





A man and his passion for **FLYING**

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL fall morning, crickets are chirping, birds are singing, the air is crisp and still — and Chuck Doyle is missing.

In his garage, the coffee's still hot, the lights are on and the stereo playing. It's obvious that Doyle has been here. But where is he now? Then, the unmistakable roar of a radial engine breaks the silence and a black and red biplane flies overhead. Mystery solved. Doyle isn't missing. He's simply out flying one of his airplanes, sharing his love of aviation with someone who stopped by that morning to say hello.

Doyle's "garage" is really an airplane hangar nestled in southern Minnesota at a place called Sky Harbor Airpark, a residential community built around a grass runway.

On a wide, grass taxiway just outside of his hangar, the biplane taxis up. Doyle is at the controls, and his passenger, a young man,

is all smiles as Doyle shuts the plane down. The passenger climbs out and, excited, starts telling his family about the flight. Doyle shakes off their offers to pay for fuel, and the young man and his family happily head for home.

You follow Doyle into the hangar, and he offers a cup of coffee.

"It's been here all morning. It's probably pretty bad by now," he apologizes and offers to brew up a fresh pot. But fresh coffee doesn't matter once you take in the sight before you — the hangar's size alone is enough to make anyone drool! Built in 1999, the 80-by-100-foot hangar has an in-floor heating system, office area, paint booth and a shop with enough tools and machines to completely restore an airplane or build >>

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one from scratch. But best of all, the hangar is packed with airplanes. And, they're all cool. From the tiny Pietenpol homebuilt powered by a Ford Model A engine to the huge, 1953 Beech 18, Doyle has nine airplanes in his collection and a few other vehicles thrown in, like a 2005 Harley Spring Classic and a 1932 Ford Model A Roadster.

Doyle offers you a chair and tells you that he grew up on a small farm in Apple Valley with a runway in the backyard. His dad, Chuck Doyle Sr., was an airline pilot known for his barnstorming, banner towing, sky writing and sense of humor, and the younger Doyle grew up flying airplanes and learned to fix just about anything that moved. Cars were an early passion, and Doyle raced late-model stock cars and owned an auto parts store for 14 years before he decided to switch careers and fly for a living. Along the way, he met and married his wife, Jody, who is also a pilot and grew up in an aviation family. Moving to Sky Harbor was a natural choice when they decided to build a home in 1998.

Collecting airplanes may seem like an overly expensive hobby, but, like collecting anything else, you start small and build from there. Doyle bought his first airplane, a Piper Cub, for \$1,500 when he was a teen-ager. "It was a pile of parts," he said.

His father yelled at him for paying too much for the plane, but Doyle worked on it, sold it for a profit and purchased his next plane for \$6,300. "That started it all," he said.

Although his father collected World War II airplanes, and a lot of people gravitate towards newer airplanes known for their speed and fancy instruments, Doyle's passion favored older airplanes, especially open-cockpit biplanes from the 1920s and 1930s.

Does he have a favorite airplane in his collection? "They're all favorites!" he laughs, then says that his 1932 Waco UBF-2 is pretty high on his list, and he is most sentimentally attached to his late father's 1941 450 Stearman that is being restored in Clara City. And though he loves to fly in his open cockpit antiques with the wind blowing in his face and not

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a worry on his mind like the barnstormers of yesteryear, vintage flying machines don't have much by way of things like heat and flying instruments. Doyle recently added a new plane to his fleet, a brand new 2008 American Champion Decathlon, a fully aerobatic airplane complete with a heater, smoke system and GPS.

Doyle finishes his cup of coffee and leans back in his office chair. With a collection of airplanes around him, a lovely home and hangar, it appears that he has it all. Yet, he's a pretty normal guy who has worked hard to get where he is now, and he's had some tough breaks along the way. Like when the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 happened and the airline he flew for closed for two years and Doyle was out of a job. Then he was diagnosed with cancer. Now, he's back to work, cancer free, enjoying his life, and helping others enjoy theirs.

"I feel very lucky. I'm lucky to be a survivor, lucky to have the job that I love to do and lucky to have the friends that I have," he says as he walks towards the door, ready to head into the house for lunch. As you follow, you notice a bulletin board covered with pictures by the door.

"Those are pictures friends have sent me of themselves with their airplanes," Doyle says as he grins. And though he owns a hangar full of beautiful machines, you have a hunch that it's the friendships that Doyle has collected that he cherishes the most. ▶

Goodness! What an odd point of view.

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