BONANZA

E33C AEROBATIC

OWNING A CLASSIC BEECH

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This year marks the 50th birthday of my beautiful 1968 E33C Aerobatic Bonanza, and whilst she is ageing gracefully, it is now time for a well-earned restoration and refurbishment that will prepare her for another 50 years of flying!

In 1968 three intrepid Apollo astronauts, Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and William Anders, became the first men to leave earth and orbit the moon, it was also the year that the Boeing 747 took its first flight. More importantly, it was the year that Beech took one small step for Bonanza and one giant leap for fun, building four prototype Aerobatic Bonanza demonstrators, assigned serial numbers CJ-1 through to 4.



THE AIRCRAFT

My aircraft, VH-KZA, was the fourth off the 1968 production line, serial number CJ-4, and was showcased across the United States during that year. It was also featured in many of the Beech sales marketing brochures from that period. Interestingly, all four of these aircraft fifty years on are still airworthy and flying, testament to their build quality and appeal.

Not many pilots are aware that Beech produced a fully certified Aerobatic Bonanza, with 25 of the E33C series built between 1968 and 69. The model was later re-introduced in 1970 as the F33C to compete for government and military contracts, with 117 manufactured before finally being discontinued.

The E33C is equipped with a 285HP Continental IO-520 fuel injected engine and is no aerobatic slouch

either, capable of just about all inside manoeuvres – snap rolls included!

VH-KZA was brought into Australia by Western Australian charter operator and AOPA Australia member, Bill Arkel, in 1979 and was used for all manner of commercial flying throughout the western state. Two owners later, it has accumulated over 5,600 hours TT, experiencing a few bumps and bruises across the past 50 years – if only it could talk!

No longer suffering the rigours of commercial life, VH-KZA is now enjoying a more relaxed pace of private ownership and has been affectionately nicknamed 'Bozzy', becoming a beloved member of our family.

RESTORATION PROGRESS

Since acquiring the aircraft in 2012, I have slowly chipped away at a range of refurbishment jobs, including a complete set of new interior floorboards, all new interior upholstery, replacement of the pilot and co-pilot magnesium rudder pedals and a full undercarriage removal and rebuild to name a few.

Like many aircraft in Australia, VH-KZA has spent the majority of its time in and around coastal locations and while kept in a hangar, it has also spent time outside exposed to the elements. In the same way the sun, wind and rain can erode and shape the hardest of rock over time, they too can facilitate corrosion in light aircraft!

In 1968 when the aircraft was built, its original owner did not consider factory corrosion proofing to be a worthwhile investment. And, this thinking was not uncommon for the era, as very few owners would have been considering the future of their aircraft in terms of a service lifespan of 50 years and beyond.

Having said this, the airframe is in remarkable condition thanks to regular applications of ACF-50, which have kept the structure protected. Despite these preventative measures however, the aircraft unfortunately developed a spot of corrosion in the left hand wing that recently required significant restoration work by the expert team at GOAIR, Bankstown Airport.

OWNING A CLASSIC

Owning a classic Beechcraft is certainly not without its challenges, but it has been made easy by the fact that there are such incredible resources available.

Firstly, you cannot go past being a member of the Australian Beechcraft Society (www.abs.org.au). Not only will you get to meet some great like-minded people, but you will also get to see some of the best loved and well-maintained Bonanza's in Australia. Additionally, the ABS run a series of maintenance and pilot proficiency workshops and seminars, all aimed at helping make you a better Beech owner and pilot.

Secondly, there is the invaluable BeechTalk forums (www.beechtalk.com), an extensive online community of Beechcraft owners and pilots from all over the globe. Post a question and kick-back as the advice rolls in! No question is too big or too small for the BeechTalk community. From new owners to season veteran Beechcraft professionals, you will be blown away with the quality and depth of advice.

Thirdly, with the advent of the internet, we now have access to Beechcraft parts from around the world, giving owners the tools to find the right parts, and more importantly - at the right price!

WORTH IT?

Yes, absolutely!

There's something incredibly rewarding in keeping such an icon of general aviation airworthy, knowing that you're preserving a peice of genuine history. With rspect to the E33C specifically, unlike other Bonanza models, they've become a highly collectabale aircraft, with their value globally now on the rise. At 50 years of age, they are certainly heading for vintage status, but to me it will always be a modern classic!





