

# EAA691

MAY 2026

ISSUE 2605

CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

Converging Contrails

Los Alamos, New Mexico

photo credit: Will Fox

[www.eaachapter691.org](http://www.eaachapter691.org)

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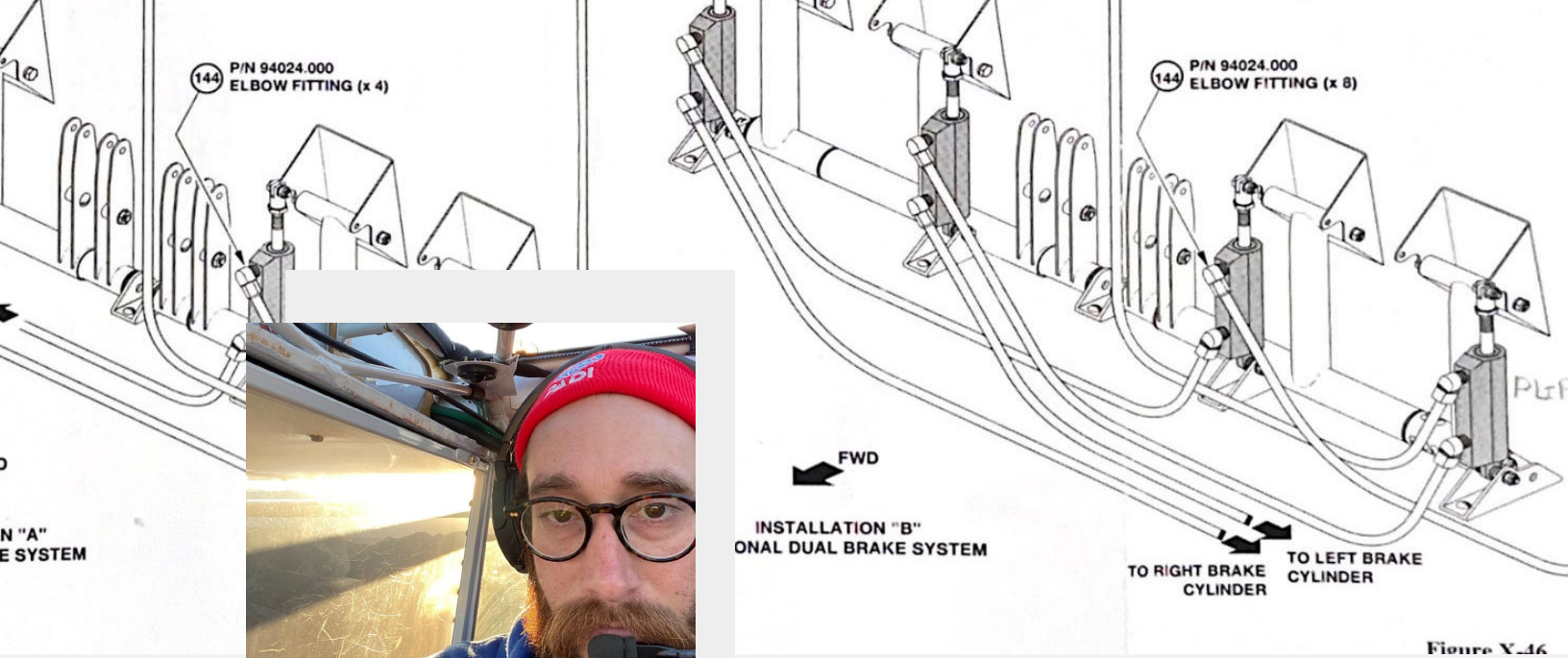


Figure X-16

# Letter from the Editor

by Andrew DeVecchio

Thanks Will for the photograph I was able to use for the cover of this Issue! I thought it was a stunning image but I frankly couldn't make out what was going on, so I had to ask him about it.

*"I took that picture on the edge of Pueblo Canyon in Los Alamos looking east one morning around 9:30 AM and it seemed like the universe came into alignment for a moment. The sun sent a shaft of light through the intersection of two contrails with a ring of light around the whole thing.*

*Pretty amazing. CHATgpt says it is one chance in 500,000 to see something like that."*

It really is amazing when these moments come to meet you in this crazy world we live in. It's easy to get wrapped up in it all until something like this slaps you out of it, so just don't take it for granted. **Be bold.** *But also be gentle.* It's all about the balance.

