

EDITOR

Larry Anglisano

SENIOR EDITOR

Rick Durden

CONTRIBUTOR

Paul Dye

EDITOR AT LARGE

Paul Bertorelli

COPY EDITOR

Jennifer Whitley

SUBSCRIPTION DEPARTMENT

P.O. Box 8535

Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535

800-829-9081

www.aviationconsumer.com/cs

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Subscription Services

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London, ON 5W1

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FIRST WORD**THE VALUE OF WELL-SUPPORTED TYPE CLUBS**

Presenting my Avionics Bootcamp lecture in a crowded hangar of Grumman owners at the Grumman Owners and Pilots Association's (GOPA) annual convention and fly-in last month got me thinking about the value of well-organized type clubs. Sure, there are some politics, and large gatherings of A+ pilot types ... well, you understand. But these events can be a huge source of education when it comes to maintaining, flying, training, upgrading and just about everything else that tags along with aircraft ownership. It's more important now than ever to help support their existence, and national gatherings can be a lot more than lunches, dinner banquets and little white lies about optimistic cruise speeds.

At the GOPA event, it was clear that the majority of attendees were there to soak up as much technical advice and information as their brains could absorb. My presentation—a candid roundtable discussion about planning and executing major avionics upgrades—with Todd Adams from Lancaster Avionics in Pennsylvania, confirmed what I already knew: Aircraft owners are pretty confused about the current market for avionics upgrades. Worse is that a trip to the local avionics shop for advice might not do much to add clarity, and in some cases it could send the expensive investment off the rails.

One owner told me his sad story of an install gone wrong, sending him back to the shop multiple times because of third-party interfacing that wasn't compatible. It was the perfect example of a shop selling a customer the wrong stuff simply because it wanted to move some old inventory. As Todd Adams pointed out, the job of an avionics sales manager isn't to sell, but instead to help the buyer make the right decisions for their flying and budget. And as Adams reiterated, the decisions you make today will have a direct effect on what you do down the road, especially when it comes to autopilot upgrades.

The point is, these large gatherings of similar aircraft models are a good opportunity to see what others are doing to their aircraft. There are rows and rows of airplanes to look at. At the GOPA convention, I spotted some pretty nice paint and interior work, and these examples are a huge resource for others thinking about or ready to pull the trigger on similar upgrades. This is especially true for avionics upgrades that include the construction of new instrument panels. Small screens, big screens, the latest digital round gauges—these gatherings are a great place to help get your project off the ground.

Looking out at the attentive audience of this well-attended gathering (organized by Bob Reed) in a rainy Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, got me thinking about one of the earliest and most popular owner groups—the Cessna Pilots Association. What was once the hands-down go-to for anything and everything you need to know about Cessnas has essentially gone silent over the past few years after the death of its founder, leaving huge numbers of Cessna owners to source technical data elsewhere. In some ways contacting the organization looking for technical advice was better than contacting the factory. Apparently, there could be hope, as the organization is in the process of being resurrected. We'll keep tabs on it. —Larry Anglisano

