



At left: C-FUZZ is a two-seat 1946 Cessna 120. The Cessna 140 is a 120 with flaps. The Cessna 170 is a 140 with four seats and a bigger engine. These are the direct ancestors of the ubiquitous 150 and 172. Today, a new Cessna 172 costs US\$364,000! Photos courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin



Claude Roy and Joan Armstrong greet attendees at the registration desk in the lobby.



Vince Landreville about to touch down followed closely by Mike Prescott. Pilots monitor a common radio frequency and they keep their eyes open!



Mike Prescott takes off on one of a half dozen introductory flights for Challenger neophytes.

Expanding horizons together

Enthusiasts attend 24th Challenger Winter Rendezvous

By Bryan Quickmire

Challenger pilots range from grizzled captains with 30,000 hours logged in every type of aircraft imaginable to low time neophytes who have never flown anything but their own Challenger. Challenger owners whose kits are still in the assembly phase may never have piloted anything at all. Ages are from 18 to 80.

These people all have something in common – none were born with a pilot licence in their pocket. They all, every one of them, started expanding their horizons by taking that all important first flying lesson. From there they progressed to the unforgettable first solo, then to short cross-country hops, then to earning an

entry level licence ... each step expanding their horizons.

Regardless of the length and breadth of their logbooks, when people start flying their Challengers they typically are expanding their horizons in some fashion. Operating off-airport is new to most; operating on-airport is new to some. Configuring with tundras, skis, floats expands horizons to new destinations with new surfaces. All have new nuances. Low and slow sightseeing is also new to most as is soaring in a powered aircraft. Ever lengthening cross-country flights very obviously expand horizons.

A synergy of plane and people

These expanding horizons have a common thread. In the same way that no one is born with a licence, no one with a

licence got it knowing all about all of these facets of aviation. They learned it from someone, somewhere, sometime.

There lies the uncommon character of the Challenger. The airplane comes complete with its own community, a network of ardent owners and ice providers all across Canada and United States. There is a synergy between the plane and the people.

Challenger enthusiasts provide everything from instruction to mentoring advice to hands on help. No matter where owners are located, no matter how remote, they can access this network in person then via phone, text, or internet.

In 2013 a dozen amphib Challengers launched on cross-country trips measured in thousands of kilometers along less traveled paths, traversing the entire breadth of Canada. And with the security blanket of our community and some were grateful to avail themselves of the community's assistance route.

Speaking of expanding horizons

At the banquet on Saturday night the Farthest Flown Award went to



Above: Darth Vader on a futuristic rocket sled?

At right: On the right Patrick Vinet taxis in with Capt. Kshemendra Weeratunga who owns an amphib Challenger XL-65 in Sri Lanka. On the left are Challengers pausing between local sightseeing flights.





Three trikes landed, one on skis and two on wheels. The two on wheels were not able to take off dual and had to leave their passengers behind. There are worse places than Chateau Montebello to be marooned!



Above left: This 1961 Piper PA-22-108 Colt was converted from tricycle to conventional gear. The taildragger configuration makes a plane with the engine in the nose much more practical on skis.

Above: Is it a bird? Is it a plane? It's both! Modern vinyl graphics can be used to render designs limited only by the imagination!

At left: Mike MacNeil's stunning yellow and blue Challenger on retractable wheel/skis was voted the Best Showplane. The cover of the February 2014 issue of COPA Flight featured Mike's plane on amphibious floats.



Brown for his thousand plus kilometre round trip from his airstrip on the Bruce Peninsula between Georgian Bay and Lake Huron. All the other attendees from south central and southwestern Ontario were socked in and came by car so why didn't Kevin? Well, partly because Kevin had a relatively weather free path, and partly because all the roads in his neighbourhood were closed – blocked by snow! A skiplane was the only way out!

A new award – Least Farthest Flown – was created spontaneously at the banquet to recognize Denis Thomassin for his epic flight from Papineauville some 5,000 metres to the west. Although his base is upriver from Montebello, the flight was downwind which was fortunate indeed because even with the tailwind it took a full 120 seconds! To make the odyssey even more challenging Denis had to fight his way home against the wind and the return leg took nearly 180 seconds. Thank goodness for his perseverance!

