

Oh No, Burt's Hit The Big 5-0!

By Frank B. Mormillo

Guess who has turned the big five-oh?

Does the word "canard" mean anything to you?

Yep, it was (as of now) the grand old man of the kitbuilt world, Burt L. Rutan. His crew at Mojave Airport's Scaled Composites hosted a gala 50th birthday party for the company's founder and we were invited.

Known primarily for his very innovative aircraft designs, most of which employ composite construction, Rutan has developed 35 major projects since 1972. Included in that number are such unusual and generally efficient aircraft as the VariViggen, Vari-Eze, Quickie, Defiant, Long-EZ, Grizzly and the globe-circling Voyager.

Though many of Rutan's designs have won wide acceptance with kitplane builders (sales of homebuilt aircraft plans were discontinued in July 1985, but he still provides builder support for over 3,000 homebuilder customers), some of his most interesting projects have been for government agencies, industry and special clients.

Included in that category are subscale demonstrator aircraft for the Fairchild T-46 jet trainer project, the Beechcraft Starship program and the Advanced Technology Tactical Transport for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

The versatile designer and his company even built an unlimited

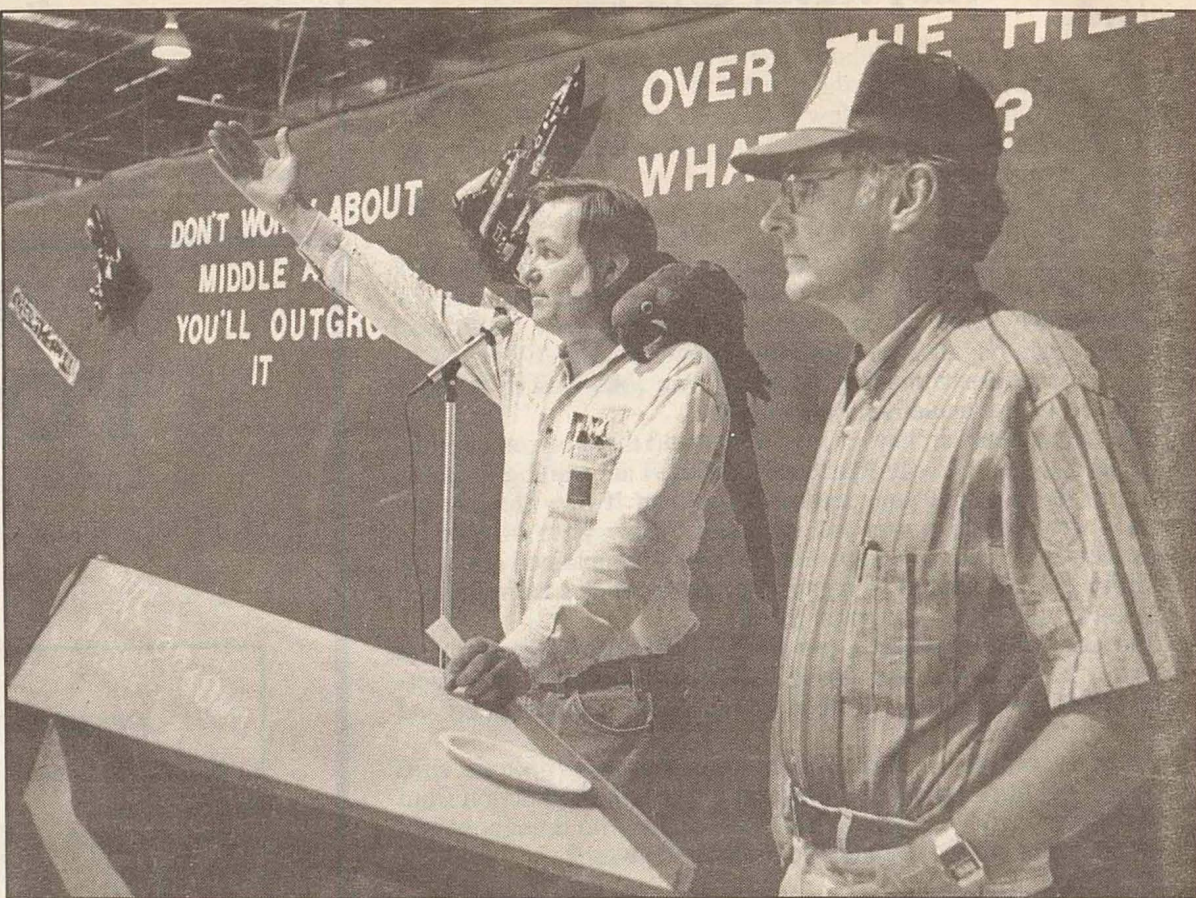
ed air racer for warbird enthusiast Bob Pond, the ARES light tactical jet as a private venture, a power-augmented ram landing craft for the U.S. Navy, graphite wing sails for use in the America's Cup sailboat competition, an ultralight show car for General Motors, a tilt-rotor demonstrator aircraft for Bell Helicopters and the DC-X 30 percent scale single stage rocket technology aeroshell for McDonnell Douglas.

Rutan's party attracted more than 500 guests to the Scaled Composites shop and the ramp was crowded with 101 fly-in aircraft, the majority of which were Rutan-designed composites.

After most of the guests had filled up on a very impressive potluck buffet (with soft drinks provided by Mojave Airport Manager Dan Sabovich), Burt and his brother Dick (pilot of the Voyager) talked to the crowd about the accomplishments of Scaled Composites, Inc., gave some hints about a few future projects and fielded some questions.

Burt also announced that, after having worked in the Antelope Valley since 1965 and at the Mojave Airport since 1974, he and his company will move out of California within two years.

"We are not moving because of the Mojave Airport," he said. "We are leaving because we have seen a substantial degradation in the business climate in California and I don't



BURT RUTAN acknowledging guests at his 50th birthday part at Mojave Airport. With him is his brother, Dick, pilot of the round-the-world Voyager, and a parrot named "Starship." Mormillo Photo

see that California is going to turn around and focus on business and jobs instead of hand-outs."

Although Rutan noted that, when he first considered moving about a year and a half ago, the advantages were offset by the expense of moving. However, he says that the business climate changed dramatically

Only one of the business hardships that he noted was the fact that, last year, Scaled Composites paid Kern County more fees for the ARES prototype than the cost of the aircraft's flight test program!

Since Scaled Composites was first incorporated at the Mojave Airport in April 1982 (Rutan has previously operated at the

Factory), its workforce has grown from 26 to 75 people and the shop has tripled in size, now encompassing a total of 66,000 square feet in three flightline buildings.

A final decision as to where the entire operation will relocate will be made within a month, Rutan said. He is considering friendly offers from