

# EXP Aircraft Services Coaches Amateur Aircraft Builders

STORY BY CHRISTINE KNAUER

It took four years and some 3,000 hours for Walter Aronow, owner of EXP Aircraft Services in Roanoke, Texas, to build his experimental Van's RV7A, a two-seat, single-engine, low-wing painted in patriotic red, white and blue.

"It was a journey of love," said Aronow, who has enjoyed building since he was a kid. "During the build, my wife, Joann, would sometimes bring my dinner into the garage so

I could keep working. If I needed an extra set of hands, she would help. I built hot rods in my youth. Finally getting to build my own airplane was a dream come true for me."

Every year, like thousands of other aviation enthusiasts, the couple flies their beloved homebuilt to the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture in Oshkosh, Wis., taking in the roar of the flight line and camping next to their little RV7A in the sticky summer heat.

"Along the way, I made lots of friends in the RV community and found myself assisting other builders with their projects as well," said Aronow, who has 30 years experience in aircraft maintenance in addition to being a private pilot with more than 1,300 flight hours. "Most builders didn't have the experience with structures, riveting, general wiring, avionics installations and standard aircraft practice that I did.

"I started EXP Aircraft Services because I love working on airplanes, and I saw a real need in the experimental aviation community for experienced aviation maintenance professionals. Someone who can help get you started, show you some basic processes, keep you motivated and generally help you build a safe, reliable aircraft that you and your family can enjoy."

At Vought Aerospace, he supervised personnel on the build lines of Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, the Boeing C17 and Gulfstream 550s. Aronow, who graduated from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, also worked as an



It took Walt Aronow four years to build his experimental Van's RV7A seen here decked out in its patriotic paint scheme.

WEBSITE: [www.expaircraft.com](http://www.expaircraft.com)

FACILITIES: 5,000-square-foot hangar

**WHAT THEY DO:**

EXP Aircraft Services specializes in experimental aircraft avionics installations, airframe maintenance and builder assistance as well as provides a variety of services for small single- and twin-engine aircraft.

EMPLOYEES: 1

FOUNDED: 2010 by Walter Aronow

AEA MEMBER SINCE: 2010



**“I don’t have anyone setting a time limit on my work. I am able to take whatever time is necessary to do the job right without any pressure from the boss or to hurry up and get it done.”**

**- WALTER ARONOW**

avionics technician, line supervisor and quality assurance supervisor for the airlines, overseeing avionics installations, maintenance, overhauls and inspections.

At EXP Aircraft Services, Aronow specializes in experimental aircraft avionics installations, airframe maintenance and builder assistance but also provides a variety of services for small single- and twin-engine aircraft. For general aviation customers, his FAA-certified repair station offers avionics installation and repair, pitot-static and transponder certification, dynamic propeller balancing, aircraft weighing and maintenance. EXP Aircraft Services also is an authorized dealer for Dynon Avionics, Trig Avionics, FreeFlight Systems and Becker Avionics.

“Anyone is allowed to do maintenance on an experimental aircraft but you must have an A&P or FAA repairman’s certificate to do the annual condition inspection,” Aronow said. “Most A&Ps and shops are not familiar with experimental aircraft or the regulations they operate under. Our expertise in this area helps to set us apart from most other shops.”

### Eye on the Details

From the beginning, customers have come to Aronow mostly by word of mouth. Participating in online forums, such as the Vans Air Force website, has helped grow his business, too.

“Through these forums, I am able to provide technical guidance to beginning builders, and I now have customers as far away as New York coming to my shop for work,” Aronow said. “These folks will schedule their maintenance needs with a vacation or when visiting relatives nearby.”

For customers who need a ride back to their home airport, Aronow gladly offers them a lift in his RV7A. In addition to being convenient for customers, it gives Aronow the added benefit of more flying time.

“Flying with customers also gives me a great opportunity to discuss things like aircraft performance, engine operation, proper leaning techniques, engine vibration and avionics operation,” he said. “I really enjoy this aspect of the job.”

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Walt Aronow routinely repairs transponders and handles IFR certifications at his repair station in Roanoke, Texas

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More than ever, owners are looking to upgrade their analog “steam-gauge” panels to glass, according to Aronow.

“Today’s glass panels, especially for the experimental market, are absolutely phenomenal with functions, performance and reliability that rival the best avionics out there,” he said. “Folks in the experimental market also are jumping on the ADS-B bandwagon with both feet. They are seeing the benefits of having traffic and weather in the cockpit now rather than waiting for the 2020 deadline.”

Aronow takes pride in just how detailed and meticulous he is, starting with the type of test equipment he uses. For transponder testing, Aronow relies on the Aeroflex IFR 6000. And for altimetry testing and calibration, he uses DFW Instrument’s DPST-8000M, an RVSM-certified unit.

“Even though very few of our customers require the accuracy RVSM offers, we believe all of our customers can benefit from the increased accuracy this equipment provides for testing and calibration services,” he said.

Another example of his extreme attention to detail is how Aronow handles an IFR certification.

“I will adjust the altitude encoder to a more stringent plus or minus 50-foot tolerance when the spec allows for a plus or minus 125-foot error,” he explained. “This way, I know things are as perfect as I can get them, and the system will stay in tolerance for the full two years after leaving the shop.

“Along the same line, if the transponder frequency is off, I will remove it and adjust the frequency back to the spec where it be-

longs. Granted, it takes extra time to do these things, but I like things to be right when they leave my shop. It’s a personal thing, I guess, but it makes me feel good when I know things are just right. It’s the same way I maintain my own airplane.”

## Help When You Need It

EXP Aircraft Services participates in the EAA’s technical advisor program, offering free inspections for experimental aircraft builders. The program helps builders use correct construction methods, techniques and materials so their aircraft turns out air-worthy.

“The most important inspection comes when the aircraft is complete and I perform the final inspection prior to the first flight,” Aronow said. “The goal of the Technical Counselor Program is to help EAA members present a zero-defect aircraft at its final inspection by the FAA, and have a routine first flight with no surprises.”

In the near future, Aronow plans to expand on those services by offering a full experimental aircraft and RV builder assist center where customers can build their aircraft with access to tooling, as well as professional and technical assistance.

Builders will be able to choose from a menu of options for a monthly or hourly rate, depending on what they need – from building space with use of tools to hands-on assistance to complete aircraft wiring and avionics installations.

“Best of all, everyone will be encouraged to work together and learn from each other,” Aronow said. “This is a great community to be a part of, and we plan to be here for a long time to help folks with their aircraft projects.” □