COPA Formation) mass arrival to AirVenture. But work scheduling conflicts always got in the way. "I had a lot of fun reading about the mass arrival, which sounded like a blast," he said. "I knew I would do it someday."





⏪ **COPA Formation** to AirVenture 2025 staging location in Janesville, Wisconsin.

Instead, he flew into Oshkosh using the iconic Fisk arrival, a route most pilots who have flown to Wisconsin know well.

“I was finally able to participate in the formation flight in 2021,” he said, “and I took the required clinics to prepare for the mass arrival.” He has joined the mass arrival every year since. In 2025, the group planned for 50 aircraft, but two had mechanical issues, so 48 planes launched from Janesville (KJVL), Wisconsin.

“We landed within seven seconds of our designated arrival time,” Derek said. “All 48 landed in less than six minutes. It was just super cool.”

With so many planes, precision and order are essential. “All participating pilots fly into Janesville, which serves as a staging airport for a mandatory final clinic and briefing before departure,” Derek said. “Earlier clinics happen during the year at various locations. Before launching to Oshkosh, all the planes line up on the runway in groups of three. The first group is far down the runway, leaving space for the others. We launch three planes at a time, 10 seconds apart.”

During AirVenture, Runway 36 is divided into 36 Left, the main runway and 36 Right, which is actually the taxiway. As the planes approach from the south, two of the three land together on 36 Left, while the third breaks off and lands on 36 Right at the same time. Each group of three touches down together.

Derek now helps others find the fun in formation flying. He leads formation clinics, mentoring new pilots as they learn the skills needed for safe formation flying.



⏪ **The COPA Formation camp** in the North 40 at EAA AirVenture.



⏪ **Derek** and his wife, Cathleen.



⏪ **A flight with Derek**, COPA member Mukul Dixit and his wife, Chelsea, touring the southwest U.S.

Flying for Work

Derek has logged about 4,600 hours of flying so far, averaging 250 to 300 hours a year, almost all of which supports his work. There aren't many places in the continental U.S. that he hasn't flown to. His wife, Cathleen, enjoys joining him in the right seat and sometimes goes along when he travels for work.

Today, Derek runs a boutique emergency-management consulting firm based in the Virginia/D.C. area that he launched in 2007. It is part of a wave of expanded preparedness needs that surged after Sept. 11. His firm helps government agencies plan, train and test their response to major incidents such as hurricanes, floods, displacements, outages and cascading communication failures, often by designing realistic exercises that pressure-test policies and procedures. In Derek's world, "mock disasters" are part of the job.

Ask Derek about scares in the cockpit and his tone shifts. He remains calm, but unmistakably serious. He's declared two emergencies in his career. One involved visible smoke in the cockpit, traced to an avionics unit that was beginning to short out. Another occurred after a COPA Migration trip, when he saw the oil pressure drop toward zero. It turned out to be a faulty sensor, but at the time, he didn't know. When air traffic control suggested a descent, Derek refused. "No, I'm not descending right now," he remembered saying. "I want all the altitude I can get."

There's More to This Man

Derek got his seaplane rating "for the fun of it." After selling his 2015 Cirrus in the spring of 2025, Derek took delivery of a brand-new SR22T G7, a plane he thoroughly enjoys.

He is an active COPA member, having joined the early online community that formed around SR20 development. He admits to reading more than he posts on the forums, but notes that membership is, without question, very worthwhile.

Outside of aviation, Derek has a few other passions: scuba diving and making short films. His filmmaking includes work projects, documentaries and comedic shorts.

"I prefer to keep most of it private and that's on purpose," he joked. "My life's pretty boring." No one who has been around him believes that. ⊕