

On January 3 Beech Aircraft rolled out the first pre-production prototype of its Starship I, a futuristic machine that seems destined to change the way airplanes look and the way they are constructed. Although the Starship is a large, very expensive corporate aircraft, its development has been of more than passing interest to EAAers because it was conceived in the mind of Burt Rutan . . . and John Roncz, who was responsible for the airfoils. Just as he forever changed the direction of the homebuilt movement with his VariEze and its moldless composite construction, now Burt is having a similar influence on the world of commercially built aircraft.

Having sold his company, Scaled Composites, to Beech Aircraft and become a vice president and member of the board at Beech . . . in addition to retaining his position as president of Scaled Composites . . . obviously Burt is a busy person these days. He has not, however, severed his ties with EAA and the homebuilt movement. He plans to be at Oshkosh this summer, will help man his usual Rutan Aircraft Factory booth G-7 in the display building, will participate in the forums program and conduct his popular under-the-wing talk sessions just as in previous years.

"We'll be there to support RAF licensees (builders), look at all the airplanes and pick up ideas," he told SPORT AVIATION in mid-January. "We'll have some new sales items for the booth . . .

things like Defiant engine installation plans, 'rain canard' plans and maybe a video tape that combines some of the best footage from our previous RAF tapes."

Burt, of course, wrote the book on dramatic entrances at Oshkosh during the 1970s and early '80s . . . and those days may not yet be over.

"I plan to fly the Defiant prototype to Oshkosh this summer. It is currently being equipped with 180 Lycomings and 3-blade Hoffmann constant speed props with feathering capability. Rodie Rodewald (of Hawaii) is also using these props on his Defiant. I'm thinking about a rear seat tank in the Defiant for long range."

But just possibly there may be a Rutan design on hand at Oshkosh '86 far more dramatic than a big engined Defiant. We could be seeing another mind blower to rank with the Ezees of the '70s and the Voyager of the 1980's. Before becoming a part of Beech management, Burt was designing a new airplane with which he intended to win the Oshkosh LBF 500 and the CAFE 400.

Designated the Model 81 in his sequentially numbered design sketchbook, the concept was quite a departure

A CONVERSATION WITH



BURT RUTAN

in airframe configuration for Burt in that it was a three surface airplane rather than the pure canards for which he had become famous the world over.

Since his affiliation with Beech, the firm has purchased the Model 81 design and has given the go-ahead to begin construction of a proof-of-concept prototype. At this time it is being described only as "a pressurized, three surface, retractable, single engine tractor with 3 plus 2 seating." Projected performance is tantalizingly limited to "275 mph at 25,000 feet and coast-to-coast range."

Burt provided SPORT AVIATION

with a few additional glimpses behind the veil.

"It will be powered by a turbocharged 210 hp Lycoming TIO-360-C1A6D which can still produce 159 hp at 25,000 feet. It's a 4 psi airframe and is all composite — a hybrid composite that places emphasis on low-cost manufacture. It will have the ultimate capability of beating Max Conrad's straight line distance records. (*That's 6,966.75 miles in a 180 Comanche and 7,668.48 miles in a 250 Comanche — Casablanca to Los Angeles! — Ed.*) I want to fly it non-stop from Mojave to Oshkosh and win the LBF."

The "3 plus 2" seating means five place and no baggage or three place and baggage.

Of course, if the Model 81 ever goes beyond the proof-of-concept stage, it will be as the first of a new line of certified Beech singles — not as a homebuilt. If, however, it is completed in time to fly to Oshkosh this summer, EAAers will have the opportunity to see possibly the first of the new generation of vastly more capable, more fuel efficient aircraft everyone recognizes must be created if the lightplane manufacturers are to ever break out of the current sales malaise.

Asked about the current status of Rutan Aircraft, Burt said its transition from a homebuilt plans seller to a support service for builders of the various RAF designs was complete. The buildings and equipment have been sold to Scaled Composites and are currently being used to take care of some of the overflow of work from the Scaled facilities next door. Mike and Sally Melvill continue to provide builder support.

Like most EAAers, we look on Burt Rutan's career change with mixed feelings. On one hand, we regret his departure from active participation in homebuilt design . . . we've all grown accustomed to expecting something new and exciting from Mojave every two or three years . . . yet, on the other, we are pleased with the success of one of our own, one who has been so closely identified with our sphere of endeavor for so long.

We take great pride in the fact that through the efforts of EAAers everywhere, we have been able to create and sustain an environment in which an individual can dream his dreams, see them transformed into reality and, in Burt's case, go on to benefit society on a much wider scale. We look forward to seeing him back at Oshkosh each year . . . and we look forward with great anticipation to the prototypes that will emerge from Scaled Composites in the years ahead . . . designs that will change the shape of tomorrow.

— Jack Cox