



CASE STUDY

HIGH-PERFORMING PEOPLE DEMAND HIGH- PERFORMING AIRCRAFT

Thornton Aviation and Universal Avionics transform
Michael Rasa's F900B

“It’s doing the right thing and being a man of your word. Have alternatives ready and operate with integrity. That’s how I run my businesses and that’s what I see in Thornton Aviation and Universal Avionics.”

Michael Rasa understands performance. He founded Dallas-based Rasa Floors and grew it to 23 locations operating in 18 states by the time he sold the company in 2021. He credits hard work, operating with integrity and maintaining a positive attitude for his success, and he seeks those same qualities when choosing partners to work on his aircraft.

Michael recently selected Thornton Aviation and Universal Avionics to integrate and install Universal’s InSight Integrated Flight Display system into his Falcon 900B per Dassault’s STC – an industry first. The STC allows operators to upgrade to the four-display InSight system while maintaining the existing Honeywell flight management system (FMS). This project was unique due to the existing CDS/R displays installed in the aircraft. The STC does not directly cover a CDS/R to InSight conversion, but Thornton Aviation and Dassault tackled this challenge and successfully delivered the aircraft.

SECRET SHOPPER BECOMES SATISFIED CUSTOMER

Michael met the Thornton Aviation team when he acquired the Falcon 900B. “I originally didn’t want to have anything to do with anyone in California,” he says. “I’m in Dallas. There are plenty of maintenance options here.” But a “secret shopper” trip to Thornton changed his mind. The aircraft was in Thornton’s Burbank operation when Michael dropped in unannounced for a visit. He talked to the technicians working on the aircraft without announcing himself as the prospective owner.



“I’ve owned two piston aircraft and 10 jets. I’m familiar with shops, having been around many of them. I was immediately impressed with the cleanliness, organization of the hangars and their people. I started talking to the maintenance team and they had great things to say about the aircraft and about improvements that would add value, safety and comfort,” Michael says.

One recommendation was to replace the aircraft’s display system with Universal’s InSight platform. InSight is a fourth-generation integrated flight deck featuring four high-resolution displays and two touchscreen control displays, with a 3D synthetic vision system and associated digital maps.

Vince Russo, Thornton Aviation’s director of avionics, introduced Michael to the Universal Avionics team out of Tucson who immediately brought a demo of the InSight system so Michael could demo it and ask questions.

“The Universal InSight display is a beautiful system with four great displays with very good clarity and a fast processor that works very well which makes the Falcon 900B enjoyable to fly,” said Michael, who is a pilot in addition to being the owner.

During the project, Michael was impressed that Thornton Aviation built a brand-new wiring harness with quick release connections for the entire panel. Everything was removed from the cockpit, a new panel was fabricated, and the new wiring harness was used to connect the new components.

AIRCRAFT:
Dassault Falcon 900B

- SCOPE OF WORK:**
- First Universal InSight install per the Dassault STC
 - Cabin upgrades
 - Scheduled maintenance

While testing the new system, Michael suggested an improvement. He worked with the Universal Avionics Engineering and Leadership team to develop an enhancement to the platform that is being integrated into the software for all InSight users.

It's this "insider eye" that makes Michael a discriminating buyer when it comes to aircraft maintenance. "I have realistic expectations when my airplanes are worked on. Things happen. It's how those things are handled that makes the difference," he says. Despite the distance from Dallas, he's come to see that there's value in having the same committed team working on an aircraft, and he's returned to Thornton for the aircraft's scheduled maintenance.

"Thornton's team was accessible and had a great attitude. They even identified an issue with the pilot side strut losing pressure. They rallied and stayed late, even working over the weekend. They also cleaned, sanded and repainted each access port to make them look like new," Michael says. "Details like that are impressive."

CLIMBING OUT – RISING ABOVE WITH FAITH, FAMILY AND FORTITUDE

Saying simply that his father was a bad man, New Jersey native Michael Rasa was born into a large Italian family. When he was 14, Michael's father tossed him out of the family home. For most, an event like that would be the catalyst for a life of struggle. But for this determined high school dropout turned military man turned entrepreneur – with a history of adversity that includes overcoming a life-threatening injury – hard work, integrity and faith forged a path to personal and professional success beyond a homeless 14-year-old's imaginings.

"I'm a big believer in dreaming, setting goals and working your tail off," says Michael. And the payoff can be found in his beautiful family, homes in Dallas, Steamboat Springs and Cabo San Lucas, and his aircraft, currently a Phenom 300 and a Falcon 900B.

It was transportation between Dallas and Steamboat Springs that sparked Michael's interest in owning – and flying – his own aircraft. Michael and his



wife Debbie were building their retirement home in Colorado while running their flooring business in Dallas. They knew they'd want to be in Steamboat frequently to monitor the construction, but year-round commercial flights weren't available. That led Michael to his first flight lesson and to owning his first aircraft, a Piper Saratoga.

MICHAEL RASA'S THREE RULES FOR SUCCESS

1. Be willing to ask for help.
 2. Use your own common-sense filter.
 3. Sleep on it and then go with your gut.
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The Piper led to a succession of aircraft, including a Bonanza that lost power at 10,000 feet, forcing Michael and his 87-year-old passenger to land in a clearing after nearly missing a succession of power lines. None of these adventures endeared Debbie to flying although she ultimately earned her pilot's license and multiple type ratings as they transitioned from piston-powered aircraft to jets.

These days, Michael prefers to turn right at the top of the airstairs instead of left. He loves traveling with the family, and he and Debbie have created a logbook for each grandchild, complete with photos and official entries from each trip.

He sold his flooring business at the end of 2021 after suffering a devastating injury at his Steamboat Springs home. He spent seven nights in the neurosurgery ICU and was not expected to survive. But Michael has a history of turning dark moments into brighter days, and he's using his experiences to inspire others through his "Rasa Revelations" webcasts. He and his family are also acquiring the last piece of land at Addison Airport, where they are about to break ground on a 30,000-sq-ft hangar with an attached 8,000-sq-ft, two-story office building. His aircraft will be based there, and the office will become home to the family's latest endeavor, Runway Roofing. Given his past success, there's no doubt the new business will take off.

"Success is all about relationships," says Michael. "It's doing the right thing and being a man of your word. Have alternatives ready and operate with integrity. That's how I run my businesses and that's what I see in Thornton Aviation and Universal Avionics."



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