

Georgia Sonex

WHILE SERVING in the U.S. Army Special Forces in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003, I promised myself that I would start on my lifelong dream of building my own airplane as soon as I was able to once I returned home. As a kid I was fascinated with the BD-5 and the RotorWay Scorpion and spent many days making scale models and drawing pictures. My favorite TV show was *Black Sheep Squadron*. My dad owned a V35 Bonanza for a short while, and I was able to make just a couple of flights with him as a teenager.

I joined the Civil Air Patrol and enjoyed the experience of flying in a Cessna 150 and an Air National Guard UH-1H Huey. My intent was to go into the military as a pilot, but my eyesight was too poor to qualify for military aviation so I chose the next best thing in my book, which was to be a paratrooper and later a Special Forces officer. As luck would have it, my battle buddy at boot camp had been a restoration assistant at the Planes of Fame Air Museum, and that got me even more interested in aviation. I eventually earned my pilot certificate in 1990 while attending graduate school at George Mason University where I was able to join the

Marine Corps Flying Club at Quantico, Virginia, because I was an Army officer. After many years of flying club and rental aircraft including T-34s, Bonanzas, Beech Sierras, 172 XPs, 172 SPs, a 182RG, and Piper Archers and Arrows, I decided I would definitely need an aircraft of my own. Someday soon, I thought. But life and finances got in the way.

Soon after 9/11, my unit was called up and deployed to Afghanistan. While there, I received a copy of *EAA Sport Aviation*, and there was a story about a beautiful experimental aircraft painted in a desert camouflage paint scheme that really caught my eye, and the builder was in Atlanta, not far from my home. Reading his story and seeing his plane, named *Spirit of 11 September*, made me promise myself that I too would build one of these planes.

Not long after returning home I was holding short for landing aircraft when this fabulous experimental I had seen in *EAA Sport Aviation* magazine in Afghanistan landed right in front of me! After my flight, I started doing some research and was able to track down the builder/pilot of the desert camouflaged experimental and asked him if I could come and look at his plane as I would like to build one like it someday. When we met at his airport a few days later he offered to take me up for a flight. I had never flown in an experimental aircraft before so I did not know what to expect. I have to say that I was overwhelmed with how much more performance the experimental had than the factory-built planes I'd flown previously. What is more is the control harmony and responsiveness were absolutely fantastic.

AIRCRAFT SUBMISSIONS

Share your craftsmanship with *EAA Sport Aviation* readers worldwide! Send us a photo and description of your project and we'll consider using it in "What Our Members Are Building/Restoring." Please include your name, address, and EAA number. We reserve the right to edit descriptions. For guidelines on how to get the best photo of aircraft, visit www.EAA.org/sportaviation.

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Soon after this flight, I enrolled in the EAA SportAir Workshop on RV aircraft assembly and bought a collection of tools and preview plans. Unfortunately, I was unable to save up enough money for building and thought I might have to give up my dream. I went a couple of years without being able to fly. Then I attended AirVenture and was introduced to the Sonex line of aircraft, which were within my budget. I was impressed with the quality of the kit and the flying examples I saw. An experienced, well-respected pilot gave me a rave review of the Sonex once I got home and encouraged me to look into it further. Later, I attended the Sonex Builder's Workshop hosted by Sonex in their immaculate factory and met the impressive Sonex crew.

When I finally got my hands on my kit, I worked on it as much as I could. Fortunately, my wife, Courtney, was patient with me and helped me out quite a bit during construction. She even helped me build the engine. She helped me rig and mount the wings, and together we have spent hours polishing the aluminum. My kids also helped me with coming up with some creative artwork to decorate the plane with.

After a little more than 1,200 building hours, I completed Sonex No. 1072 and received my airworthiness certificate on August 18, 2014. I made the first flight on August 22, 2014, from Fulton County Airport/Brown Field in Atlanta, Georgia. The airplane flew with precise control as well as great control harmony and grin-inducing roll rate. The airplane now has more than 150 hours on it and has made several trips from Atlanta to South Florida, the Carolinas, and Tower,

Minnesota, which is just south of the Canadian border. The aircraft is powered by a normally aspirated AeroVee rated at 80 hp with an AeroInjector, and it has flown with propellers from both Prince Aircraft and Sensenich.

I followed the kit plans with the exception of some cosmetic enhancements such as aluminum replacing fiberglass on the sides of the cowling and fabricating a small framing piece to provide better symmetry to the aft cockpit bulkhead. I also added weather stripping to the canopy to cut down on noise and to prevent water leakage. The panel consists of an MGL Velocity engine monitoring system, an iLevil AW AHRS, ADS-B "in," an Infinity military-style joystick grip, a Garmin GTR 200 comm, and a Garmin GTX 327 transponder. The aircraft is equipped for day and night VFR.

The plane cruises at a little less than 120 knots. This aircraft is very nimble and responsive and makes a decent cross-country traveler for me. I used both the EAA Technical Counselor and EAA Flight Advisor programs as well as the Sonex T-Flight Transition Training Program to ensure a successful build and first flight. Jim "Nomad" Lawrence, EAA 450069, the pilot who built the beautiful desert camouflaged experimental I saw in *EAA Sport Aviation*, wound up being my flight advisor and first flight chase pilot. My EAA technical advisor was Matt Lazar, EAA 708914, who is also an Operation Enduring Freedom veteran. What a great pilot-builder community we have!

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