The honour for Farthest Travelled – Canada went to Mike and Tracy Hughes from Edmonton. You may recall that at the Challenger 30th Anniversary celebration Mike won the Farthest Flown Award for his amphib voyage of 4,500 kilometres return and Tracy won Best Supporting Spouse for woman-handling their 50,000-pound motorhome along the route

to provide overnight accommodation.

Furthest Travelled – United States went to Vince Vairo for his second trip to Montebello from his home in Tucson, Arizona. Vince, who is assembling a Challenger kit, flew F-4's and F-100's in the USAF then went on to a second career with a major airline and was flying the DC-10 when he retired.

The ultimate award – Furthest Trav-

elled across the Entire Universe – was won hands down by Kshemendra Weeratunga who came all the way from Colombo in Sri Lanka. Really! This is a round trip of 17,000 miles, which in Canadian is over 27,000 kilometres, and it represents over 40 hours of airlining!

Kshemendra is a senior training captain at SriLankan Airlines, dual rated in the A-320 and A-330. He and his friend

Kapila Gunaratne, also a captain at SriLankan, have Challenger XL-65's on Puddlejumper amphibious floats. In this the year of the polar vortex it would have been much more sensible for Kshemendra to have stayed home in Sri Lanka and for everyone else to have rendezvoused there!

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This 1965 Champion 7ECA Citabria is capable of light duty aerobatics. Citabria is Airbatic spelled backwards! Photos courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin



This Bell CH-146 Griffon is based upriver at CFB Petawawa with 427 Special Operations Aviation Squadron. 427 is a tactical helicopter unit that provides support to the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command.



This Cessna 207 has been modified with a turbine engine and a five-bladed prop. With all that power it still couldn't land because conditions were only suitable for skis.

Challenger Rendezvous

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And speaking of the polar vortex

The 24th annual Challenger Winter Rendezvous was, as it always is, a great success. The polar vortex retreated just long enough to make temperatures perfect – warm enough to be comfortable but cool enough to keep the snow from getting sloppy.

Attendance was excellent, either in spite of the wickedest winter in decades or perhaps because of it – what better prescription to cure cabin fever!

While most of the attention, and the photography, is focused on the skiplanes cavorting outdoors much of the value of the Challenger Winter Rendezvous is rendered indoors. Our event has become not just the largest and most famous winter aviation event in Canada and arguably worldwide but also the most significant. It's more than a chilifest!

Saturday's five seminar sessions had a common emphasis on fun flying with the maximum degree of safety. Topics ranged from planning and executing long cross-country voyages to the care and feeding of our engines to strategies and tactics for dealing with problems and emergencies. At the banquet the keynote addresses by leaders of COPA and UPAC prognosticated on the future of recreational aviation.

Together we expand each other's horizons, limited only by our imagination and desire.

Not to mention the five-star facilities

Fairmont Le Chateau Montebello is the world's largest log cabin – built as a private retreat for the rich and reclusive it has since

hosted prime ministers and presidents. Throughout the weekend attendees gravitate to the lobby to greet old friends and meet new ones around the magnificent three-story six-sided granite fireplace.

For the hardy there are outdoor activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, skating, dog sledding and sleigh rides. For the less hardy there is the indoor Olympic sized pool with hot tub, the fitness centre, the spa, the comfy chairs, the lobby bar, etc.

For everyone the Chateau's chefs turn out spectacular breakfasts, lunches and dinners.

The unique Challenger camaraderie perfuses the entire weekend – inside and out.

Next year is the 25th

Chateau Montebello has already been booked for the 25th Annual Challenger Winter Rendezvous. Mark the dates on your calendar now: January 30 to February 1, 2015.

At the Winter Rendezvous you will see the Challenger community in action and sense its aura. You will witness the synergy between the plane and the people.

In the meantime, during 2014 we have a full slate of Challenger events across Canada. Dates and places of future events as well as reports, pictures and videos from past events can be found on the Challenger Canada website <http://www.challenger.ca>.

The website also contains complete details on the Challenger Canada line of aircraft. National Ultralight Inc, the exclusive Canadian distributor, can be reached by email at challenger@challenger.ca or the old-fashioned way by phone at 705-721-9811.



Denis Thomassin shows the stunning performance of his 582-powered Challenger. Note the snow whipped up by his prop blast!



This classic Challenger long wing looks hesitant to touch down. No worries mate – the ice is 14 inches thick – enough to support an eight to 10-ton truck!

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