For me... well I got some work done on my plane but not enough to make a post about it in this issue, so I'll save it for next. I should hopefully be able to devote a little more time to it in the next couple of months and have it back up flying soon. Sometimes it really does feel like the beautiful picture is developing but its just going to take a little bit longer than you imagine.

Got photos to publish? Send them to: [helloeditor691@gmail.com](mailto:helloeditor691@gmail.com)

– Andrew

# Upcoming Events

Saturday May 16th

## Tales of a Test Pilot

Time: 9:30 AM Donuts and Coffee, 10:00 Presentation

Place: KSAF, Atlantic Aviation

109 Aviation Dr, Santa Fe, NM 87507

Questions: [helloeditor691@gmail.com](mailto:helloeditor691@gmail.com)



Northern New Mexico Chapter 691 of the **Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA)** will meet **Saturday, May 16** in the **Atlantic Aviation** (formerly Santa Fe Jet Center) Pilot Lounge at the Santa Fe Regional Airport (KSAF). The program will feature a presentation by a Consultant Flight Test Designated Engineering Representative (DER) and former company test pilot, who will share selected experiences from his

# Upcoming Events

(cont'd)

experience in the industry. The meeting, will begin at 9:30 with coffee, pastries, and informal discussion, followed by the presentation beginning at 10:00

## **Flight Test and Evaluation**

Rigor is embedded in every flight test program that successfully demonstrates compliance with the aircraft's respective certification basis. When an aircraft is designed to achieve a Standard Airworthiness Certificate, a team of company test pilots, FAA test pilots, flight-test-designated engineering representatives (pilots), and Flight Test Engineers guide applicants through the process.

Our guest will speak openly, sharing and pulling from experience in flight tests with Bombardier Learjet, Eclipse, Honda, Aviat, GE Aviation, Adams Balloons, and others, to obtain initial Type Certifications, Amended Type Certifications, and Supplemental Type Certifications, and discuss a couple of programs that failed to make certification.

Our guest will discuss the kinds of testing typically performed, depending on the experience a pilot or flight test engineer brings to the project. This may include avionics and electrical systems, mechanical systems, the powerplant, performance or handling qualities, or a combination of these.

Home builders and future flight testers can learn about resources and processes for test planning, how to identify, quantify and mitigate risks, how build ups and build downs are performed, what corner cases are, possible action to take when results are unexpected, what behaviors certain design quirks and features tend to introduce into the behaviors of aircraft, and other considerations to incorporate in your test program, all through the lens of lessons learned.

Our guest, a New Mexico native and EAA lifetime member, shares the building passion and will discuss how he intends to bring industry experience and industry-standard practices to his personal Amateur-Built flight test program to create greater rigor.

# Upcoming Events

Saturday June 20th

## A Bad Day on 27

Presenter: Omar Wooten

Time: 9:30 AM Donuts and Coffee, 10:00 Chapter meeting, 10:30  
Presentation

Place: Terminal Building, Los Alamos Airport  
1040 Airport Rd, Los Alamos, NM 87544

Questions: [helloeditor691@gmail.com](mailto:helloeditor691@gmail.com)

Saturday July 18th

## Member Fly Day

Time: 9:30\* AM Donuts and Coffee, 10:00\* Chapter meeting, 10:30\*  
Fly (\*Times subject to change)

Place: Terminal Building, Los Alamos Airport  
1040 Airport Rd, Los Alamos, NM 87544

Questions: [helloeditor691@gmail.com](mailto:helloeditor691@gmail.com)

# Presidents Report

by Will Fox



that if you want to learn to fly or own your own plane, you can, all it takes is "True Grit". Check out the article in this month's newsletter if you want to know more.

We have a special treat for you at this month's presentation on Saturday May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026 that will be held at the Santa Fe airport in the Atlantic Aviation Pilot Lounge. We will have a guest speaker that is a consultant, flight test Designated Engineering Representative (DER), and former company test pilot, who will share selected experiences from industry that builders of Experimental Amateur Built aircraft will find interesting and valuable. Please join us if you can. The social starts at 9:30AM with coffee and donuts and the presentation will start at 10:15AM.

