

PILOT PROFILE : Jim Siemens

By JIM GILLASPIE

Ask any pilot what is better than owning a Harley and an airplane, and you will receive a variety of answers. To Jim Siemens of Yuma, it's a pretty simple question to answer: be a successful Harley dealer and own two fixed-wing aircraft and a helicopter; one of the aircraft and the helicopter he built himself.

A native of Corn, Okla., Siemens grew up on a farm and soon found that he liked to work on mechanical items, especially if they had an engine and were a challenge. He got his start in motorcycles in high school when he adapted a Briggs and Stratton engine to his bicycle for riding to school.

Siemens had two heroes in his young life, an uncle who was a Navy Seabee during World War II, and a farm neighbor, Oscar Megart. Megart, who lived about a mile and a half away, was a flying farmer who introduced Siemens to flying.

In 1956, when he was 20 years old, Siemens decided he wanted to be in Naval aviation. He scored high in the aptitude test and, as a result, went to boot camp at the Great Lakes Naval Recruit Depot as an airman recruit.

After graduation he attended aviation schools at Norman, Okla. and Memphis,

Tenn. In Memphis, the Navy selected him to attend the Aviation Metal Smith School, although he would have preferred to have been an aviation mechanic mate.

After school, he was assigned to BARSRON-2, which was stationed at Barbers Point in Hawaii. BARSRON-2 flew the WV-2 Super Constellation (Connies) aircraft on long range flights reconnoitering the barrier extension of the Dew Line. Siemens was a plane captain, which required him to fly as a crewman. He bought his first Harley Davidson motorcycle in Hawaii. He thought it was the best way to get around the island.

After a couple of years, he was transferred to the Naval Air Station at El Centro, Calif. In 1959, subsequent to the Marine Corps taking over Yuma's Vincent Air Force Base, his entire squadron was transferred to Yuma.

Jim still had his motorcycle and began hanging around Skip's (Costley) Harley Davidson Motorcycle Shop, eventually going to work there part-time. Part-time turned into full time when Siemens got out of the Navy.

In 1966, he bought the motorcycle shop and in 1972 married. Bonnie and Jim's business grew, and in 1975 they moved it to its present location. It was about this time the boomer generation began to discover the joys

of riding and owning a Harley.

In 1979, a customer came into the shop and told him about the thrill of taking flying lessons. Siemens asked him whom his instructor was, and he replied Bill Cohn.

Siemens contacted Cohn and asked about taking flying lessons. Bill asked when he wanted to start. Jim replied, "How about right now?" He hasn't looked back since.

Siemens got his ticket in 1980 and the same year bought a 1973 Piper Cherokee 140. In 1988, he and Bonnie flew to Fairbanks, Alaska. It was on that trip he decided he wanted a faster airplane.

Siemens looked at the kit plane market and settled on the Lancair 320, which he ordered in December 1988. Fortunately, when Jim built his house, he built an oversize garage to house his motor home. This made an excellent workshop for building the Lancair.

He and his son, Allen, worked long hours on the Lancair. It was signed off in December 1990 and made its first flight in March 1991. (*Arizona Flyways*, April 1997).

The Lancair has been flown approximately 600 hours, a good number of those while traveling in the summertime between Yuma and the Mogollon airpark.

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Bikes, choppers and planes

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Siemens was never interested in helicopters, comparing them to motorcycle sidecars: How do you keep them going straight?

He doesn't know how it happened but in 1996, after reading about the Rotoway Exec Kits, he found himself at the plant. He liked what he saw, got hooked and ordered one. Siemens completed assembly in 13 months and started flying it in 1997.

The Rotoway had 90 hours on it at press time. His Cherokee has flown more than 1,800 hours.

Siemens is considered the best overall mechanic in Yuma. He freely helps his many friends and enjoys a good challenge. He donated a great amount of time to the restoration of the "City of Yuma" endurance airplane. He says a Lancair could have been built in the time it took for the restoration.

The Harley Shop has been very successful, but Siemens thinks it's time to face new challenges, so he is turning his shop over to a new owner over an extended period of time. He plans to stay in Yuma and continue his aviation lifestyle.



BONNIE AND JIM SIEMENS with their Piper Cherokee, Rotoway Exec and the Lancair.

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