

## The Great Eclipse

Albuquerque figures prominently in the story of Eclipse Aviation. It provided an ideal setting for the development and production of the first Very Light Jet (VLJ)—the Eclipse 500. Born of the fertile imagination of high tech entrepreneur, Vern Rayburn, this is the story of the rise and fall of a dream: to build a low cost, high speed personal transportation system in the form of a twin-engine jet.

Rayburn's vision was not just of a small economical airplane, but the entire design, manufacturing, training and support network that would turn the aviation world on its head.

Winner of the prestigious Collier Trophy in 2005 for achievement in aviation, the Eclipse dream faded when a series of misfortunes and mismanagement deprived the aviation community of this innovative airplane. Among its many accolades, Eclipse pioneered the use of 'friction stir welding' and built its first 100 airplanes faster than any GA jet aircraft manufacturer in history. Yet the story is not over despite delivery of only 259 aircraft and the bankruptcy of Eclipse. Investors have purchased the assets and this new start may yet achieve Rayburn's vision.

**Dennis Maxwell** has been writing about technology for over 30 years, at GE, SRI International, for a number of Silicon Valley high tech firms and for Eclipse Aviation.

