



PAUL BOWEN

# A TROJAN FINDS NEW WINGS

Dennis Kranz and his Reserve Grand Champion T-28

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**Y**ou might say that Dennis Kranz is a lucky man, but I would say that luck has little to do with his success. It's true that his beautifully restored T-28C Trojan won Reserve Grand Champion Post World War II earlier this year at Sun 'n Fun, but few would argue that it deserved to win at least this award, even among the stiff competition of newly restored warbirds. For Dennis' Trojan had the markings of an owner with extreme personal pride in his aircraft. Unlike some owners who merely plunk down the cash for a restoration shop to do all of the work and then pick up the finished product, Dennis lived and breathed the restoration of his Trojan for 18 solid months after he pur-

chased the project. In fact, he says that he may not take it to EAA Air-Venture Oshkosh simply because he's already missed two boating seasons!

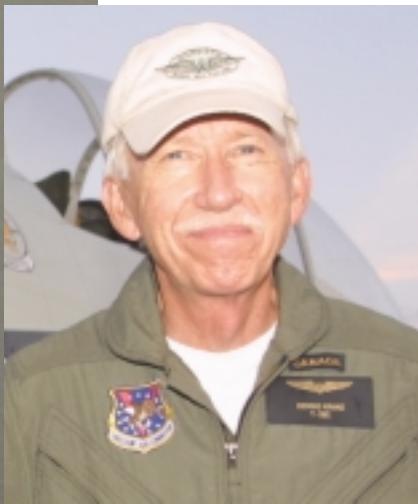
A former business owner in the hospitality industry in Oregon, Dennis typically spends six months in British Columbia and six months in Daytona Beach, Florida. While living in Daytona Beach, Dennis says that he couldn't help noticing all of the warbirds in the area, and he first became interested in T-28s about eight years ago.

"I was looking for one that was already restored, but there aren't that many out there for sale. When I bought this one, it was entirely in pieces," Dennis said. "There weren't any two pieces connected together!"

Dennis found the aircraft nearly in his own backyard. Victoria Air Maintenance, a British Columbia repair station that specializes in T-28 restorations, owned the aircraft for three years and had barely started restoration work on it, finishing only the landing gear before Dennis purchased the aircraft in early 2000. He then made an agreement with Victoria Air Maintenance for the restoration of the T-28, urging the quickest restoration possible. Dennis was itching to fly his new bird.

But first it had to be put back together.

"Mine was the 28th T-28 that Victoria had done, and the sixth or seventh restored from the ground up," Dennis said. "I spent most days



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Dennis Kranz

with the aircraft, advising the restoration. Victoria had four to five people working on it at any time, which is highly unusual for their restorations. And it was finished in about 18 months, which is the quickest restoration of a T-28 that they've done."

Quick does not necessarily mean hasty. Delving back

into the aircraft history, Dennis had found that his T-28, built in 1957, had been used for U.S. Navy carrier qualifications at Whiting Field in Pensacola, Florida, and served on the USS Lexington. Taken out of service in 1969 with 4,800 hours, the aircraft never had a civilian registration number until Dennis purchased it, although a previous owner had dismantled the bird in a vain restoration attempt. The aircraft still showed the markings of its military career. "The fuselage was nice enough, but the wings had a lot of dents from military boots," Dennis said. "We were about halfway through the project when we decided to re-skin the wings."

At the same time that Dennis and the Victoria crew were working on the airframe, Rudy Blakely, a well-known radial engine mechanic in Central Florida, rebuilt the 1,425-hp nine-cylinder Wright 1820 engine. Dennis is pleased with the results, noting that other T-28 owners who have flown his bird have remarked that the engine is very smooth and "really well balanced." The finished engine was shipped to Canada to allow the Victoria crew to mate the engine and fuselage.

In the meantime, Dennis did a little more shopping, deciding to completely upgrade the entire avionics panel. He

The crew mates mates the restored fuselage and engine to the refinished wing.



PHOTO COURTESY DENNIS KRANZ

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feels that the panel, which he upgraded to “what airlines and corporate aircraft had in the 1980s” is one of the nicest features of the aircraft.

One of the other nice features of the aircraft, of course, is the exterior paint. Dennis did his homework here, too, although he “took some liberties” with the final paint scheme.

“The markings are all typical Navy T-28 markings,” Dennis said. “The T-28s were all yellow originally. Flying off of the Lexington for training, they were painted red and white. Then

they were sent off here and there and done in the gray and white Navy scheme.”

