

Tom Bond, MU-2 Pilot

By Mike Taylor

Mike Taylor is a former aircraft design engineer, 24-year aviation industry veteran, current marketing consultant and private pilot.

Every few months I have the pleasure of meeting another MU-2 owner/operator. This time it was Tom Bond, an attorney from Texas. I figured I'd like him since I'm from Texas, and we've got a reputation here for being friendly folks.

I first learned that Tom has been a pilot since the early 1980s. Tom informed me he's owned many airplanes. Starting with trainers, he proceeded moving up in scale. "Isn't this what ordinary pilots do?" Tom continued, "The MU-2 was my 17th airplane when I bought it the first time and the 19th when I bought it back." He informed me he'd taken a "very nice" Duke in trade for it a year ago and now the Duke's for sale.

Originally bought in 2007, Tom explained how he'd met the MU-2's previous owner, "We used to see each other at a rural airport. I was visiting ranches and thought the airplane was really neat. I had heard a lot about the MU-2." Tom was flying a Cessna 421 at the time and told its present owner, the MU-2 was "really cool." Tom asked him, "Let me know if you ever want to sell it." Eventually, he called.

In preparation for his next move up, Tom started to research the MU-2. He punctuated, "This was before the SFAR implementation. I did lengthy research, read all the news and accident reports I could find." Due diligence an evident priority, Tom was determined to make himself very comfortable with the impending purchase. Tom concluded, "With proper training, I was assured the MU-2 would be the most capable plane for my purposes."

Tom trained with Shawn McDonell in Salina, Kansas, who put him through "MU-2 boot camp," as he said. Tom added, "I've never looked back. I love the plane. I love what it can do."

But about a year ago Tom sold his vacation property in Colorado and invested in a ranch in Texas. The thought was that he no longer needed a turboprop. His sights turned to piston singles to fly around Texas, and the MU-2 was "traded for a nice [Beechcraft] Duke."

Next, Tom sold his ranch in Texas and bought a ranch in Colorado. With two kids in Texas and two in Colorado, he realized he needed more capability in an aircraft. The Duke required full fuel to get to Colorado nonstop. And while this was doable, there was no room left for baggage considering weight.

In talking with the guy to whom he had sold/traded the MU-2, Tom learned of his intentions to sell it and move up to a jet.

Owner/Operator Spotlight

So, eventually the two made a deal, and Tom bought back his previously owned MU-2. "It was the best decision I ever made. I like this airplane because I know it well," he declared.

This time Tom did his recurrent training at Simcom, where upon he immediately began flying the MU-2 to Colorado.

I asked Tom about his expectations for the airplane, wanting to know more about how he uses it. He replied that he rarely flies for work; it was purchased just for family use. "Having owned it for approximately six years, it served that role well," he professed.



N383TX, an MU-2 M-model owned and flown by Tom Bond, attorney-at-law.

Tom's passion for flying has always been separate from his work. For 30 years he's been in the legal profession. On occasion, he would fly himself on a business trip. At times, he would take a business associate along. But the primary use of the aircraft he'd owned was for family travel.

Although Tom's firm is very large, with national and international offices, in his Austin office Tom knows of only one law partner who

is a pilot. The joy of flying seems to be on a truly personal level for Tom.

Of all the Cheyenne, Turbo Commander, and piston twins he's flown, for the money nothing compares to the MU-2, according to Tom. His aircraft is an M-model. As such, it has higher pressurization, i.e. higher service ceiling, and can carry 1000 lbs. of people and bags, features that have been very appealing to him.

I asked Tom, where did his passion for flying begin? Following his first round of graduate school, Tom returned to Austin. Shortly thereafter, he took four hours of flying lessons "just because I had always wanted to do this," he avowed.

He later moved and took a job. This was around 1973/4. Fast-forward, and Tom finished law school and passed his bar exam in 1982. The following day he started flight school.

Tom earned his single-engine pilot certificate and instrument ratings at the former Tim's Airpark, later named Austin Executive Airpark Airport (not to be confused with Austin Executive Airport, KEDC). Presently, Tom bases his MU-2 at Georgetown Municipal Airport approximately 40 miles north of Austin, TX.

On one memorable trip, Tom and his wife took two of their children (he clarified: two young couples) nonstop to Denver for a weekend. Tom informed me, "The MU-2 was perfectly suited for this kind of travel,"—six passengers plus baggage. He

Tom Bond (continued)

summarized, "In any other aircraft it would have cost twice as much, considering both purchase price and maintenance, for a trip like that."

Tom confers that his story is like others who fly the MU-2. Many have had the opportunity to trade their aircraft, or to move up (for example, to a small jet), but later realized they missed their MU-2. Jokingly, Tom agreed he did not share this sentiment with the seller of his MU-2 the second time around, as moving up to a small jet was precisely what he intended to do.

"It's a phenomenal aircraft for the money. For a lot more money, you can buy a bigger airplane," said Tom. He concurred it will be interesting to follow the seller who is looking at a CitationJet. But Tom is convinced many CitationJets would not carry the load of the MU-2 on a similar mission profile. However, the desire for many pilots is to continue going up the ladder, and he's certain the seller will enjoy the process. According to Tom, "I've had bigger turboprop planes. I was never really interested in a jet. But he certainly was."

When asked about his current missions for the MU-2, Tom noted he has a place near Durango, Colorado, and flies to Denver regularly. In addition, he flies around Texas, sometimes to the Midwest and Louisiana. Nevada will be a future destination and a west coast trip is planned for the Fall.

He really appreciates the MU-2's ability to load it up and go. "It's

been very reliable," he states. In the six years he's flown it, he's only left it on the ground twice, with minor issues. Tom's M-model has the earlier TPE331-6 engines. It's moderate in weight, but does 280-282 knots on 72 gallons per hour, a combination that he seems quite pleased with.

Tom left me with the impression he takes an evenhanded approach to life, his work and his flying. As a litigator, facilitator and family man, this makes sense. Flying is as methodical as an approach to choosing an aircraft. There's a process to arriving at a comfortable solution. It entails discovery and analysis. There are goals and, ultimately, the satisfaction of reaching them.

When asked about his favorite airplane, Tom trumpeted, "The MU-2 is at the top of the list. I've owned several very nice planes, but it is remarkably more capable and more durable than any of the others I've had. It carries more, flies faster on relatively less fuel, and performs better in hot and cold conditions. In a typical year it is only in the shop for its regular maintenance and maybe one other day trip to Intercontinental Jet Services Corporation for non-scheduled stuff." He concluded, "The plane is there now, in Tulsa, for its annual and some panel upgrades."

For Tom Bond, satisfaction with the MU-2 came about through a process. His perfect airplane is well defined by the journey it took to get there. I believe that's what makes Tom so pleased with the airplane he loves.



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