

THE FLYING IS GREAT

Building An Aircraft - Why Not?

As unshy as I have been in talking about Long EZs, suppliers, modifications and personalities, I have never really printed my thoughts about this Long EZ world. I have finally "finished" my aircraft and I would like to throw in my two cents. I think I have probably talked at length to 80 people about building an aircraft. My experience is not unique, although I have probably put more time in "verbalizing" than mixing epoxy and sanding. I find that I have come to trust a number of people on building subjects and count them as friends. I first acknowledge Dave Ronneberg, Dick Kreidel and Mike Melville, because of their listening when my thick-headed questions required multiple attempts at clearing up. The only thing they seem to have in common is that they all believe the provision of good information is more important than worrying about legalities. It really takes a lawyer to realize how generous that is. As for the rest of you, I am often reminded of Clayton Kau's first statement on the subject, to wit: "You meet a weird bunch of dudes building these airplanes."

The Project:

I must say that the idea of building your own airplane is akin to being slightly insane. I was warned that the Rutan plans were wrong when they said it took below 1000 hours if you bought many pre-fab parts. I have since learned that most plans estimates are wrong, and I am consoled by the equal truth that kits really are not built much quicker than scratch built aircraft. Had I to do it over again, I wouldn't "start". What I would do with the Long EZ, however, is find a partial plane at the best price and finish it. I advise people of this approach at every opportunity and I even keep a list of the people who have told me that they are running out of steam and thinking of selling, so that I can help the "new people" crazy enough to start.

The Builder Most Likely to Succeed:

I often wonder what makes a good airplane builder and I have to say that I am not the one to judge "good", but as for those who have finished, I must say the characteristics I see in common:

1. Past building experience, hopefully on aircraft, is the best guarantee of success.
2. Past flying experience gives understanding and realism. People who have only just started flying tend to give up building after only a few months and worse, give up on aviation. If you aren't already a pilot, the likelihood that you can hold your spirits together, and afford a Long EZ, in both time and money, is much slimmer.
3. Perfectionists beat themselves up with a project which is so much art, so much speed and so much work. Some remake so many parts, I wish I had kept all their beautiful rejects for another builder to sprint into the air.
4. There is a real need to network on skills and information. The few loners who finish do not usually make a good aircraft and sometimes make a dangerous one. This is not the project to build secretly. So get some advice, fix whatever a more experienced builder suggests, ask for inspections often.
5. Look at the project realistically. Where can you find 2500 hours and \$20,000 to \$35,000 to complete this airplane. There are ways to skimp, (and buying a wrecked tomahawk or Cessna 152 is the best). But look at the effect of the 2500 hours. If you have a woman who is not self motivated and can keep busy every weekend, who is not now helping you sand bondo on your pickup, or who is planning a new child or complains about finances more than once a week, you will lose your woman. For a while, the famous "Hole-in-the-Wall Gang" at Santa Monica jokingly referred to itself as the "Divorced Long EZ Builders' Club". 4 out of 5 had given up a woman at the time, some quite inadvertently. If you are in the young family era, the plane you may need is a three or four seater. If your wife isn't already used to flying, take her on three weekend trips to unlikely places before you build. There is nothing like an unhappy back seater to cool your use of a plane.
6. If you have never maintained an aircraft or a British sports car yourself, you don't really know how much

constant maintenance is going to cost or time you will lose. Because of unexpected maintenance, you cannot keep exact appointment schedules with your plane (the weather makes commuting a sometime thing too) and you may get stuck out in a small town at the wrong moment. Lawyers and Doctors beware!

7. It may be a life long dream to build your own plane. If you are in the retirement generation, face the possibility that you may be building during the years you could fly and may get medically grounded at any point before you have accomplished your dream.

8. Do not get into partnerships without drafting out and signing these points in full:

- a. Who will pay, who will work and where will you build after the present location.
- b. If anyone doesn't match the agreement, how do you decide and how do you buy him/her out.
- c. Who will do the first flight?
- d. Can you afford to lose a good friend?

9. If you are going to build the thing, "no matter what", by all means get on with it as quickly as possible. Don't finish the roadster so you will be able to build out the garage to build an aircraft. Forget it.

10. Please help other builders but watch out for the earnest guy who comes back over and over for starting advice. The builders who carefully read the plans for six months and collect advice for six more will most probably never finish. They are the equivalent of the real estate "looky loos". Realize as early as possible that these types are also a real drag on the real builders. Determine when the guy bought his plans. If his plans purchase date predates yours, chances are that he is so persistently careful that he will never finish, wasting your donated time along with his own. The best way to handle the persistently careful who has not yet really started is to politely tell him to come see you with his next part. The same type also has a way of buying all the toys (radios, engines etc) first. The surest way to recognize the guy is when he walks in with a beautifully drawn instrument panel and has no epoxy under his finger nails.

Sounds pretty gloomy? I wish I had been warned---I might have been flying tight formation in a sunset sky in my own bird six months earlier if I had followed my present advice. I can't get those months back now. And only when you fly these things do you realize what you have been missing. You become jealous of your own time in the air.