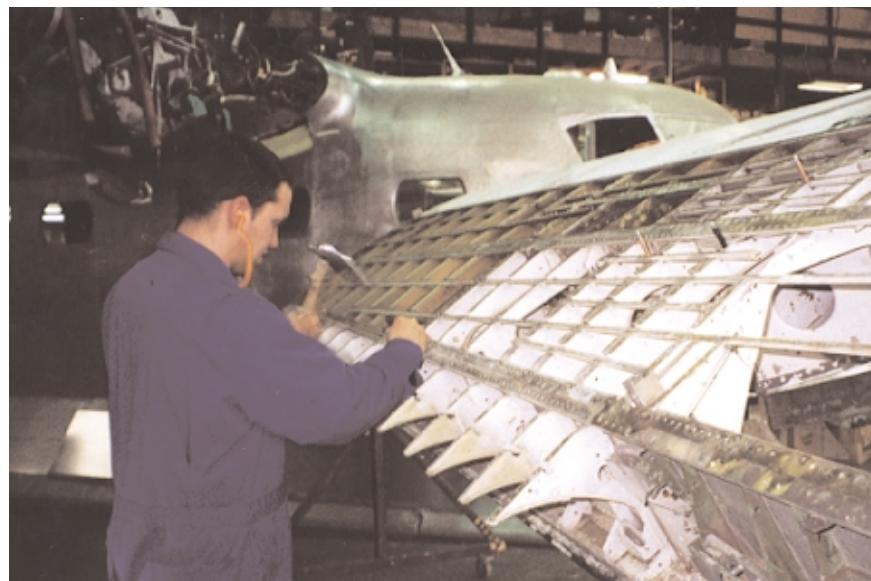
Dennis decided to replace the last colors his bird wore operationally, the gray and white, but then added the colors of an F-4 Phantom squadron based out of Naval Air Station North Island, San Diego, California, from 1958 to 1962. The squadron colors included a lightning bolt and stars on the tail and painted wingtips.

“You don’t normally see



Dennis installed a completely new avionics package to complement the restored exterior.

(Below) Restoring the wing is meticulous work.



PHOTOS COURTESY DENNIS KRANZ

much color on the T-28s,” Dennis said. “I never built it with the idea of winning an award. I’m just a visual person, and I tried to get everything right—the color combinations, markings, and so on. It’s really just another gray and white T-28, but it really shows well.”

Dennis and the Victoria crew finished the restoration in October 2001, upon which the aircraft was delivered to Camarillo, California, where Dennis met his instructor. A longtime pilot with 6,500 total hours who started in sailplanes, flew an MU-2 twin corporate aircraft for 18 years, and currently owns a Beech Baron twin private aircraft, Dennis was not about to step into the Trojan and fly it home. But he was eager to fly it. He started the Letter of Authorization (LOA) process in Camarillo, spending two days of ground school learning the aircraft systems, emergency procedures, and flight profiles.

“I’d heard that the T-28 is a systems aircraft,” Dennis said. “It’s easy to fly, but there are a lot of procedures to learn. That was okay by me—I’ve always liked learning.”

After completing some air and pat-



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The T-28 fuselage in its pre-restoration form waits for its turn.

tern work, Dennis and his instructor took off for Dennis' other home in Daytona Beach, with the new Trojan pilot earning his LOA on the way. Dennis has since put more than 60 hours on the Trojan, attending and flying single-ship passes in various air shows. He had wanted to get 40 to 50 hours of flying experience in the T-28 before starting to work on formation skills, which he says is his next challenge.

"About a dozen T-28 owners live in Florida and have shared tips on maintenance and other issues," Dennis said. "Most have military backgrounds, and I've really enjoyed being around them. I especially enjoy some of the people who walk up to me at air shows with military time and tell me all about flying T-28s."

Just about the only problem Dennis has had with his newly restored

bird is chasing oil leaks. But he merely shrugs his shoulders and says, "You're always chasing oil leaks in a radial engine." Besides, Dennis has extreme confidence in his maintenance personnel, as he has hired George Baker, Sun 'n Fun 2002 Grand Champion Post World War II Warbird winner from nearby New Smyrna Beach, to perform all maintenance on the Wright engine.

Dennis says that it's hard to say what exactly attracted him to T-28s. "It's like saying what you like in a girlfriend," he said. "I like the sound, the look, how it flies. The T-28 just has all of the ingredients that I really admire in an airplane."

Don't look for another Kranz restoration any time soon, however. Dennis says he expects the Trojan to be his "first and last warbird," not because of the expense, but just because he loves the T-28 that much. It's too bad that Dennis is not planning another warbird restoration. With his meticulous attention to detail and keen eye for color, we might have expected more winners from this welcome newcomer to the warbird community. 