

April 8, 2018- Twins of a Feather

One of the airports that I seem to most often visit is the nearby Okeechobee Regional (KOBE). It has two long runways that handle most wind conditions producing favorable landing direction, an excellent on field restaurant, (*The Landing Strip*) and just enough traffic to make arrivals interesting but not overly challenging. I probably average a visit a week there. Today, as I pulled up to an empty tie-down spot, I noticed a very pretty Piper Twin Comanche parking next to me. I always take interest in this particular model of aircraft as I used to own one back in the 1980's and 90's. It was always my favorite airplane offering efficiency, speed and economy in

My Highlander and the visiting Twin Comanche



Me and my Piper Twin-Comanche, back in 1986



one very pretty package. With a cruise speed of almost 200 MPH it would burn far less than 15 gallons per hour at economy cruise. It could get me up to 18 thousand feet and it would carry all of my testing equipment, 300 bulky pounds worth, after I removed 3 of its 6 seats. It was a very stable instrument platform and allowed me to cover a wide portion of the US in my non-destructive testing business. My particular twin-Comanche had

counter rotating propellers, which gave it a decided edge if you lost an engine, since there was no "critical" engine whose loss would produce asymmetric drag. The telltale sign of this decidedly positive option was the opposing angle at which the props would park themselves when the engines were shut down. I noticed this occurring on the adjacent Comanche & I inquired same from the pilot when he and his passengers

entered into the restaurant. "Interesting that you would mention that." he replied. "I was just telling my passengers that someone was apt to bring it up when they saw my propeller blades. In fact, no that is not the case. I have a problem with the prop governor adjustment which is producing a balance problem that has them out of sync. Something that I need to address but as a result this is the way that they position themselves when parked". We talked a bit more about what turned out to be both our favorite airplanes. This was his 3rd twin Comanche and while the oldest, had the most updated retrofits. He turned out to be a current commercial airline Captain and on his day off, like me, was out for a lunch trip on what was a very enjoyable flying day.

Notice the opposed position of the prop blades- Just like mine



However, it became apparent, after I finished my lunch and began to head back to my airplane, that it might not have been all that enjoyable recent flying day for another private pilot. I noticed what appeared to be an unusual position for a Mooney airplane parked just a short walk over from the restaurant. I wandered over and found what might be called a "low rider". However it did not attain this very low profile from a tricked out modification to its suspension. It had all of the classic signs of a "gear up" landing; something that is not all that uncommon to retractable wheeled airplanes. It is usually caused by inattention by the pilot along with the



absence of using a landing check list while on final approach. This is something that almost happened to me with my single engine Piper Comanche on a flight up to Buffalo, NY back in the '70s. I failed to call out my standard **GUMP** check list while on final, ie: **GAS** (on proper tanks and electric fuel pump in the on position), **UNDERCARGAGE** (gear in down position and locked with all 3 green lights showing "safe", **MIXTURE** (in the full rich position, to keep the cylinders from overheating, just in case a "go around" becomes necessary, and **PROPELLER** (pushing the prop controls into the high RMP setting to aid in climb performance in case full power is required for that "go around".)

Here we have photo evidence of that gear-up landing. On the left we see the curled back prop tips from their contacting the runway asphalt and on the right is a view of the planes underbelly showing that the gear doors



are still up and the wheels fully retracted. Although it appears that the plane did not sustain much undercarriage or wing damage, there will still be a LOT of money spent as the engine will have to be entirely disassembled and rebuilt. The prop will need to be replaced along with its adjusting and governing components. And, of course, all torn-up sheet metal will have to be replaced and repainted. The wings will also need to be checked for structural damage and possibly re-rigged. We are looking at a \$100K, *minimum*, repair here.