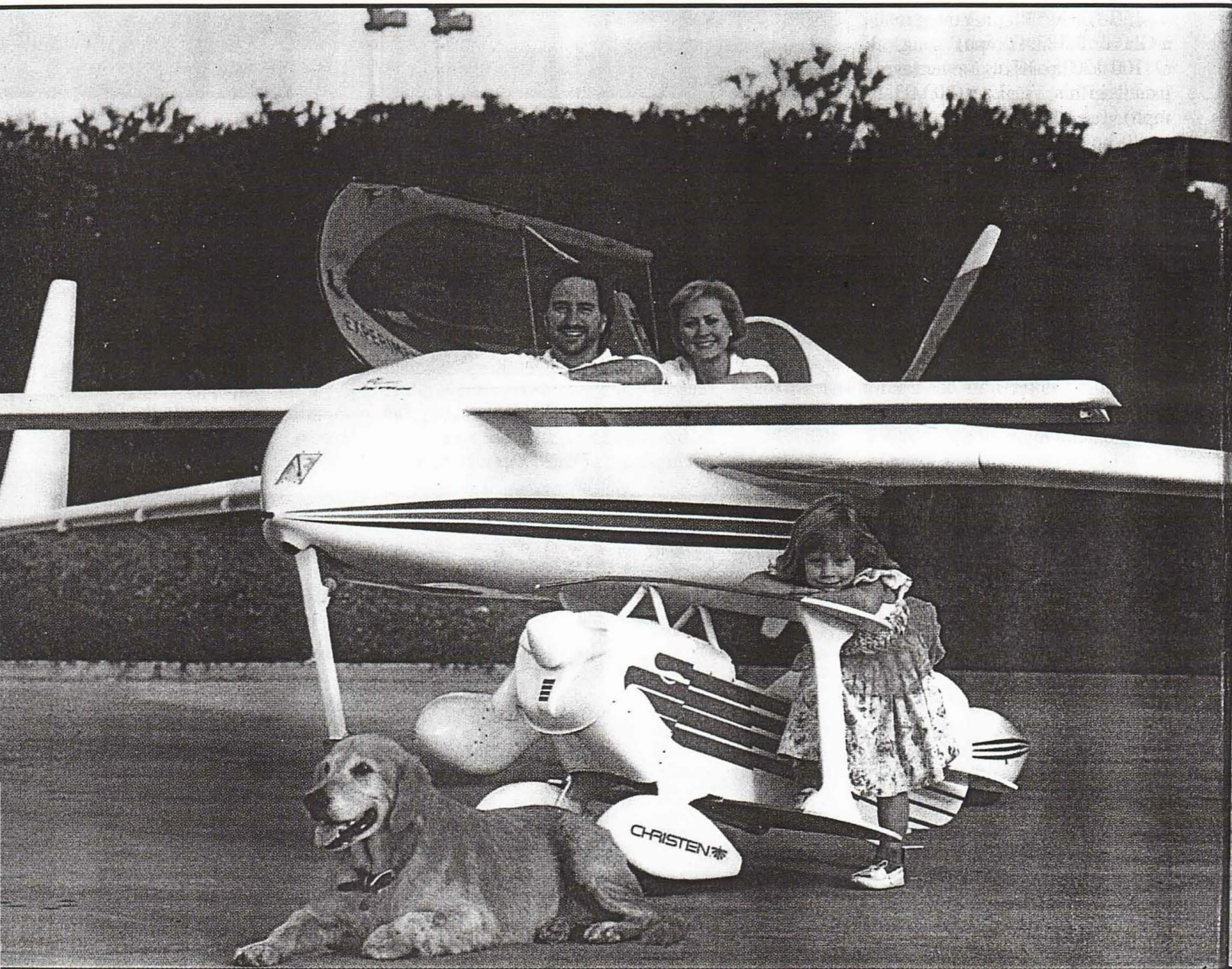


Commuting the Eze

Five years of overflying L.A. gridlock in a homebuilt.



By Bob Gray

Cary, Nancy and Canon Thomas show off their wings. But where does Boomer sit?

What starts the morning commute on four wheels, soon converts to three wheels, and finally arrives at the office on two wheels?

The answer is not a *what* but a *who*: Cary Thomas commutes 100 miles from his seaside home in Carlsbad, California, (just north of San Diego) to Marina del Rey, north of Los Angeles International Airport (LAX).

