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JACKIE KLAUS - COMMERCIAL PILOT

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Photographed by Richard Grayson

If Jackie Klaus seems happy enough to walk on air, it is only appropriate considering her profession. At the age of 50 she is doing just what she has always wanted to do. She is a commercial pilot.

Jackie cannot remember when she did not love flying. "My uncle was a pilot in the old barn-storming days and I knew all about him even when I was a toddler."

Jackie still remembers her first airplane ride. It was in a noisy DC-3 that flew round trip from Peoria, Illinois, to Chicago. "My parents promised me a trip if I made the honor

roll. You can bet I was on that honor roll the next time and on that plane."

Flying had to wait until after college at the University of Illinois, Champaign, where Jackie majored in business.

Her first job took her into flying as a TWA flight attendant.

But Bob Klaus, her college sweetheart, then proposed marriage. "I guess he found out how much he missed me when I was out of town," Jackie says.

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Marriage and motherhood, however, did not diminish her love of flying. The desire was only postponed.

After their three children were in school fulltime, Jackie started flying lessons in 1971 at the local airport.

"I

was glad she did," says Bob Klaus, "but I thought it would be just another hobby like bridge or tennis."

"Even though I started flying just for the fun of it," Jackie says, "after I achieved one goal I was hooked and I never quit. I was fortunate to have as my flight instructor another woman pilot from Peoria - Jean McLaughlin, twelve years older than

I am - and she became my role model. In fact, we were copilots in the 1976 Powder Puff Derby. Placed in the top ten, too, out of 40 entries."

Jackie has passed all of her ratings - private pilot, commercial instrument, and multi-engine. She has even been checked out to fly commercial seaplanes.

"I didn't do much commercial flying, though, until after the kids left for college," says Jackie. "But once you start teaching other pilots, you can really rack up those flying hours.

She instructed their son, Scott, now 26, who recently earned his private pilot's license. "I signed him out to another instructor, though, for his solo flight. I was afraid that, like any proud mother, I might not be objective enough to find anything wrong with my son."

In the meantime, Bob Klaus had been busy for the past twenty years as president of the family business, Klaus Radio, headquartered in Peoria, Illinois. Klaus Radio is a franchised

distributor for electrical appliances and electronic components for much of Illinois and Iowa and services about 6,000 retail and industrial accounts.

Bob had never been interested in flying but used to rely on commercial flights from Peoria for business trips. Gradually, however, commercial air service disappeared at these smaller airports and Bob had to travel many hours by car and sometimes stay overnight to attend important business meetings.

"One day in 1975, I heard Bob bemoan the fact that he could not make an emergency meeting in Newton, Iowa, five hours away by car. I said, 'why don't you let me fly you there?' It was a beautiful day for flying, we rented a plane, and I flew him to and from his meeting with no problems at all," Jackie says.

"It was not until we were back home that same night and I was grilling our dinner steak," says Bob, "that I realized how convenient our flight had been. We had accomplished all of our goals, we were rested, and I wasn't even late for dinner."

It did not take Bob long to buy a company airplane. In fact, the company bought three planes the first year. Jackie is the official corporate pilot for Klaus Radio.

As the corporate pilot, she is responsible not only for the

actual flying but also for scheduling the aircraft maintenance, for doing the paperwork for the company's aviation department, and for planning the comfort and convenience of the passengers on all flights. Their present aircraft is a Piper Seneca III with twin engines, six lush leather seats, and all the latest flying gadgets that make flying safe and easy.

Jackie says that she has never experienced any discrimination because she is a woman. "If you have the skills and can do

the job, people will know it and you get the respect. I think that women can do anything we set our minds to, but I want to be respected because of what I can do, and because I earned that respect - not because I am a woman."

She enjoys remembering one incident, however. "It was not so much discrimination as awe," Jackie relates. "Several years ago I flew some women friends from Peoria to Chicago for a shopping trip on Michigan Avenue. We landed at Meigs Field just south of the Chicago Loop in bad weather. When we got out of the plane and trailed through the flight room, there were all those male pilots battling the breeze about the weather and how bad it was out

there. And here we all were in our good clothes without even one hair out of place. Their mouths just sort of fell open."

Jackie not only serves as corporate pilot for Klaus Radio and a flight instructor at Mt. Hawley Airport, but she is on call with the company plane as a chartered pilot. In fact, on Tuesdays, she may hop in the plane before 6.00 am to fly to St. Louis to pick up a surgeon who will spend the day operating at St. Francis Medical Center in Peoria. Then she flies him back to St. Louis when his surgery is over for the day.

Jackie does have a hobby that the male charter pilots do not have. She works on her needlepoint during the inevitable delays at the airport.

This may be the best of times for any woman who has a yen to fly. The expansion and deregulation of the airline industry has created an unprecedented demand for pilots that may take five years to fill.

"The cockpit is sex and color blind," according to Dave Husar, director of Aviation Training Enterprise, American Flyers'

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training facility located in west suburban Chicago. "Women are almost 50% of the work force but only 6% of all pilots are women, only 3% of all commercially rated pilots are women, and only .003% of all airline pilots are women. If you have the skills, a woman will get a job in aviation today."

Neither is a college degree a prerequisite. To complete the training for all ratings takes four to five months of four hours a day for five days a week. Total cost is \$15,000 to \$20,000. The only drawback is that no school or scholarship loans are available for aviation training. Most committed aviation students seek a personal bank loan or they work part time and train part time. After securing a multi-engine rating, a pilot will have 230 loggable flight hours and 200 hours of ground education. The minimum age to get a commercial license is 18 years.

Formerly, corporations would not consider hiring pilots until they had 500 hours of flight time. Now the demand for pilots is so great that United Airlines, for example, is interviewing pilots with a minimum of only 400 hours. Maximum age to start flying for the airlines is 35 years but business corporations will hire pilots in their forties and fifties if they have the right training and experience.

Husar says that women used to start flying because of their

husbands. Now they continue flying in spite of their husbands. The husband may be too busy to continue flight training but the wife finds she likes flying so much that she continues on to get additional ratings.

"Women sometimes make better students than men," Husar thinks,

"because there is no clash of male egos in the cockpit. They will listen and obey their instructors better. Of course, that could be a problem later on when the woman pilot has to assume the 'pilot in command' attitude. But if a woman has been culturally conditioned to be subservient, she can also be conditioned to take command," Husar contends.

The pilot in command attitude is no problem for Jackie Klaus.

"I've only made one suggestion to Jackie since we started flying and she came right back with -'Listen, are you going to fly this plane or am I?' I haven't opened my mouth since," laughs Bob Klaus.

Jackie has amassed over 6,000 flying hours during her fifteen year career and she has no intention of stopping now. She wants to compete in the 1987 International Air Classic Race, the successor to the Powder Puff Derby. Jackie is a member of the 99's, the sponsor of the race and the original flying organization for women started in 1929 by

Amerlia Earhart and Jackie Cochraon together with 97 other famous women
aviation pioneers.

A pressing concern of every pilot is passing the periodic
physical examination. The Federal Aviation Administration has set up
rigid criteria to provide for the renewal of a pilot's medical certifi-
cation. So a pilot's career could end abruptly if for some reason he or
she could not pass the physical.

Jackie hopes that her perfect health continues and that she never
has to retire.

"As long as I have my medical, I will be out there flying."

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