## Getting Started in Aviation

Is it really that hard to get started in aviation? I hear a lot of people say it is. The most common complaint is it is too expensive. Another is that it takes too much time to get your license. A third is it is really hard to find a good instructor and a plane to rent. Finally, people will say that once they get their license they'll never be able to afford to keep renting an plane or own my own plane. OK, If learning to fly was easy, everyone would be a pilot. So yes, it takes hard work, dedication, and perseverance along with being fun and rewarding. But I'm here to to tell you



This soon to be Sport Pilot sitting in the left seat looks like he is having fun on this approach. The instructor sitting in the right seat looks a bit more serious. He is probably thinking "I wonder how exciting this landing is going to be" 😊

**Check out our Chapter YouTube channel for the latest videos at**  
<https://www.youtube.com/@eaachapter691>  
**For a schedule of upcoming events, go to the Chapter website at**  
<https://www.eaachapter691.org/upcoming-events/>

# Flyers Almanac

## May into June:

## Build-Up

by ChatGPT / Andrew DeVecchio

By late May, northern New Mexico begins shifting toward its summer pattern.

Spring's sharp transitions soften. Wind becomes less dominant day-to-day. Heat settles in more consistently.

But stability doesn't return.

Instead, energy starts accumulating.

### Heat and Lift

Surface heating now drives nearly everything.

- Thermals begin earlier and build stronger
- Afternoon turbulence becomes routine
- Density altitude climbs quickly through the day

Expect:

- Rougher low-level air after late morning
- Strong sink outside thermal cores
- Climb performance that fades faster than expected

The air may look calm from a distance.

It rarely is.

### Moisture and Development

Moisture slowly increases from the south and east, though dry air still dominates most days.

Cloud build-up becomes more common over higher terrain:

- Afternoon cumulus over mountains
- Virga and localized downdrafts
- Isolated late-day showers or thunderstorms

Most storms remain scattered.

But even isolated cells can reshape the air around them far beyond the rain itself.

## **Wind and Timing**

Average winds ease compared to spring, but outflow becomes more important.

Expect:

- Light mornings
- Variable afternoons
- Sudden gust fronts near convective activity

A calm departure can return to a completely different airport environment a few hours later.

Timing matters more than distance.

## **Temperatures and Surface Conditions**

- Highs: 75–90°F
- Lows: 40–55°F

Runways heat aggressively by afternoon, especially at elevation.

Expect:

- Increasing density altitude concerns
- Longer takeoff rolls
- Reduced climb margins in the heat of the day

Summer performance begins arriving before summer weather fully does.

## **The Psychological Shift**

Flying starts to feel easy again.

Dry mornings. Clear horizons. Predictable visibility.

And because conditions often look good, it becomes easier to stop noticing how much they're changing underneath.

The challenge now isn't obvious weather.

It's accumulation:

heat, altitude, turbulence, fatigue, and time.

## **Pilot Takeaway**

May into June is a season of gradual build-up.

More heat.

More lift.

More atmosphere in motion by afternoon.

The best flying usually happens early.

Not because later is unsafe—

but because the air becomes increasingly busy as the day develops.

### **Expect:**

Temp: 90–40°F

Wind: Light mornings, variable afternoons, localized gust fronts

Sunshine: 10–11 hrs/day

Precipitation: Isolated afternoon showers and thunderstorms developing

Key Factor: Heat, density altitude, and convective build-up

# Tech Corner:

## True Grit

by Will Fox



Is it really that hard to get a pilot license? I hear a lot of people say it is. The most common complaint is that it's too expensive. Another is that it takes too much time and effort. A third is that it's hard to find a good instructor and an airplane to rent. Finally, many people believe that even if they do earn their license, they'll never be able to afford to keep flying afterward.

While there is some truth to these concerns, none of them are new. Learning to fly has always been challenging. But I'm here to tell you that if you truly want to become a pilot, you can do it. All it takes is true grit.