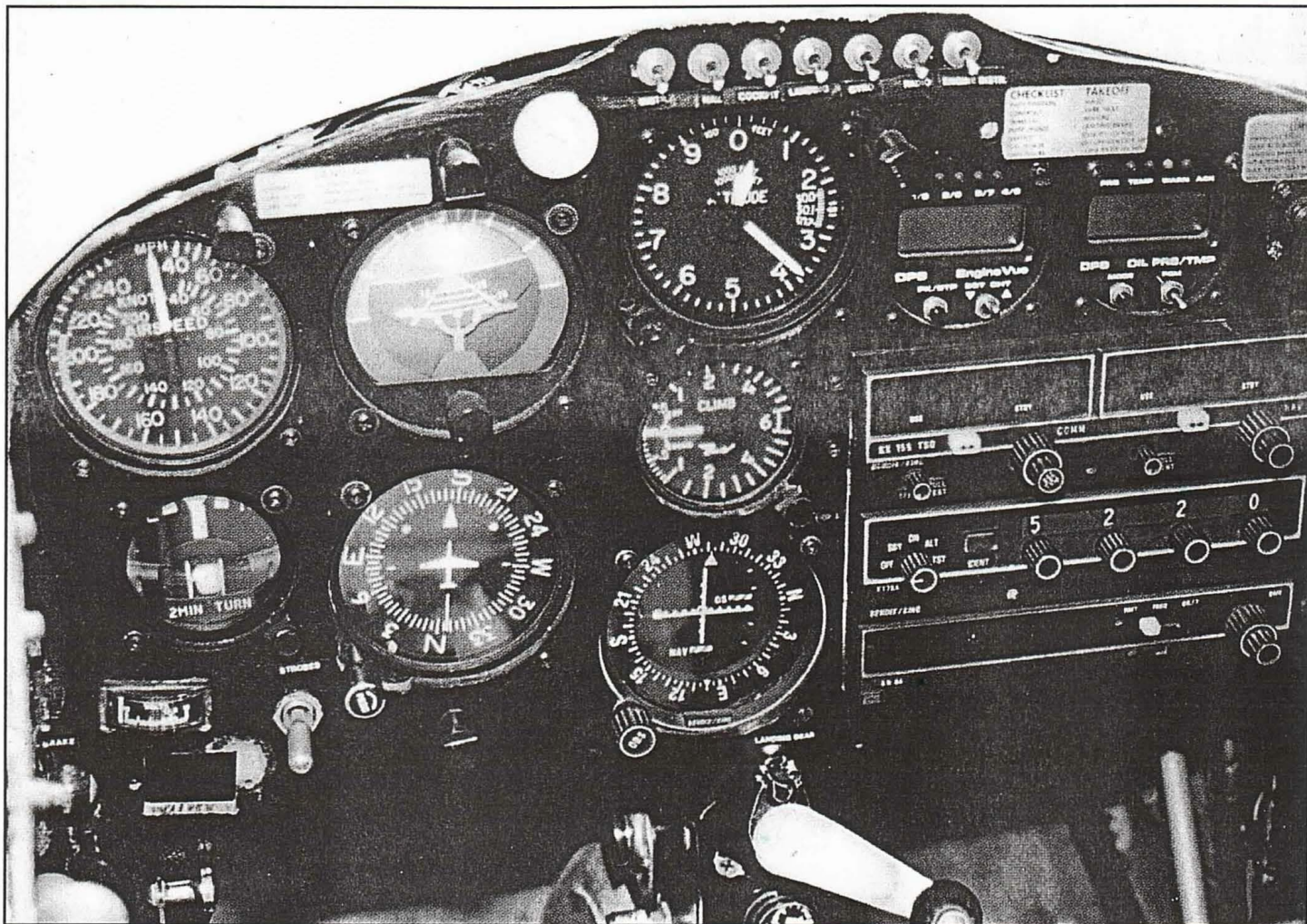
Thomas drives his car the short distance from his home to Palomar Airport, jumps in his VariEze, and flies northwest along the coast and through the VFR corridor over LAX, lands at the Santa Monica Airport, and bicycles the last 3 miles to work. He is administrative director of the Information Sciences Institute, a computer research lab that is part of the University of Southern California.

