

Veteran aviator crosses the country in a futuristic aircraft called a Cozy

By Jack Elliott

We were flying into Sussex Airport a couple of weeks ago when the pilot of the aircraft in the pattern ahead of us called in and identified himself as a Cozy.

A Cozy? What's that? The name was familiar, but we couldn't recall exactly what kind of craft it was. When we touched down, we saw that it resembled the futuristic-looking VariEze or Long-EZ, creations of Burt Rutan, the avant garde of aircraft designers.

WINGS OVER JERSEY

The propeller is in the back. On the front of the fuselage is a canard, a kind of small wing that looks like the horizontal stabilizer you normally find in the back. The wings are swept back and have vertical winglets extending up from the wingtips.

We had to find out more about the plane and the man who was flying it. We accosted the pilot after he debarked and asked about his airplane. We knew it was a homebuilt. But, while we had seen similar-looking craft many times, we had never seen a Cozy before.

The pilot, who looked as if he had been around for a few years, acknowledged that it was a homebuilt. "But I didn't build it," he was quick to add.

"Where are you based?" we asked. "Right here," he replied. He identified himself as William Rhoat of Branchville, about 10 minutes from Sussex Airport.

His wife, Margaret, was still sitting in the back seat. His son, William Jr., a doctoral candidate at the California Professional School of Psychology in Fresno, who also had been aboard, was preparing to help his dad push the plane into a parking spot.

It was about noon and they had flown in from Danville, Ky., in 3½ hours, William Sr. told us. We wanted to learn more, so we sought the shelter of the building that looks like a tower but actually houses the airport's office.

William Sr., we learned, had been an American Airlines pilot for 30 years. He retired as a DC-10 captain in 1984. He has owned a 1946 Navion,



PHOTO BY JACK ELLIOTT

William and Margaret Rhoat of Branchville after landing their Cozy at Sussex Airport after a two-stop flight from Fresno, Calif.

based at Sussex Airport, for 18 years. He first learned about the Cozy from an article in *Sport Aviation*, the magazine published by the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA).

Rhoat's Navion, which he has flown all over the country, cruises at about 120 mph. The Cozy cruises at 200. That speed held a lot of appeal. The plane was adapted from Rutan's Long-EZ by Nat Puffer of Mesa, Ariz., a former Navy carrier pilot.

Puffer, who checked out on a carrier in 1945 when he was 19, built a VariEze between 1976 and 1978. And got to know Burt Rutan. Puffer suggested a side-by-side version of the tandem Long-EZ.

Rutan didn't have time to work on it, but Puffer, who has a degree in mechanical engineering and had minored in aeronautical engineering, took up the task with Rutan's help.

The big difference between the Long-EZ and the Cozy is that the Long-EZ is a two-place plane and the original Cozy was a three-place. A newer version is a four-place. The Cozy wing is the same as the Long-EZ wing.

Rhoat's airplane is the Mark IV, the newer version of the Cozy. Puffer sells the plans under exclusive license from Rutan. He has sold 750 sets of plans. There are 250 Cozys flying, 35 of them the four-place model.

Building a Cozy averages about 2,500 hours. The first Cozy built is in the EAA museum in Oshkosh, Wis.

Rhoat's Mark IV holds 48 gallons of fuel, which gives it a range of five hours or about 1,000 miles. It is equipped with a Loran C. navigation system, and Rhoat also has a handheld Lowrance GPS (global positioning system).

Plans for the plane, which is built of composite material, cost \$500. Parts, which are obtained from aircraft suppliers, cost between \$35,000 and \$40,000, plus \$8,000 to \$10,000 for a rebuilt 180-hp engine.

Rhoat estimates the value of the avionics in his plane at between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

"I started building a Cozy two years ago," Rhoat said, "but I didn't think I would ever finish it. I did finish the wings.

"I saw an ad for one in the Cozy Builders Newsletter. It was in Myrtle Creek, Ore. We went to California to visit my son and then we went on up to Oregon to look at it. A fellow named Larry Sligen built it. It took him four years. He and his wife, Susan, both flew it.

"I bought it, checked out in it in two hours, and we flew it back to Fresno, where my son joined us for the flight back to New Jersey."

Rhoat learned to fly in the Army Air Corps in World War II and served in the ferry command. He ferried three A-26 Invader attack bombers to England and a B-25 Mitchell bomber to India before being stationed in Egypt flying cargo and mail in C-47s.