

His and Hers Bearhawks Debut at AirVenture

Oregon couple each build their own airplane for tandem touring

BY JAMES WYNBRANDT

DONNA SVOBODA AND Dennis Reynolds, a couple from Cottage Grove, Oregon, arrived at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2017 with the ultimate his and hers accessories: two newly completed Bearhawk Patrol homebuilt aircraft.

“I had a Citabria; he had a Pacer,” said Donna while sitting under the wing of N240BP in Row 318 of the Homebuilts area, explaining how the two Bearhawks, now sitting side by side, came to be.

“The speeds were not matched,” Dennis added. “We flew all around the country and decided to get a couple of airplanes more matching up.”

“And the only way to do that is build,” said Donna, a retired pipeline patrol pilot who had no previous aircraft-building experience. Dennis, however, had converted his Tri-Pacer into a Pacer years before, was building a Mustang II for years, and had the necessary tools, so he convinced Donna to give it a go.

Why the two-place Bearhawk Patrol taildragger? “We were looking for an airplane we could fly in the backcountry,” says Dennis. “These airplanes had



PHOTO BY ANDREW ZABACK

the best of both worlds. They're faster than a Super Cub and still have good low-speed characteristics. They [also] came in a quick-build kit, and they're reasonably priced.”

Their kits were delivered in 2013, and the couple immediately got to work.

Did they ever consider building just one airplane and flying it together? “I had my plane when we first met, and it never occurred to me to not have an airplane,” Donna said. “And I'm pretty sure he didn't want to give up his airplane. And you can't get [piloting] experience

in the back seat.” She also noted that they can carry more luggage with two planes. As Dennis pointed out, “If one breaks down, we always have a spare.”

The two aircraft were completed in January and made their first flights a day apart — first Donna's and then Dennis' (N241BP). The flight to Oshkosh was the Bearhawks' first long cross-country, and they averaged about 142 mph along the way.

“We got here quicker than we thought we would — the planes are faster than we're used to,” Dennis said. Both planes have about 100 hours of flight time now. They're equipped — almost identically — with Dynon SkyView glass panels. The paint scheme on Donna's Bearhawk is bright yellow and white, and Dennis' is black and white.

The couple admitted they felt goose bumps when they landed their homebuilts at Wittman Regional Airport. As for what it takes to build an airplane, Donna said, “It's not beyond anybody who has the desire. It's an awesome process. You never stop learning, and [you feel] the pride of a job well done. I look at it and I'm in awe.” **AVT**