PHOTOS: STEPHANIE SANGUINETTI AND BOB GRAY

Cross-Country Cruising Way



Thomas says he looks and feels like this after each commuting trip in his VariEze.



Commuting

continued

A seven-button control stick adds convenience. Although equipped and often filed for IFR, the Eze is left at home in marginal weather.

The family commuter was built by Bruce Evans, who fabricated much of the around-the-world *Voyager*.

Not New at It

He has been performing this routine on about half of his work days for the past five years—except for a year and a half when the VariEze underwent a complete repaint and the installation of an updated instrument panel. Most of the other half of his work days, he needs a car to leave the center for meetings or the weather is unsuitable for flying. By car the commute takes at least 2 hours and 15 minutes and up to 3.5 hours depending heavily on the time of day and traffic conditions, including the number of freeway collisions. By homebuilt the trip takes 38 minutes VFR and 10 minutes longer when filed IFR.

Thomas has failed to complete the round trip due to weather on only two occasions. Fuel for the plane averages 4.5 gallons; the car takes more gas. He flies the same route and uses all the same nav aids for VFR and IFR.

What It's Like

The typical commute starts with a briefing from FSS via the 800/WX-BRIEF telephone connection. He never flies in SIGMETs. If ceilings are below his personal minimums, he drives. His VariEze will hold enough fuel for two round trips with reserves, and he always leaves in the morning with full fuel. This ensures that he can get home or to an alternate if the weather turns bad. The plane is always preflighted exactly the same way to avoid missing something. He says that propping the O-200 (which lacks a starter) is perhaps the most exciting part of the trip. The VariEze has all King radios, including a KX155 navcom with VOR/GS and coupled to a King DME. They have been trouble free. Thomas uses a seven-button control stick so the radio flip-flop is done by just pressing his thumb. The six primary instruments are in the standard configuration for the traditional IFR scan pattern. Many weekends and plenty of planning were

EXPERIMENTAL		AB 22-1	
AMATEUR BUILT AIRCRAFT			
MODEL	VARI EZE - EVANS		
SERIAL NO.	01	EMPTY WT.	697 LB
DATE OF MFG.	8-79	GROSS WT.	
ENGINE	O-200 CONT	H.P.	100
BUILT BY			
NAME	BRUCE M. EVANS		
ADDRESS	P.O. BOX 544		
CITY AND STATE	LA JOLLA, CA. 92038		

needed to pack that much gear into the narrow Eze panel.

Reliability Is the Key

The VariEze has proven itself to be a safe and reliable platform. It was built by Bruce Evans who, with pilots Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager, built the round-the-world-unrefueled *Voyager*. When people question the wisdom of commuting in an Experimental airplane, Thomas tells them, "Hey, the guy who built my plane built the *Voyager*!" After hundreds of flights he has yet to experience an airframe problem. His only mechanical problems have been a propeller hit by runway debris and a cracked exhaust pipe, both easily repaired.

When Thomas first considered commuting by airplane, he only looked at factory-built models. But the smallest ones were too slow, the fuel costs were too high in the faster ones, and the retractables were too expensive. He was discouraged until Dave Ronneberg, developer of the Berkut, recommended that he consider a VariEze. The numbers worked out better than predicted.

"The Eze gets better mileage than my car, I can do the routine maintenance myself, and the nose-retract parking allows sharing a hangar with another Eze."

Only a pilot can fully appreciate the enjoyment of this kind of commuting. "Most days the flights to and from work are great," Thomas says. "I've seen rainbows over Catalina Island, watched the seasonal wild fires of Southern California light up the night sky, and been awed by spectacular sunsets over the Pacific. Flying over the traffic jams on the freeways really makes my day."

Thomas gives much credit to the San Diego EZ Squadron (established in 1976); some really helpful FAA controllers; his hangar mate Dave Kilbourne, whose Eze has more than 2500 hours on it; and his wife, Nancy, for their support.

The icing on the cake is how the commute affects Thomas's psyche. "When I drive the car, I arrive pretty wasted," he says. "My employees can tell by the smile on my face when I have arrived by VariEze."

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Bob Gray is a professor retired from San Diego State University. A founding member of the San Diego EZ Squadron, he flies a VariEze that he spent 11 years building.