

# Cree as a bird

A passion for aviation led to a complete change in R&D focus for a cooling systems business. **Paul Hill** spoke to the president of the US company to find out how this came about

**O**f the thousands of new products and innovations being exhibited at the K2016 show, few had a background story quite as fascinating as Addex's Intensive Cooling Experience and ICE-enhanced air rings.

Before taking up his role as president at the blown film cooling systems supplier, Bob Cree had a conversation with his predecessor and now chairman, Rick Von Kraus. The talk involved the latter's plans to consolidate the business to one location in New York, USA. As well as this, he felt Cree needed to add a sales and marketing arm to his job description.

The president-elect soon realised that this meant he could make the most of his passion for aviation and fly his private aircraft around North America, making sales and building up relationships with customers in the process. The 57-year-old had gained his pilot's license in his teens and after 30 years of working in the blown film extrusion industry, he was now able to combine his main hobby with business.

With a background in R&D and product manufacturing he was also able to use this knowledge with his extra responsibilities and the results, Cree explained, were fascinating: "A typical customer meeting includes not only a discussion of our current technology, but also a preview of projects in the works. During my

*Above right: Cree's interest in flying and wing design influenced how he tackled increased output, which he claims was essentially an aerodynamic problem.*

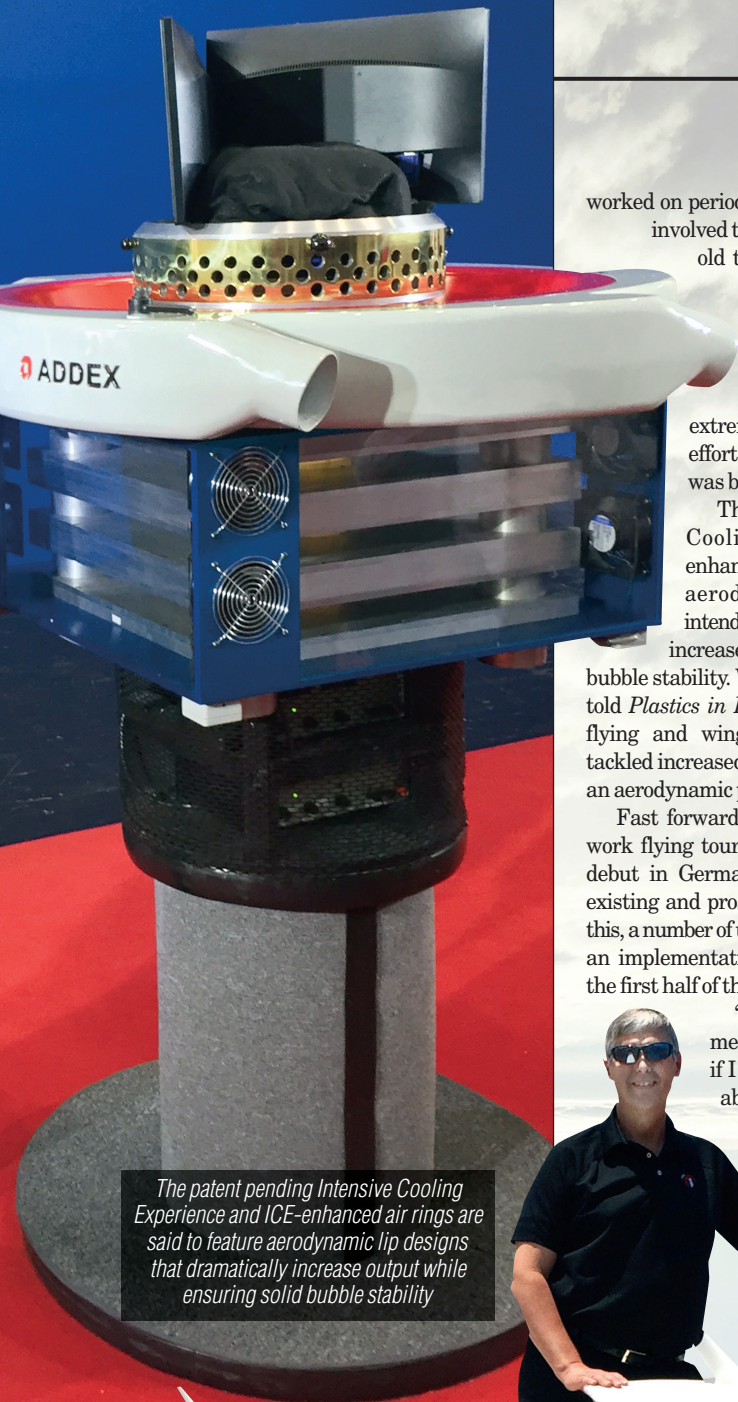
*Right: Cree pilots single engine prop planes, usually a Mooney 231, Piper Arrow or Cessna 182, depending on where he is going.*