What is true grit? Just ask Mattie Ross, the young woman whose father was murdered by an outlaw in the Old West. She hires U.S. Marshal Rooster Cogburn to help bring the killer to justice. That is the central plot of Charles Portis' classic novel *True Grit*, and it perfectly illustrates the passion, determination, and perseverance

required to achieve a meaningful goal. The book is a great read, and the 1969 film starring John Wayne and Kim Darby is worth watching as well. Mattie's relentless pursuit of justice is a fitting metaphor for someone pursuing a pilot license and overcoming the obstacles encountered along the way.



Kim Darby and John Wayne star in *True Grit*, a 1969 movie based on a novel by Charles Portis

So why does it take true grit to become a pilot? Getting a pilot license is very

different from getting a driver's license. Flying requires significantly more knowledge, skill, discipline, and judgment than driving a car. Driving primarily involves movement on a two-dimensional plane: accelerating, braking, and turning. Flying requires the pilot to manage six degrees of freedom: movement along three axes (longitudinal, lateral, and vertical) and rotation around three axes (pitch, roll, and yaw). In simple terms, flying is dramatically more complex. In addition, a pilot can't simply pull over to the side of the road when the weather deteriorates, the engine fails, or a medical problem develops. The consequences of poor decisions are often much more serious in aviation.



The cost of learning to fly depends on the route the student decides to take.

Joining a flying club or forming a partnership to purchase an aircraft and split the cost of ownership can reduce the cost of learning to fly by 50% or more.

As a result, the training required to become a pilot is substantially greater than that required to drive a car.

Realistically, it takes three to five times more effort to learn to fly than it does to learn to drive. Most people can earn a driver's license in two or three months, while the national average for earning a private pilot license is approximately one year.

Then there is the issue of cost. The cost of obtaining a driver's license generally ranges from a few hundred dollars to perhaps a couple thousand, depending on how someone learns to drive. By comparison, surveys from organizations such as Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and flight schools around the country indicate that earning a private pilot license typically costs between \$8,000 and \$25,000. That price tag alone discourages many people before they even begin. In fact, roughly 70 percent of student pilots never complete their training. One major reason is that they underestimate both the time and money required.

Let's take a closer look at what earning a pilot license actually involves—and how true grit can make the difference between success and failure. A student pilot must pass several knowledge tests, including a pre-solo written exam, the FAA knowledge test, and an oral examination during the practical test, or "checkride." To succeed, students must learn about aerodynamics, weather, FAA regulations, aircraft systems, navigation, flight

planning, and many other subjects required to become a safe and competent pilot. Depending on the individual, this typically requires between 100 and 200 hours of personal study.

That knowledge can be gained through an in-person ground school, an online course, or self-study. An in-person course may cost \$500 to \$1,500, while online courses generally range from \$250 to \$500. Self-study, however, can be almost free because an enormous amount of aviation educational material is now available online. With enough true grit, motivated students can successfully teach themselves much of the required knowledge while saving a substantial amount of money. In fact, one of the best strategies is to begin studying before taking your first flight lesson. Ideally, students should complete and pass the FAA knowledge test before their first solo flight. Doing so provides a major head start and makes flight training far more efficient.

Most of the money spent earning a pilot license goes toward flight instruction and aircraft rental. The FAA minimum for a private pilot license is 40 hours of flight time, including at least 20 hours of instruction. In reality, however, the national average is closer to 70 total flight hours, with roughly 50 hours of dual instruction.

Why does it take so much longer than the minimum? One major reason is that

training often becomes stretched out because of financial limitations, instructor availability, scheduling conflicts, weather, or aircraft maintenance issues. Another factor is that modern aircraft avionics and systems are more complex than they once were. In addition, today's airspace system is busier and more heavily regulated than it was decades ago. The average age of student pilots has also increased significantly over the past 40 years. Studies consistently show that learning speed gradually declines with age, particularly after age 30.

So where does true grit come into play? Earning a pilot license is exciting and rewarding, but it also requires hard work, persistence, and dedication. There will be times when training becomes frustrating. You will encounter learning plateaus where progress seems to stop entirely. Some days you may even feel like you're getting worse instead of better. Other responsibilities will compete for your time and money. Family obligations, work schedules, and financial pressures will constantly test your commitment. That's where true grit matters. Make a plan and stick to it as best you can. When obstacles arise—as they inevitably will—don't quit. Adjust the plan and keep moving forward.

