

Sure and Safe: **Steve Allen** and His **Cessna 195**

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by Heather Skumatz

Photo: John Weisbart.



The Cessna 195 has been called “one of the finest classics ever built” by collectors. Photo: John Weisbart.



John Weisbart (left), Allen’s instrument instructor, stayed in Fredericksburg, Tex. for the 10-day training course.

Everywhere this award-winning airplane lands, people come out of the FBO to take a look. Photo: John Weisbart.



Like so many of the pilots profiled in *Cessna Flyer*, Steve Allen of Fredericksburg, Tex. was passionate about airplanes at a young age. He’d built many model airplanes, including control line and radio control models, before he got his sport pilot endorsement at age 53.

“I’d always wanted to fly,” Allen says, “but like many, I got busy with my career and family. Once I had a successful business, I could finally think about flying.” Possibility turned into reality when Allen moved to Fredericksburg in 2003.

Fredericksburg, a small town of about 10,000, is 67 miles west of Austin and situated near the famous community of Luckenbach in Gillespie County. Gillespie County Airport (T82) is just three miles southwest of Fredericksburg, and it’s the home field for Steve Allen.

Allen attained his sport pilot endorsement in 2007. “This seemed like the easiest route to get into learning to fly,” he explained. “But [an LSA] was too limited for what I was trying to do,” Allen continued.

What he was trying to do was get back and forth from Houston quickly

and safely. “My company is in Houston, and I needed a way to check on the business,” he explained.

Cessna 195

Allen’s love of flying for business and personal transportation led him from LSAs to a 1953 Cessna 195. “I fell in love with the looks,” Allen said.

The 195 Businessliner was the first all-aluminum airplane and came with a full cantilever wing. The 195 wing also has a straight taper from root chord to tip chord, no dihedral, and uses the NACA 2412 airfoil used on the later Cessna 172s and 182s. It was used as a light transport and utility aircraft by the United States Air Force, Army, and Air National Guard under the designation LC-126.

Many pilots may have been tempted to purchase an aircraft they were not yet rated to fly, but Steve Allen actually went ahead and bought his 195. “It was sitting at a hangar at our airport where a friend was trying to sell it. The plane had been sold... but [the buyer] thought it was way too much to handle when they delivered it to him, so they flew it back to Texas.”

“I saw it the next week and bought

it,” Allen said. “I was a sport pilot at the time, so I needed a lot of extra training and a tailwheel/high performance endorsement—along with my private pilot ticket.”

“Just a few things,” Allen added.

Classic and Contemporary

“I had to work my way into it,” said Allen. “My instructor, Bob Snowden, was courageous because the plane only had one yoke at the time.”

The swing-over yoke is just one feature of N4426C. Its Jacobs 300 hp radial engine—the 195 is Cessna’s only postwar radial-engined aircraft—is another. A third feature of the 195 is its larger fuselage, which Allen calls “very comfortable.”

Just over 1,000 Cessna 195s were manufactured, from 1947-1954, and 552 aircraft were still registered in the United States according to a recent search of the FAA database. The 195 is supported by the International Cessna 195 Club as well as by Cessna Flyer Association.

“Everywhere you fly this airplane and land, people come out of the FBO,” Allen told me. “It has a classic look.”



Allen saw this 195 and had to have it. He bought it the following week. Photo: John Weisbart.



The 195 Businessliner is Cessna's only postwar aircraft with a radial engine. Photo: John Weisbart.



Allen commutes from Fredericksburg to Houston to check on his business. Photo: John Weisbart.

Indeed it does. This 26C won Best Restored Classic at Sun 'n Fun in 2002, and Best Classic at EAA AirVenture in Oshkosh the same year. The Cessna 195 has been called “one of the finest clas-

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sics ever built” by collectors.

At EAA AirVenture last year, Allen was with a group of 190/195 owners when they welcomed Cessna CEO Jack Pelton to the display area. “Apparently, Jack Pelton owns one, too,” Allen said. “It’s rumored to be one of his favorite planes to fly on the weekends—and I guess his aircraft looks a lot like mine.”

Even though it has its fan club, the 195 was built for business, so it was expensive to operate for private use. “I heard that Cessna had trouble competing with the Bonanza back then,” said Allen, “so they discontinued the 195.”

But the performance of Cessna’s Businessliner is solid. Allen consid-

ers the 195 “very well built and very stable.” Allen’s 195 has a cruise TAS of 148 knots, a fuel consumption of 15 gph, a range of 600 nm and a 1,200 fpm rate of climb.

