

LIFESTYLE

[Living](#)

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Living a dream

H. Shashidharan is not just any spare parts dealer – he deals in aircraft parts, writes REVATHI MURUGAPPAN.



If you spot a Cessna aircraft flying past the Petronas Twin Towers on a clear day, it's probably H. Shashidharan cruising to catch a sunset over the city. Seeing the brilliant orange globe lighting up the sky takes his breath away and is his way of relaxing.

After all, his work as an aircraft parts distributor from 11am to 2am is a taxing one. He trades in aircraft spare parts which can range from a few cents for a screw to a cool million ringgit for an engine part.

"I'm really like a second-hand car dealer," says the 38-year-old group director of Falcon Aviation Support Sdn Bhd (FAS) who goes by his professional moniker H.S. Dharan. "I negotiate the price, then buy or sell the parts."

Through phone calls and the Internet, he sources for spare parts from the original manufacturers e.g. Boeing, or does exchanges with other airlines which have gone bust but have surplus inventory.

"As long as the records can be properly traced, we'll exchange the parts. Or we might buy an older aircraft, strip it down, send its components for overhaul and stock them up as spares. The other option is to auction them off," he explains.

Dharan supplies parts to most of the regional airlines. Components without which an aircraft cannot function include engine parts, airframe panels and rotables. (Rotables are aircraft components that have to be overhauled or repaired after a certain number of hours, for example, hydraulics.)

Dharan claims it's rare that spare parts malfunction; human error is more likely in aviation disasters.

The parts are mainly stored in the US and Dharan's company has recently invested in a repair facility to minimise cost. However, he hopes to set up a warehouse in this region to reduce the time factor when shipping the parts to Asia.

In his 16 years in this business, his worst nightmare was during Christmas 2002 when five aircraft were on the ground simultaneously – in Thailand, India, Indonesia and Malaysia – and critically needed certain parts which were contracted to FAS.



H. Shashidharan (above) flies to relax.

“All the parts were stored in the US and since it was the holiday season, most of the offices were closed. Freight companies were having delays due to weather conditions and it took one week to finally bring the parts in. Every day an aircraft is grounded, the airline loses about US\$27,000 (RM99,000) in revenue. It was massive stress for me!” he shudders, recalling the incident.

This Kuantan-bred lad actually harboured hopes of being a pilot but because his grades were not good enough, he had to settle for accountancy – a profession that could provide security.

“I got employed as an audit clerk and every day, I was clearing files. The more I cleared, a higher stack was placed on my tray! I thought I had made a wrong career decision and quit after three months,” says Dharan.

He then became a business executive at a trading company which supplied military vehicle parts to the Government, and eventually landed a job handling aircraft spare parts for Boeing 727s, 737s, 747s and 767s. He loved it and knew that was his calling. One thing led to another and he established FAS with a few American friends. It’s based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, but Dharan looks after the Malaysian operations.



Once he established his business, his burning desire to fly resurfaced. So Dharan bought a Cessna aircraft, hired an instructor and was thrilled to be piloting a plane.

Over time, people started enquiring about learning to fly. Sensing a demand, the enterprising Dharan bought two more Cessnas and a Piper from the US, and started the FAS Udara Flying Club in Subang last year. Former Prime

Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is the club's patron.

Already, the flying club is operating at full capacity with 23 students enrolled to acquire a private pilot licence. In addition to theory, students need 35 instructional hours and 15 solo flying hours before they can sit for their licensing exam.

Dharan says anyone, irrespective of gender, can obtain their licence provided they have passed the SPM and cleared their medical test at a Department of Civil Aviation-approved medical facility. A full-time student can complete the course in four months.

“At present, we are sourcing for more instructors because we didn't anticipate such a demand,” discloses Dharan.

He has also tried his hands at producing movies and is the executive producer of *Ethirkaalam*, the first locally-produced Tamil movie to be shot in digital format and converted into 35mm for nationwide screening. Written, produced and starring his younger brother, H. Sri Kumar, the plot revolves around youth and gangsterism.



The FAS flying team. Crafts owned by FAS.- Pictures by H. SHASHIDARAN

“It was my brother's dream to produce a movie and as his eldest brother, I financed it. Sadly, the response received was just lukewarm as most Malaysians think it's just another drama. But people who have seen it rate it positively,” says Dharan, who has a tiny part in the movie.

And if you watch television regularly, you would have noticed a tall, bearded hunk playing badminton in the Tamara (a cholesterol-lowering powder) ad aired on NTV7 and Astro's Vaanavil channels. Yes, Dharan also dabbles in the commercial world, although he says his entry was accidental.

“The producer had seen my picture in the newspapers when *Ethirkaalam* was released, got in touch with me, asked if I was free the next day . . . and that's how it happened,” Dharan says, laughing.

Citing AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes as his idol, Dharan hopes to emulate him someday.

“I think he has done an amazing job with Air Asia. The way he has set up the guidelines and all is just remarkable,” says the father of two.

But for now, Dharan is quite happy to simply hop into his Cessna and take a spin above the Klang Valley whenever time permits.