One important reality is this: the faster you train, the less expensive it becomes. Frequent flying dramatically improves retention and reduces the amount of review required during each lesson. Train in a simple airplane. They are less

expensive to rent and easier to learn in. Fly at least two or three times per week if possible. Long gaps between lessons cost both time and money because skills deteriorate surprisingly quickly. Take the time to find a good instructor—someone who is dependable, teaches regularly, communicates well, and is willing to stay committed to your progress all the way through your checkride.



Learning to fly is rewarding and fun, but it also takes hard work, persistence, and dedication.

Study hard. Prepare for every lesson. Show up ready to learn.

Joining a flying club or partnering with other pilots can also reduce costs substantially. Sharing ownership expenses among three or four people is often far cheaper than renting aircraft by the hour. If you approach training seriously and consistently, you can

reduce the overall cost of learning to fly by thousands of dollars while dramatically improving your chances of success. All it takes is some true grit.

There are also other ways to improve your chances of earning a pilot license while building friendships within the aviation community. Join a local Experimental Aircraft Association chapter or another aviation organization and get involved. Volunteer at fly-ins, pancake breakfasts, airport open houses, Young Eagles rallies, and community events. Spend time around pilots. Ask questions. Offer to help whenever you can. Aviation is still a community built heavily on mentorship, generosity, and shared passion. People naturally want to help individuals who work hard, remain humble, and refuse to give up. You can usually recognize someone with true grit.

One final thought: if your primary interest is recreational flying, there is another option worth considering.

Start with a Sport Pilot certificate. Without going into too much detail, earning a Sport Pilot certificate generally costs about half as much and takes about half the time required for a Private Pilot certificate. In addition, you do not need an FAA medical certificate if you possess a valid driver's license. There are limitations, of course. Sport Pilots are restricted to lighter aircraft, may carry only one passenger, and cannot fly at night or in certain types of controlled airspace without additional training and

endorsements. Still, becoming a Sport Pilot is an excellent way to get into aviation more quickly and affordably. Even better, the flight experience gained while earning a Sport Pilot certificate counts toward a future Private Pilot certificate if you later decide to continue your training. You will still need additional instruction and must pass a more comprehensive knowledge test and practical test, but the transition is straightforward. And if you have the grit to earn a Sport Pilot certificate, you'll probably have the true grit required to become a Private Pilot as well.



Getting a Sport Pilot License can cut the cost and time to learn to fly in half. It can be a "sporty" way to start a flying career.

# Dragonfly Project Update

Stay tuned here. I'll have some updates on the brakes, wheels, fairings, new firewall forward, and new panel and instruments in the following months.



# Clickbait!

## ***Sonex is Back. Stronger. Faster. Built to Last.***

<https://www.sonexaircraft.com/sonex-reopens-here-for-the-long-haul/>

Sonex Aviation is back open and in production as of May 1, 2026. ON Capital, Inc., led by aviator and general contractor Stephen Osborne, acquired all assets of Sonex LLC — including the AeroConversions and Sonex Aerospace product lines — and managed to reopen the doors in just 21 days. Sonex founder John Monnett has publicly endorsed the new ownership, and longtime designer Mark Schaible has been elevated to Lead Designer, now focused full-time on aircraft design rather than administration. Tail kits for the Sonex High Wing are resuming shipment in May, with full kits expected mid-summer.

## ***Tickets on Sale for 61st National Championship Air Races***

<https://planeandpilotmag.com/tickets-on-sale-for-61st-national-championship-air-races/>

The 61st National Championship Air Races are set for September 16–20 in Roswell, marking the second year the event calls New Mexico home. This year all seven racing classes will be represented — Jet, Unlimited, Sport, T-6, Formula 1, Biplane, and STOL Drag — with over 100 competing aircraft expected on the field. The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds will also make their debut appearance at Roswell Air Center, adding a new highlight to the event. Tickets are on sale now at early bird prices at [airrace.org](http://airrace.org), with options ranging from single-day admission to weeklong and VIP packages — and organizers are encouraging attendees to book lodging early, as rooms in Roswell can fill up fast.

