

Ken Sutton: There's a tool for every job and a job for every tool.

By Mike Taylor

Just prior to Christmas 2013, I received an email from Pat Cannon and MU-2 operator Ken Sutton. Pat expressed his sincere appreciation to Ken who voluntarily shared his experience as an MU-2 owner. Pat seemed overjoyed in telling Ken how owner/operator stories such as his reassure the MU-2 team of their sense of purpose in working to support "this incredible machine." Pat continued, "Even though it is, in fact, only a machine, each one tends to have its own personality and we soon become one with it after we have gotten to know it well." Ken's email follows:

Hi Pat & Rick:

I wanted to share some of my story with you so you can better understand how deep the MU-2 burns in the souls of so many.

I learned to fly when I was in high school. I got my high school to agree to allow me to skip lunch to fit in all my classes in the morning, and then leave school to work for my dad's construction company in the afternoon. They understood my flying ambition. I then would eat a sandwich on the way to the jobsite and work the rest of the afternoon, often into the evenings. I would earn enough money during the week to allow for a flying lesson on Saturday or Sunday. I had my private, commercial, instrument, CFI, and ME by the time I graduated in 1980.

In college, I studied business and economics with the idea that I needed a degree, and a backup plan to my proposed career in aviation. In 1981,

I wrote to Mitsubishi—maybe it was you? I really can't recall. It was somewhere in Texas where I got an address. I expressed my enthusiasm for the MU-2 and asked if there were any pictures I could get to decorate the walls of my dorm room. A few weeks later, I was sent a whole package of promotional pictures that were 8x10's and had stats about the airplanes on the back. I was so excited, you can't imagine. In my dad's shop, I took frame stock and built oak frames for each picture I received. I matted them, cut a piece of glass from old salvaged windows, and properly framed these pictures. They adorned my dorm room for the next three years and followed me to my first apartment the last year of school. From there, I sadly have no recollection of what happened to these pictures.

Regardless, my love of the MU-2 was burned into my soul as I got up every morning looking at those pictures, telling myself that one day I would have the opportunity to fly this airplane.



Skip forward decades, and about 15,000 flight hours later, to this past year when I was finally able to fulfill my longtime dream of not only flying the MU-2, but actually owning one of my own. It's so far beyond anything I could have comprehended back when I was in high school, you can't possibly imagine.

I wanted to share this little story with you so that you understand the good you are doing in supporting Mitsubishi, and hence enabling the dreams of so many.

I will take my family to Orlando from Chicago on Thursday. It will be the first trip with the entire family on our new airplane. I can't wait to show them what all this talk has been about all these years!

Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year!

*Ken Sutton
N616KL*

In March 2014, squeezed in between a trip I had just made to Europe and one Ken was planning to take to Japan, I was able to visit with

Ken by phone. His enthusiasm was apparent, and with only a few questions to lead him into telling his story, I soon began to appreciate the opportunity I had in high school learning to type, fast. So the following is what Ken had to say in the best typing shorthand I could take down.

Ken mentioned not knowing Pat's position at Mitsubishi. There's a longer story behind this, but suffice it to say that Pat has

been associated with the MU-2 since the early 70s. Pat is one of the highest-time MU-2 pilots in the country and leads Turbine Aircraft Services as its president, succeeding Tom Berscheidt following his passing in 2011.

As mentioned in Ken's email, Mitsubishi sent some really nice photos following a letter in response to a magazine ad sent by Ken. It's easy to see how 40 years has passed, as response to an advertisement today commonly takes the form of smart phone communications and JPEG images. Suffice it to say Ken's love affair with the MU-2 began in the form of postal letter. That indeed signifies a generational shift.

In the 70/80s, Ken was a teenager and he was really into the muscle cars. He dreamed what an amazing thing it would be to fly an MU-2 someday. It was like the first beautiful girl that you see and develop an affection for. As with most first loves, the affection faded and Ken busied himself with work and starting a family.

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Ken Sutton (continued)

Ken owned and flew a 2003 model Cessna 310 until the end of 2013. He would travel all over the country in it for business and personal trips that made sense. He worked for the airlines, and knew well that owning a small airplane “opened up another part of the world.” He could fly it on his own schedule and to destinations not well served by commercial transports. But Ken would not pull the trigger on buying an MU-2 until much later in his flying career.

The 310 was a challenge, according to Ken, and would prove to be nowhere near as capable as the MU-2. His father, in the construction business, used to tell him “there’s a tool for every job and a job for every tool.”

Weather was an issue with the smaller aircraft. This led Ken to search for higher performance aircraft such as twin Cessnas, King Airs and Citation Jets. He launched into some very thorough research. His next plane would be one best suited for the flying he wished to do. Although the MU-2 was also a contender, his research would not be biased towards his past love affair with the aircraft.

