



John Cashman, Boeing Commercial Airplanes chief test pilot and director of Flight Crew Operations, credits his 40-year Boeing career to having passion and some lucky breaks—and to working with great people along the way.

40 years and still soaring

Test pilot's career is built on passion, hope—and a little luck

BY DEBBY ARKELL

You would think heart-stopping moments such as piloting a transport airplane to a full stall and having it roll unexpectedly past vertical bank—and

scrambling successfully to right the aircraft—would be among the highlights of Commercial Airplanes Chief Test Pilot John Cashman's 40-year Boeing career.

It's a career that began with Cashman joining Boeing as an engineer and eventually becoming a test pilot. It's also included Cashman's earning honors for his contributions to the development of airplanes—including The Brackley Memorial Trophy, a prestigious award he received last month from the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators.

Yet Cashman, the director of Flight

Crew Operations, cited his participation in the "working-together" approach taken by the 777 program—something that's now part of the everyday vernacular of Commercial Airplanes employees—as a memorable moment.

"The whole 777 program has been the highlight of my career," Cashman said. "The concept of working together on that program was done so well, it truly was fun. We had some heated debates and intense discussions that were a little stressful and tiring at times. But because of that approach

and because we were working with exceptional people, the results were so much better than the sum of the individual parts.”

‘VERY REWARDING’ EXPERIENCE

Cashman became 777 Program Chief Pilot in 1990 and had what he called a “very rewarding” experience as chief pilot on the 777’s first flight. “When you put your heart into a program, it’s very satisfying,” he said.

Cashman credits a good portion of his flying career to lucky breaks. He grew up near a naval air station in Illinois, his father was a pilot in the early 1930s, and his uncle owned an airplane. Cashman had always wanted to fly, but his eyesight didn’t meet high military standards and he wasn’t able to pursue military training. It was while earning his bachelor’s degree at the University of Michigan that Cashman decided to take to the skies.

“While I was studying aerospace engineering there I decided that in addition to understanding the science of flight I needed to know how to fly,” he said. He joined the school’s flying club—ultimately becoming the club’s president—and getting his private pilot’s license.

His first job as a pilot was for the university’s skydiving club. “It didn’t pay, but I’d do anything to fly,” Cashman said.

Upon graduation in 1966, Cashman moved to Seattle. As luck would have it, Boeing was hiring. His first job at Boeing was as a structures engineer on the 727 program. Yet he continued to pursue his passion for flying on his own time, acquiring his commercial pilot’s license and ultimately earning all his ratings while flying with the Boeing Flying Club. It was there Cashman continued his fondness for aerobatic flying—flying loops, rolls and other maneuvers—and began teaching flying after work and on weekends.

Cashman joined Boeing’s aerodynamics staff early in his career and finally got his break to become a Boeing pilot in 1974.

Historically, Cashman said, Boeing pilots tended to be former military pilots who’d gone through military test pilot school. But 747 Flight Engineer Jess Wallick was a civilian pilot who worked his way into flying, ultimately attaining captain’s rank. “He worked his way up as a civilian, and that gave me hope,” Cashman said.

“The 747SP (Special Performance) program took a chance and decided to hire two flight engineers into experimental flight test (new airplane testing),” he said. “They wanted to do something different, to hire flight engineers who knew about flight test

and how to fly, so they hired me and [recently retired Vice President of Flight Operations] Ken Higgins.”

Looking back, Cashman credited his ability to pursue his dreams to Boeing’s changing attitudes and increasing diversity—in addition to passion and lucky breaks.

“The key point for me was the shift to allowing civilian pilots into the ranks,” he said. “Today Boeing really values diverse backgrounds in its test pilots—civilian, military and test-pilot-school graduates—because everyone brings a different perspective when designing our products.”

MANY ACHIEVEMENTS

Cashman’s achievements include flying copilot on the 707 and being rated as captain on all other Boeing jet transports: 727, 737, 747, 757, 767 and 777. He’s flown both in production and experimental flight-test roles.

Cashman also has received several prestigious awards and honors during his Boeing career. He’s received the Iven C. Kincheloe Award of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots for outstanding contributions to developmental flight test in an individual aerospace program, along with The Brackley Memorial Trophy—which honors transport pilots for outstanding flying, for contributions to the operational development of air transport or for new techniques in air transport flying. These are tremendous accolades, but as with other exciting events in his career, the even-keeled Cashman takes them in stride.

“Receiving an international award like this is an honor,” he said. “Boeing is the only company in the world where I could have worked my way up to be a chief pilot. Having a passion for what you do and a little luck helps, but it’s the people that give you the chance—and people that make it fun.” ■

debra.j.arkell@boeing.com

“It’s the people that give you the chance—and people that make it fun.”

—John Cashman, Commercial Airplanes chief test pilot



GREG THON PHOTO

In this mid-1990s image, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Chief Test Pilot John Cashman (left) and now-retired Boeing executive Ken Higgins are in front of the first Boeing 777, shortly before the airplane’s first flight. Cashman and Higgins got their start as Boeing pilots when they were hired together as flight engineers on the 747SP (Special Performance) program.