*Far right: A typical two-week tour for Cree can cover more than 5,000 nautical miles and involve meeting up to 10 companies*

first flying tour, our R&D at the time was focused on improvements to film quality. At the end of each presentation I would then ask the customer how our plans align with their industry needs. The response I kept receiving took me aback. What they really wanted was more output. I kept hearing it again and again and it led to a complete change in focus of our R&D direction."

In response to these revelations, Cree immediately switched the focus to increasing output rather than film quality. He then picked up a project that he and Bill Randolph, product development and engineering manager, had





worked on periodically through the years. This involved the task of improving a decades-old technology developed at Mobil Chemical in the 1970s called the Herrington Stack, which delivered gains in output but caused vibration, resulting in bubble instability and extremely noisy. The intense R&D effort paid off and ICE technology was born.

The patent-pending Intensive Cooling Experience and ICE-enhanced air rings are said to feature aerodynamic (no aviation pun intended) lip designs that dramatically increase output while ensuring solid bubble stability. Whilst in Düsseldorf, Cree also told *Plastics in Packaging* how his interest in flying and wing design influenced how he tackled increased output, which was essentially an aerodynamic problem.

Fast forward to three years after his first work flying tour and the technology made its debut in Germany, gathering attention from existing and prospective customers. As well as this, a number of unnamed OEMs are considering an implementation of the full-ICE product in the first half of this year.

"These technological developments may never have happened if I didn't go ahead with these 'fly abouts'," he commented. "I will often land at municipal airports that are very close and sometimes within walking distance of blown film plants. It's a very efficient use of my time

and our sales reps really have to hustle to keep up with me when I visit their regions."

A typical two-week tour can cover more than 5,000 miles and involve meeting up to ten companies. His latest trip included stops in Kentucky, North Carolina, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, California, Washington, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Michigan.

"Trying to make that many stops using commercial aviation would take at least three or four weeks, not to mention layovers and delays in airports, which would eat up more valuable time. It's all about making personal contact and maximising time with customers, while minimising time away from the office. It also leaves me in charge of my own itinerary," Cree enthused.

The former US Navy lieutenant commander pilots single engine aircraft, usually a Mooney 231, Piper Arrow or Cessna 182, depending on where he is going. "Each airplane has advantages and disadvantages. The Mooney with turbocharger and retractable gear flies faster and higher and is very fuel efficient, which works great over the mountains and big lakes, but it has strict weight limits and costs a bit more to operate. The Arrow and Cessna are less expensive and can carry a heavier load, but can't fly as high, are slower and less fuel efficient, which is fine east of the Rockies."

As an instrument-rated private pilot, Cree is permitted to fly in less-than-ideal conditions. However, even with this rating, he considers himself a conservative pilot and limits his trips to warmer weather to avoid any danger of icing, a serious condition where ice accumulates on the wings and a common cause of accidents during cold weather. In an amusing turn of events, he's now hoping that the ICE technology will help finance a company plane with de-icing capabilities.

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