

LEGACY IN AVIATION

Ely Nevada, rich with history. Ely's rancher and Holiday Inn owner Bob Dickenson enjoys a legacy of aviation history. Bob has been flying all his life. His father started the Santa Paula Airport in California. Airplanes got in his blood from birth. Bob remembers the early days when his father, Ralph Dickenson, and his co-rancher friend, Dan Emmett, built with their own hands the Santa Paula Airport which is widely recognized around the world today for its antique, classic and experimental aircraft.

After the St. Francis Dam disaster in 1928 these local ranchers decided to turn some of the devastated land, next to the river which flowed through their valley, into an airport. Both these farmer/ranchers had landing strips on their properties and realized they could benefit the city of Santa Paula through developing a community airport. Airports do wonderful things for communities! They knew it. Had the vision. Made it happen.

Ralph obtained \$1,000 each from 19 local ranchers and businessmen and began. The airport opened in 1930 with a dedication

celebration which included many famous aviators of the time. Many talented and famous pilots flew in and out of Santa Paula Airport, including Charles Lindbergh, Chuck Yeager, Roscoe Turner and Poncho Barnes.

Bob grew up with aviation. Began flying as soon as he was legal. His family brought in many military aircraft after the war. PT-17, BT-13, AT6, UC78. They had so many airplanes they removed the engines and mounted them on large tripods they built as wind machines to circulate air through their fruit orchards when the frost hit.



Bob purchased the Moorman Ranch outside of Ely Nevada and moved there in 1948. 300,000 acres, 500 head of cattle and a 4,000 foot airstrip. Bob particularly enjoyed his twin engine Baron which he flew all over the country, Mexico, Canada and Alaska. He also owned a C-206 and then a Comanche for 25 years.

Bob keeps a condo in Palm Springs where the Baron quickly made regular commutes. It was in Palm Springs that Bob started to build his own aircraft. The first year was devoted strictly to the wings. The next two years on the fuselage. Finally he moved the plane to Ely where he could focus the next three years on the cabin, engine, instruments and operating systems. When I saw the plane, Bob was alas waiting on the FAA for final inspection for his flightworthy certificate.

Notice the all-glass cabin. Bob intends to view the country in his craft. View is the operative word. Visibility in every direction. Hope he takes a camera.