# Catching Up

by Claude / Andrew DeVecchio

## Is Your Checklist Still Working for You?

There's probably a checklist somewhere in your airplane that's perfectly organized. Laminated. Complete. Maybe even manufacturer-approved.

And then there's the checklist you actually use.

Most pilots don't talk about that gap very often. After enough hours in the same airplane, things become routine. The flow develops, hands move automatically, and you stop reading every line because you already know what comes next. That isn't necessarily a bad thing — familiarity is part of becoming comfortable in an airplane.

But it does raise a worthwhile question: when was the last time you looked at your checklist and asked whether it still works for you?

Checklists drift. Notes get added in the margins. Old reminders stick around long after they're needed. Items that once meant something start to blur into background noise. And gradually, without any single decision being made, the checklist becomes something you glance at rather than something you use. That usually isn't carelessness. It's just a list that stopped fitting the way you actually fly.

The best checklist probably isn't the longest one. It's the one you'll honestly reach for every time — short enough to follow, clear enough to scan, specific enough to matter.

So here's a simple challenge for this month: pull your checklist out before your next flight and ask yourself three questions.

- Does every item on here still apply to how I fly this airplane?
- Is there anything I do consistently that isn't on here?
- Would a pilot unfamiliar with my airplane be able to follow this comfortably?

If the answers come easy, you're in good shape. If they give you pause, that's the checklist telling you something worth hearing.

A checklist only works if it stays part of the process — not just part of the paperwork.

# Catching Up

Follow up from our April Issue on **Density Altitude**

Last month I had a reader respond to the article on density altitude with some sobering stories I think we could all use as a general warning:

“

I have cared for casualties from several aircraft accidents. At least two were due to density altitude:

- 1) A Cherokee 140 at gross after a refuel, attempted takeoff from an airport elevation of 4000 ft, on a hot summer day. Crashed off the end of the runway resulting in the two rear seat passengers getting a crushed spine and becoming paraplegics (the rear seat sits on the wing spar and has NO give) and several broken legs in the front.
- 2) A 172 (150hp) with 4 passengers after a refuel, from a >7000 ft elevation airport surrounded by trees, could not get out of ground effect and went into the trees. The pilot was reminded by the tower to check density altitude. When it is hot sometimes a 4 seat plane is really a two seater and a two seat plane is a one seater.

I used to fly a C 150, alone, out of KDVT (Deer Valley Airport - Elev 1478) in AZ, heading north to Page. On hot days, I would be in a climb continuously from KDVT to get to 8500 ft for the 120 miles be able to overfly Flagstaff, AZ. I could not level off till Flagstaff was cleared.

Once, at KPHX, **all** planes were grounded at Sky Harbor, midday, not because they knew they couldn't fly but because the books did not calculate over 120 degrees. Whether a plane can fly or not, does not depend on how many seats it has or it's gross weight but how much weight the wings can get out of ground effect.

”

And he had three important points to remember when flying amongst the mountains:

- 1) Mountains don't move, they won't get out of your way
- 2) What the clouds above a mountain are telling you  
And most importantly,
- 3) Unless you have thousands of feet of altitude above a mountain, never approach it at a 90 degree angle, always approach it at a 45 degree angle into the wind

Wise words to remember.

Be sure to keep an eye out for the **NMPA Mountain Flying Clinic**, September 25-27 held at the Santa Fe Airport.

[https://www.nmpilots.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=4002&club\\_id=264824&item\\_id=2890426](https://www.nmpilots.org/content.aspx?page_id=4002&club_id=264824&item_id=2890426)

# EAA Chapter 691 Membership Application/ Renewal Form

*Please consider making a donation to our 501c(3) non-profit by mailing this form along with \$35 to our Chapter Treasurer, Checks can be made out to EAA Chapter 691:*

David Young  
819 Gonzales Rd  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spouse/partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
EAA #: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date (MM/YY) \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State: \_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Please list your currently flying A/C and any finished or in-progress projects:



[www.eaachapter691.org](http://www.eaachapter691.org)