

Jumping right in

Putting the technology to work *By Mike Collins*

How do you approach the idea of learning to fly if you've already achieved success in a variety of other disciplines?

Well, if you're Peter Coad, you jump right in and devote yourself exclusively to the task. Coad, an entrepreneur from San Jose, California—he and his family just moved there from Sugar Land, Texas—bought a brand-new, glass-cockpit Cirrus SR22-G2 and

airline miles. "One year, every single week I was traveling," he said. But Coad liked the view from the flight levels. "It was quiet. There were no phones, no e-mails."

He sold the business in January 2003, and then took Greek, New Testament, and philosophy courses. "I thought, *Gee, I always wanted to fly. I live near an airport—here's my opportunity.*" Later that year he took several lessons in a Cessna 172. "I hated it," Coad recalled. He didn't like the older airplane, which had such traits as a worn flap lever that didn't lock into place. "I really felt disappointed—the cockpit looked like what I remembered from back in the 1960s."

Not a person who wanted to fly in anything just for the sake of flying, Coad stopped training. "If it's not more engaging than this, and if it doesn't offer more safety than what I see in the rental fleet, it doesn't move me," he said. "I almost gave up on the whole idea."

Then he discovered Cirrus and took a demo flight. "If it wasn't for the Cirrus I wouldn't be flying," he said. Because the domain Lonestar Charter was available online, Coad picked the name for the company that owns his aircraft, and he took delivery of the SR22-G2 in April 2004. He jumped back into training with some cross-country flying. "I wanted to see the big picture before starting to work on the details."

As this is written, Coad was rapidly approaching 600 flight hours. Consulting requires that he travel about a week each month. "I'm probably safer because of the added emphasis that I put on flying than I am driving my car," Coad noted. "Safety's a big deal for me." Coad is a strong believer in recurrent training and, although it's not required for the type of flying he currently does, he works with his flight instructor—Luke Lysen, president of Kirkland, Washington-based The Flight Academy, which specializes in Cirrus instruction—two or three days each quarter on additional safety-related training.

In the future, Lonestar Charter could become a true charter provider. Coad has ordered a twin-engine Adam A500 for July 2006 delivery, and he'll add his commercial certificate and multiengine rating then. He flew an hour in the Adam A700 twinjet—very similar to the piston-engine A500—and might move up to that at some point.

For now, Coad's emphasis is to gain flying experience, with the Cirrus and then the A500. "I don't like playing with the technology, I like putting it to work on something useful. What a great time to be alive and flying." ☐



Name: Peter Coad
Age: 51
Certificate: Private, with instrument rating
Career: Entrepreneur
Flight time: 577.4 hours
Aircraft flown: Cirrus SR22-G2
Home airport: San Jose (California) International Airport

started flying. In his first year he logged 502.1 hours of flight time, including 175 training hours, and earned his private pilot certificate and instrument rating.

"Some people in life do a good job of doing many activities and switching between them," Coad said. "I tend to focus on one at a time—software engineer, business developer, author, pilot. The time to focus has made a difference for me."

He was exposed to general aviation during his childhood. "My first flying I can remember is over the Mojave Desert in California. My parents had some friends who owned a four-seat Cessna single-engine airplane," recalled Coad. "I thought it was a lot of fun."

But Coad didn't take lessons. Instead, he earned electrical engineering and computer science degrees. As a Hughes Aircraft contractor from 1984 to 1987, he worked on advanced air traffic control automation for the FAA. Coad got to know several retired controllers and was impressed by the responsibilities they shouldered.

Next, Coad wrote some books, then founded a software company. He accumulated more than 3 million