Allen’s Businessliner also has “all the latest upgrades you can do to a 195,” he said. These include a locking tailwheel, heavy-duty aileron hinges, a Hamilton 2B20 propeller and spinner. It also has a door post doubler, wheel fairings, Cleveland brakes, auxiliary oil sump, filter, clean kit, an air/oil separator, intercom, J.P. Instruments (JPI) EGT monitor, inertial reel shoulder harnesses, a leather interior, and an engine pre-oiler.

For avionics, 26C contains a Garmin 430W and an S-TEC autopilot with GPS steering, but Allen is in the process of adding an Aspen EFD1000 primary flight display. “The local avionics shop in Fredericksburg is working on that

right now,” Allen said. “We need to get a Field Approval for the 195.” A JPI EDM 930 engine monitor is going into the 195, too.

Business and Pleasure Use

Allen uses his 195 mainly for commuting between Fredericksburg and Houston. “I have a company in Houston and I frequently fly over there to check up on things and visit customer locations,” he said. “I also love to fly around the patch in the Texas Hill Country, especially at sunrise and sunset,” he told me.

Allen is also heavily involved in the Boy Scouts of America and uses his 195 to travel to meetings in Austin. “I plan to fly to Virginia this summer for the National Jamboree celebrating the 100th anniversary of Scouting,” he said. Allen also plans to fly to the 195 Fly-In at West Yellowstone, Wyo. in September.

When I asked him about his most exciting PIC story, Allen answered: “Fortunately, I’ve not had anything interesting happen!” Allen’s flying philosophy is simple and cogent: “Be safe,” he said, “and do a thorough preflight briefing.”

Instrument Training

As a new owner of a General Aviation aircraft, Allen was naturally anxious to begin working on his ratings. “I didn’t want to spread it out too much,” he explained. “Other people I talked to said that getting your instrument rating tends to drag on for a long time—months, or even a year. I wanted to focus on it and get it done.”

That being said, “I think it’s good for anyone to get a lot of hours before getting their instrument rating,” Allen continued. “You need real-life experience. The more things you see will help you with your decision making.” Allen had 750 hours as a sport pilot and private pilot before he was rated for instrument flying.

“In a small town, it’s just not practical to drive to the city to go to ground school,” Allen told me. “I saw the ad for AFIT Accelerated Flight & Instrument Training in flying magazines,” he continued, “and a local pilot friend did the accelerated course and liked it.”

After speaking with AFIT’s president, Tony Montalte, Allen decided to work with AFIT for his training. “Tony was very enthusiastic and positive about their program, and I liked what he had to say,” said Allen. “He put me in touch with John Weisbart, my instructor.”

“I could tell over the phone that we’d get along just fine, and we did,” Allen recalled.

Though Allen was nervous that the training would be too much to absorb, “it really wasn’t,” he explained. “I was worried this would be a little like drinking from a fire hose, but I was pleasantly surprised.”

AFIT’s Approach to Learning

The way the immersion-style curriculum of AFIT is organized, topics and lessons build on the learning from the previous day. “There was constant reinforcement of the subject matter and [gradual] introduction of more and more to do by yourself, until finally, you’re doing it all,” Allen said.

Weisbart arrived in Fredericksburg and stayed for the 10-day coursework. “It was a one-on-one situation,” said Allen. “We flew four-plus hours each day and also had several hours of ground school.”

“If [the training] would have been stretched out, I could see how you would be taking some steps forward and one or two steps back, having to re-learn information. With this approach, you eat, sleep and breathe instruments for 10

days. I even had dreams of doing approaches in my sleep,” Allen confessed.

“By the time I got to the checkride that day, I felt very well prepared. It was just another day of shooting approaches and flying under the hood.”

Allen was very positive about AFIT. “The people are very friendly, and the system works. You get it done and feel safe as an instrument pilot. Overall, it was a great way to do it,” said Allen.

“I have flown actual IMC and six approaches in the week following my rating, and felt very assured that I knew what I was doing and could handle it,” said Allen. “The first three [approaches] were with a good friend that is a long-time pilot—and a fellow 195 pilot. I just wanted to be sure and safe.”

(For more information on the organizations mentioned in this article, visit The International Cessna 195 club at www.cessna195.org, Cessna Flyer Association at www.cessnaflyer.org, and Accelerated Flight & Instrument Training at www.afit-info.com. —Ed.)

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