

# KIT-BUILT CONUNDRUM

## EXPERIMENTAL-HOMEBUILT (Fixed & Flying Aircraft)

1980, Certified 300+ h.p., IO-540-S1A5, all new Narco IFR panel, Foster F14 EAP, Insight GEM, extended tips with custom interior and more. Professional beautiful inside and out. Priced to sell.

1980, 141TT, elastic metric hub, HD Terra 720 Coms, professionally map, Loran, will take aircraft on trade.

FOX III with IV wing, windshield and season fuel, new radios, A&P shop built engine. Sits tan, brown and burgundy.

1980, 40 hours, Rotax 582, Loran, 141TT since new, 160 h.p. con-

ARDUSTER TOO, 300TT, BEAUTIFUL flying, excellent condition, 150HP, KX170B, seat pack chutes, \$24,000, professionally built.

1988 SONERAI II LOW WING, 2180VW, 100 hours TTAE, 9G wing, long range fuel, intercom, 140+ MPH, clean, fast and well built. Located No. Indiana. \$8500.

1959 DAVIS DA5A, ALL metal, single place, TT 207, SMOH 895, STO 62, Continental 85, fuel injected. Was \$16,000, now \$9500. No damage, hangared since new.

1991 RV-6A, \$65,000/offer, sliding canopy, 110TT, great IFR panel! Wheel pants, strobe, many extras. Impeccable condition.

QUESTAIR VENTURE, 60 HRS, TTAE, new paint, leather interior, King radios, MSI, intercom, moving map, Loran, \$189,000. See at Sun 'N Fun.

CORBIN BABY ACE, 700TT, 565SMOH Continental A-65, very clean aircraft. \$7500.

MARQUART CHARGER, 140 TT, 15 SMOH, 160 HP Lycoming.

PIETENPOL AIRCAMPER, NO FWF or cover, \$2760.

CORBIN BABY ACE, TT660 hours, TTAE, no damage, all logs.

and many more. \$25,000.

BREEZY, 1970, 720 channel, hangared.

LONG-EZE - 141, KX155 NavCom, beautiful in & out.

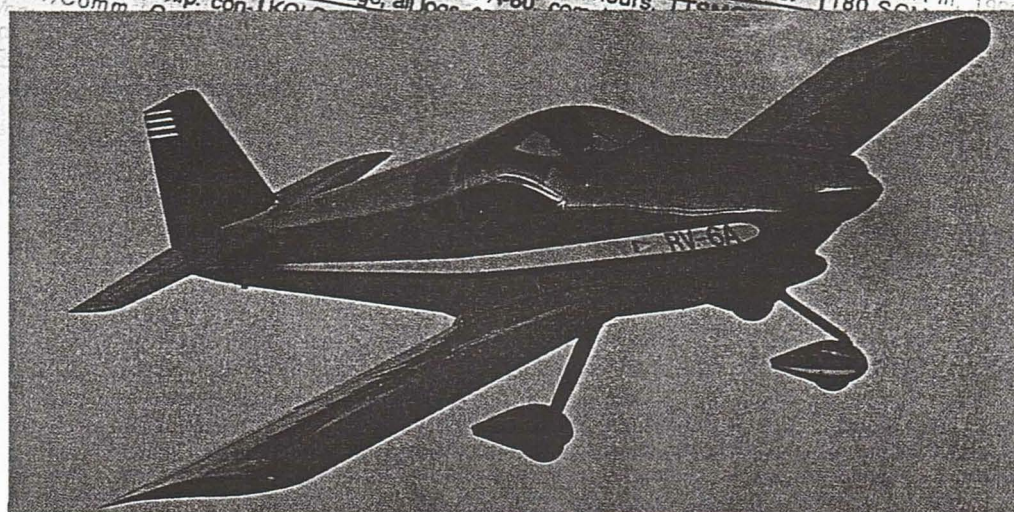
ACRODUSTER II, landing damage, Logs. Can't find any.

RV4, 160 HP, 85G, Loran, II-Morrow Com, with orange trim, Nav headsets, a beauty.

SIDEWINDER, O-321, full panel, many extras.

TEENIE TOO, 45 HRS, VFR panel, disc brakes, selling - I'm too big.

GLASAIR III, 180 SC.