Range, payload, and efficiency all played an important role in the decision to move up to an airplane that Ken could use for his business travel, and occasional family travel needs. In the end, however, he was unable to convince himself that any of the other aircraft were better than the MU-2. In just more than six months of ownership, Ken was more and more convinced he made the right decision.

In the world of private pilots there are literally thousands of aircraft models from which to choose. And each pilot holds dear to his heart the memories of flying one or more aircraft in particular. This vastness of aircraft creates a community of pilots that are willing to share their experiences and partake in the sharing with other pilots who come along. Ken expressed unequivocally, that other pilots often love the MU-2 too.

When operating his MU-2 at commercial and non-commercial airports around the U.S., Ken encounters numerous pilots. He shared that many of these pilots tell him they have always wanted to fly the MU-2. Ken had heard this story himself while flying commercially and in his Cessna 310. Now that he owns one, he sees why. The appeal of the MU-2, in his words, is extraordinary, and it is a widespread sentiment among pilots he encounters.

As part of the path to buying the MU-2, research involved budgeting for its purchase and operation. Ken confirms that his expectations

have been spot on. He went on to say that often it has actually worked out much better than expected.

When asked about his experience with the aircraft, Ken commented that the job of learning and familiarizing himself with the MU-2 is now all consuming. He believes in the mantra: ask me again in a year. In other words, the experience is really all about the path to getting there. But he did say that the experience thus far is fabulous and continues to be.

“The MU-2 flies like an airliner or a jet. It’s comfortable, it fit very well from day one, and every day it seems to fit better,” said Ken. He equated the purchase to that of buying a pair of new shoes.



Others have asked him what’s next? Ken’s simple answer: “This is it. For what we are doing it fills the need.”

When pressed, Ken offered that he may fly his MU-2 to Norway later this year. He mentioned his wife is from there, and that an airport nearby their family home would make flight connections through other big cities unnecessary. He was convinced it’s a good idea after having spoken with Mike Laver, another MU-2 owner who flew his aircraft around the world. “Canada

and the Caribbean are also in my future,” says Ken.

For now he’s busy flying between the college cities of his two daughters, one at Washington State in St. Louis, MO, and business trips to New York and Philadelphia, while living outside of Chicago. Ken conjectures that the MU-2 is “my little time machine.”

FBOs really like the aircraft, according to Ken, and are helpful with facilitating his trips. Ken’s other daughter was recently picked up at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, whisked to Chicago’s O’Hare airport for a last-minute visit with customs to prepare for their trip to Japan. All of this otherwise time-constrained travel was facilitated by use of the MU-2.

Ken mentioned that his MU-2 has new MT propellers, which offer impressive performance. In addition, the aircraft has “ramp presence.” This relates to his teenage love affair with the MU-2 and its resonance with the muscle car fascination of his youth.

The MU-2 is the third airplane Ken has owned. Now 52, he sees owning the MU-2 as an all-in proposition. Ken worked with Jet Air to refurbish the instrument panel. SureFlight gave it new paint. The impressive overhaul of the 1973 model makes it look brand new.

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Ken Sutton (continued)

“When it was introduced, the MU-2 was way ahead of its time; it was built with the same philosophy as an airliner. You see that up close when you touch it. You feel it when you close the door and sit in it. It’s robust. Its dispatch reliability is strong. Mitsubishi built it with airliner quality,” all spoken from the point of view of a commercial pilot who has seen how airliners are routinely used up to their capacity in every respect.

Ken flew commercial for 27 years and retired at age 50 for economic reasons. Ken sees the good days of being an airline pilot as passed.

From 1996-1999, Ken took a leave of absence from work and started a new business. He is now managing his third business with family that involves development of new technology in electronic lighting.

Ken admits that he is still learning a great deal about the aviation community and is humbled by the hard working MU-2 team. “They work at a level that shows seriousness and professionalism,” he continued, “They are very thorough and this is inspiring to me.”

While traveling with his family of three daughters, wife, and two female cats, comfort is a key factor in transportation. Ken quips that his eldest daughter really likes the rear divan seat as she takes advantage of the opportunity to sleep right after boarding. He mentions that his youngest daughter has some interest in being a pilot, although he will work to ensure that hers is a strong commitment to the discipline. His middle child and wife concur that the MU-2 is indeed a time machine.

Our conversation is cut short in light of Ken’s trip to Japan the next day. Again, inspired by Mike Laver’s round-the-world trip, including a stopover in Japan, Ken is making a point to stop by the Mitsubishi factory and museum to see the MU-2 prototype and view the production facilities.

Success is born out of passion. As a marketer I am accustomed to embellishing, if even glamorizing, the words of others. However, with little effort to that end I share Ken’s words. His passion for the MU-2 is expressed very well. His genuine enthusiasm would place Ken tops among MU-2 salespersons if the company were indeed selling new aircraft today. Next time you’re asked what’s the right airplane tool for the job, here’s a hint: for the right job, the tool is an MU-2.

