

Book Review – Bob Hoover, an American Treasure
Forever Flying – Fifty Years of High-Flying Adventures, from Barnstorming in Prop Planes to Dogfighting Germans to Testing Supersonic Jets, by Bob Hoover

Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI



I think that I first became aware of Bob Hoover at an airshow at Paine Field in western Washington in the early 1970s. Bob was flying an Aero Commander, built by North America Rockwell. This was (and still is, for that matter) a twin-engine propeller-driven business aircraft of no particular distinction (Sorry, NA Rockwell) It is a fine aircraft, but not one noted for the air show circuit. But in Bob's hands, any aircraft is a show aircraft.

The culmination of Bob's act was that he would shut off both engines, and perform several rolls and loops, and then land, first on the left main wheel, and lift off slightly and touch down on the right, and then both. And then he would let the aircraft roll off of the runway, onto the taxiway and tarmac, and stop precisely on the spot marked previously marked for him – all with the props at a standstill. I thought, "Wow." And ever since that day I have thought of him as America's most precise, most talented pilot. But I never gave a thought about how he got there. This autobiography tells that story.

I find autobiographies a bit tricky, as opposed to biographies. A person writing of his or her own life may be in the best position to relate the how's and why's of life, and to relate anecdotes that the rest of the world never knew. But there can also be a tendency to omit those portions of life that the author is not so proud of, or to speak of the highlights of life and come across as a braggart.

Bob Hoover's story comes across a bit as, "And then I . . ." or, "And then I met . . ." But through it all I was fascinated by the flying jobs he held, and the friends he met along the way. I had a feeling that I was sitting with him and a small circle of his friends, and listening to one of his friends say, "Hey Bob, do you remember when you and Chuck Yeager were attempting to break the sound barrier?" and then Bob would sit back to reminisce about his friend Chuck.

Or someone else might ask, "Mr. Hoover, did you really break out of a German POW camp and steal an FW-190 and escape?" And then Bob might say, "Oh that was an interesting story. Let me tell you how it came about." And then he would start on a story about being shot down in World War II, and his capture and escape.

Or maybe someone might know of his early days as a civilian test pilot, and say. “Bob, why did you ever leave the military and all of those cool aircraft and go to work testing corporate aircraft?” And then he might smile and say, “Well, I had some thoughts about that at the time. But here is how that came about.” And he would be off on a story about flying for North American Aviation in everything they produced, military and civilian.

Over the years, Bob’s life was touched by many of the names in American aviation – Roscoe Turner, Jimmy Doolittle, Chuck Yeager to name some of the more obvious. But he also met, at various times, Charles Lindbergh, Orville Wright and Neil Armstrong.

This book is the personal story of one very interesting man. And I would have loved to have been on the edge of that small group, late at night, when someone would say, “Hey Bob, do you remember when you and I . . . “I can just see a smile, and another story start to roll out.



Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order

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And here are more favorites: www.ChrisHopeFAAFlightInstructor.com/books/books.html