

THE CUBMAN

By Dan Compton



IT WAS THE YEAR 2000, THE MILLENNIUM BUG HADN'T WIPED US OUT AND IT WAS TIME TO OWN MY FIRST AIRCRAFT. MY DREAM WAS TO BUILD SOMETHING, BUT SPARE TIME FOR SUCH A PROJECT WAS MINIMAL.

One 'tried and proven' factory-built aircraft always captured my imagination, the Piper Cub. I found one for sale in Caloundra, Qld. I was based in East Sale, Vic and couldn't go to inspect it, but my friends Bob and Lorraine McGillivray could. Bob had a lot of Cub experience and they advised me to buy it. They then flew my new 1955 Super Cub back to Sale. On arrival, my wife Erlina asked how excited I was to be getting in a Cub again. That's when she learnt that I'd never even sat in one. I'd bought it going on their reputation. Our marriage survived that (just) and we're now on our third Cub, with the fourth on its way.

After I sold that first Cub, I built an RV8. Anyone with RV time knows they are great and it wasn't too bad as a bush plane, but something was missing. The best thing about the RV8 was my involvement with other builders that has outlasted the ownership of the aircraft.

I re-entered the Cub world with an L-4, a genuine Warbird from 1942. I shipped this and a Taylorcraft BC12 out from Utah and registered them both in RAAUS. The L-4 was an instant hit, both with me and with students at my new RAAUS flying school, Wings Out West. The exhaust soon cracked on this Cub and while ringing around for replacements I spoke to Darin Hart, CEO of American Legend Aircraft. He had exhausts and every other part to build a Cub as they supply Cub kits or the whole thing factory-built as LSA. I bought that exhaust with an AL3 Legend Cub attached to it.

The AL3 looks like a J3, but looks are deceiving! It weighs around 370kg, has 100hp O-200-D and a Catto Prop. The fuselage is the Super Cub fuselage with many mods including cross-bracing in the top, three inches extra width, float fittings and doors on the left side. Like the original J3 it has no

flaps, but still has terrific STOL performance and makes a perfect training aircraft.

I am told that every Cub is either in Alaska or going to end up there, so we went to visit.

We were greeted into Alaska by Clark 'Jay' and Sandy Baldwin of Alaskan Cub Training Specialist. I had already read Jay's book on survival flying and knew of some of his USAF exploits.

We got straight into training, day one covering high-end handling, advanced stalling, spins, tight valley turns, etc. From here the training took a sudden turn for the extreme. This is where the big 35" tyres came into good use. River landings started on some of the large gravel bars below the Knik Glacier and quickly became shorter and narrower. My crash buddy that day, an Israeli pilot, hit a steep side on a gravel bar and broke his undercarriage.

Fortunately this is common and as such the Alaskan Cubs all have cables around their gear as a back-up. Jay worked me hard and soon had me conducting landings onto a gravel bar, and upon take-off, failing the engine and forcing me to land with zero preparation into the next. The training is real enough that on one of these landings we had to shut down and step out a curved take-off path to get back out of the tight spot I put us into. We also had to walk through some shallow water on another occasion to check it was safe to taxi through to get back into the air.

Part two of my training was the mountains. Jay's son Steve had just shot a prize Dall Sheep high up on a ridge line that his friend John Bush had dropped him into with his highly modified Cub (see the black Cub on YouTube that won Valdez – John Bush is in on that). We flew up to these ridges, which averaged around 6500'. There was a spot up



there where the hunters had been landing. It was steep, short and surrounded by rough tundra. Jay briefed me on how to approach this, in particular never go below it and once committed there's no go-around.

My first landing was short (ouch) and after hitting the tundra, I lost forward speed and Jay had to turn me around as the strip was too steep to turn on!

On the second landing, I was short and blasted clean off the end. Once again, Jay had to get out and lift the aircraft over the Tundra; 35" tyres weren't big enough! The third landing was sweet. From there we tried to find Steve and John's ridge landing. We think we found it, but thankfully even Jay said they were mad.

Part three. Jay wanted me to come back and teach so he put me through all of the above from the back seat, which involves seeing no gravel bar on short finals. It was great preparation for my return to Australia and my Cub-centric flying school.

The Legend Cub has nearly 400hrs and I can't wait to see my Super Legend, which is waiting for us in Texas. The Super Legend is essentially the PA18. It has 115hp O-233 Lycoming, but the power-to-weight ratio matches the original 150hp Cubs.

Would I buy this aircraft as a kit? Absolutely,



though not for a flying school! You would stand to save some money and if built as a kit the MTOW is increased to the full 1750lbs for the AL3 and AL18. Being a fabric-covered aircraft, completing the externals would be quick, compared to riveting—and there's no fibreglass! ➤

Sadly, Clark J Baldwin died on 4 June 2015 when he was struck by a moving propeller while conducting Cub Training with four Cubs in the Alaskan wilderness.