THE SHANNONS’ RANCH HAND
A CARAVAN PROVIDES THE LIFT FOR A FAMILY’S WEEKEND RETREAT
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“We really hit it off,” Chandler recalled. “We found we had similar interests. We both married incredible wives who put up with us for a long time, and our children have similar ages as well. We developed a relationship — as couples and in business.”

Soon Chandler and his wife were frequent guests of the Shannons at Chimney Rock Ranch, the friends often flying down in the Chandlers’ Cessna 425 Conquest. With Carroll County Airport (AM1) in Berryville, Ark., just a few miles away, Shannon saw how easy a private aircraft made the commute. Recalled Chandler, “He convinced me I needed to make an investment in boats and a cabin at the lake, and I convinced him he had to make an investment in airplanes.”

Shannon agreed. “He got the bug in me to go flying.” Chandler’s friend Kirby Ortega, Cessna’s chief pilot for piston engine operations, became Shannon’s instructor. As Ortega recalled, “After a few flights, he said, ‘I’m going to buy my own airplane.’”

Shannon bought a pre-owned Cessna 182 Skylane that he flew for several years before moving up to a new Millennium Edition Cessna 206 Turbo Stationair. He later upgraded to a Cessna Turbo Stationair with a Garmin G1000 avionics suite. For longer-range travel, Shannon also joined CitationAir by Cessna, purchasing shares in a Citation Excel and a Citation Sovereign, adding even greater utility and comfort.

In early 2010, Shannon decided to upgrade again, setting his sights on the power and reliability of a turboprop. “I looked around at a variety of aircraft, from a Pilatus (PC-12) to a TBM 850,” Shannon said. “Speed wasn’t a critical factor as much as my confidence that I could fly the plane well. I took a demo flight in the 208 and found it as easy as the 206 to fly.”

The demo pilot — Ortega, of course — sealed the deal when he showed Shannon the Caravan’s short-field capability. “Kirby had me stay high on final, then pull the power back and put in full flaps,” Shannon remembered. “We set it down, put the prop into the beta range and stopped in 1,000 feet without ever touching the brakes.”

The FlightSafety International training course that is included with the Caravan’s purchase simplified the turbine transition, and Shannon was already familiar with the G1000 flight deck from the installation in his Stationair. But taking his family to the ranch would have to wait. Shannon’s insurance company mandated 50 hours of pilot-in-command time before he could carry passengers, and Shannon was eager to make the most of them. He again enlisted Ortega, who plotted a route designed to expose Shannon to a wide variety of aviating in an accelerated time frame, while showcasing the full range and versatility of the Caravan. Labor Day weekend 2010, the two set off on their training mission.

“We flew from Wichita to Leadville, Colorado, the highest public use airport in the country,” Ortega said, recounting their itinerary. “Then to Santa Fe, Tucson and Phoenix, where we overnighted. The next day, we flew to Sedona, then San Diego, and on to Catalina Island — the Airport in the Sky — then to San Luis Obispo, and from there to Furnace Creek, California, the lowest airport in the U.S. It was hot — 115 degrees. Then we flew over to Las Vegas and overnighted there. The next day, we flew to Albuquerque, then to Ken’s ranch in Berryville, Arkansas, and the next day back to Wichita. We knocked out about 24 or 25 hours over the weekend.”

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— Ken Shannon

Shannon made sure his family would enjoy riding in the back as much as he liked sitting in the front left seat. For cabin appointments, he chose Yingling’s Oasis executive interior, with its top-grain leather, high-gloss cabinetry, alternating-current outlets and video screens. The whole family helped choose the colors and textures for the cabin. Yingling also prepared a pair of custom synthetic leather slipcovers, perfect for protecting the seats when his young grandchildren are aboard strapped into their car seats. “We were thrilled with the interior, the craftsmanship and how quickly they were able to turn it around,” Shannon said. “We’ve had the fractional share in the Sovereign and the Excel, and my wife will tell you the Caravan is every bit as comfortable.”

The paint scheme for N406CR (the “CR” is for Chimney Rock) has accents of Silver Platinum and Walnut over Matterhorn White, crowned by Chimney Rock Ranch’s silhouetted pine tree logo on the forward doors. Given the heavy family hauling it does, Shannon also got the optional cargo pod, which adds an additional 111.5 cubic feet of storage.

While most of his flights are to the ranch and back, he enjoys longer journeys, like flights to Florida to visit his daughter and son-in-law, as well.

“From the middle of the U.S., I can get to Palm Beach in under seven hours — quicker than if I fly commercially,” Shannon said.
So far, Shannon has put more than 180 of his 900-plus total flight hours in the Caravan. “It provides me the opportunity to take my entire family on vacations; it also affords us the opportunity to take friends down to our place on Table Rock Lake. And because of its large cargo capacity, I’ve been able to transport large and unusual things such as a set of bunk beds I had built for my grandson.”

“I couldn’t be happier with my decision,” Shannon said of his choice in turboprops. “We’ve always been in the Cessna family, and it seems a natural fit to stay here.”

The Shannon family (left to right): John Melhorn, son-in-law; Julie Melhorn, daughter (at the time, she was pregnant with Ken and Jan’s grandson Jacob); Ken Shannon; Jan Shannon; Kirsten Shannon, daughter-in-law; Paul Shannon, grandson; David Shannon, son; Annabella Shannon, granddaughter. (photo courtesy: Ken Shannon)

KEN SHANNON AND HIS TIES TO THE CESSNA FAMILY

Ken Shannon, 56, was no stranger to Cessna Aircraft Company or its airplanes when he began flying some 15 years ago. Wichita, Kan., born and raised, while in college he was hired by longtime CEO Dwane Wallace, Clyde Cessna’s nephew, and assigned to Cessna’s service parts center. Shannon was often sent to pick up customers and drive them to the aircraft delivery center at Cessna’s Pawnee Division, but he never fantasized about flying away in an airplane of his own in those days. “It was a good job, (but) I never got the bug to fly during that period,” he said. “After college, I went in a different direction and a different career path.” But his and Cessna’s paths converged once again shortly after his flight training began. Shannon decided to buy an airplane and soon located a beautiful Cessna 182 for sale. There was only one catch — the plane was the last aircraft Dwane Wallace had owned, and Velma, his widow, insisted on approving the buyer. Thanks to his previous association, that wasn’t a problem for Shannon — or Velma. “I had known Dwane, so she was thrilled,” he said. The sale was approved, and Shannon’s ties to the Cessna family were firmly re-established.