*When walking the used-homebuilt tightrope, keep your eyes wide open.*

BY MARC E. COOK

**IF** life in general aviation is reflected in the yellow pages of *Trade-A-Plane*, as some pilots maintain, then homebuilt airplanes have truly come of age. No longer relegated to the back pages of the classifieds—almost an afterthought—experimentals now reside with the big boys, right in there between Ercoupe and Fairchild. And if the placement alone isn't particularly telling, then the nearly 240 listings in a recent issue for completed airplanes, partially finished projects, and parts ought to tell you that homebuilts are no longer the lunatic fringe. ■ Poring over those advertisements can be thought provoking, too. Listed in a recent *TAP* were airplanes ranging from "professionally built" Glasair IIIs to Fly Babys and virtually everything in between. If a kit or set of plans has seen any kind of popularity in the past five or 10 years, it's a good bet you'll find one for sale. ■ Some of the ads might tempt the fence-sitter into the experimental-aircraft fold. As an acquaintance told me, "There's nothing wrong with these kit air-





planes that not having to build them wouldn't cure." For a price, it seems, you could have nearly all the advantages of a kit airplane—the beauty, the speed, and the individuality—without having to construct it.

Were it only that simple. Buying a completed or partially finished kit- or plans-built airplane has been described as walking a half-inch rope across a half-mile-wide Dante-esque fire pit of doom. Make it to the other side, and you'll be richly rewarded, but wear your asbestos jammies just in case. Let's not understate the issue by making light of it: Many of the homebuilts for sale today are real beauties, meticulously crafted and certainly safe. But there are also a few that are poorly built and untested, and there's the whole in-between—airplanes that could have bank-vault-tight fuselages and mare's nests for systems. They could become the incautious buyer's worst nightmare.

Before you buy an experimental airplane, you need to know who built it and why. Much ado has been made of the "hired gun" builders. There are several levels of aid available to kit-airplane builders—from the fellow who runs a "builder's assistance" shop where several of the same model go together with owners doing most or all of the work, to small-scale manufacturers who produce turnkey airplanes. In the latter case, the owner's involvement is strictly financial.

Professionally built experimental airplanes, though usually works of aeronautical art, run contrary to the spirit and intent of the rules. The Federal Aviation Administration has set aside the Experimental—Amateur-built certification method for "education and recreation" purposes. The FAA expects the builder to complete the "majority" of the work, widely construed as being 51 percent of the effort. Recent fast-build kits have stretched this definition, and many FAA regional offices con-

## *The FAA expects the builder to complete the "majority" of the work.*

sider the 51-percent rule by task rather than by total time. That is, if you construct one wing rib, the "education" part of the rule is fulfilled as though you had built all 30 ribs. Consider, too, that in many sophisticated homebuilts, finishing the airframe is often less than half the work; installing and troubleshooting the systems consumes the rest.

If you are contemplating buying an airplane built by one of the pros, be sure you understand the category in which it's certified. If you really build one yourself, you get an airplane in the Experimental—Amateur-built category. Some FAA offices look the other way at these pro builders and issue the amateur-built certificate even if the real owner did little more than write the checks.

Other FAA offices, however, require that the airplane be registered as Experimental—Exhibition. Usually, such a designation carries serious limitations on the use of the airplane. It can be flown at air shows where it will be exhibited, for example, and for flight testing, for purposes of transporting it to and from exhibit locations, and for pilot proficiency. This last category is where most pilots expect to regain the utility inherent in the amateur-built certificate, but don't believe that an Exhibition-registered air-

plane can be used just like one with a Standard-category or Experimental—Amateur-built airworthiness certificate. This is still a small segment—compared to the more than 14,000 aircraft having Experimental—Amateur-built certificates, only 2,700 are on record with Exhibition tickets, and most of those are warbirds or restored antiques.

Regardless of the fine print on the airworthiness certificate, you as the new owner will not have the same authority in maintaining the airplane as did the original builder, who can apply for a limited Repairman's certificate. This allows him to perform all maintenance and sign off annual or condition inspections. Not being the builder, you are required to have a mechanic with an Airframe and Powerplant certificate do the work, just as with production airplanes. You can still take on the usual roster of owner-performed maintenance tasks, but the inspections and any modifications must be made by someone approved for the task. And finding an A&P familiar enough with homebuilts can be a daunting task; many don't want their signatures anywhere near a kit-built's logbooks.

Cautions apply to buying into partially completed kits. Check with your local FAA office, so you can get an official determination of how much of the airplane has been finished and how much you will get credit for. You want to be listed as the sole builder, and that means completing 51 percent of the work. Be sure, too, that the individual who started the project kept good records of the process because the FAA will want to see documentation for all the work performed on the kit. Also, try to divine the builder's reasons for selling. Some just don't have the time or money to complete a long-term project, while others get frustrated with the seemingly snail's pace of building. Those in the latter camp might have tried to cut corners to



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