

Opportunity

How a visit to Oshkosh changed my life

THANK YOU, EAA, FOR the gift of flight and the opportunity to live my dream. You have enabled thousands of homebuilders like me to pursue our passion for flight. The experience I gained building and flying my own VariViggen and Long-EZ led me to the ultimate opportunity—flight testing SpaceShipOne. More importantly, I never would have become the first commercial astronaut. From the VariViggen to SpaceShipOne—dreams and a passion for flight can make anything possible!

My first taste of flight occurred at age 7 when my uncle took me up in his Tiger Moth. Like others before me, I built model aircraft, starting with free-flight gliders and then graduating to powered “U-Control” models. I was hooked for life!

My wife, Sally, and I immigrated to the United States in 1967; I worked as a machinist in Anderson, Indiana, and learned many of the skills necessary to complete my first homebuilt. When our small company needed a pilot, I volunteered and earned my private pilot certificate in 1969. Later I found it expensive to rent an airplane, so we looked into building one of our own.

In July 1970, Sally and I attended the EAA fly-in convention at Wittman Regional Airport (OSH). I was amazed at the selection of homebuilts and astonished to discover that anyone so inclined could build such aircraft, receive an amateur-built airworthiness certificate from the FAA, and ultimately fly that plane.

At EAA Oshkosh 1974 I purchased a set of VariViggen plans from a fellow named Burt Rutan. He was selling plans out of his plane on the flightline. When I was close to my first flight, Burt stopped by for a visit. Later he invited Sally and me to Mojave where I got checked

out, first in the rear seat and then in the front seat, of Burt's VariViggen. He demonstrated the entire envelope of his creation, including its quirks and shortcomings.

This was a huge benefit to me. On September 22, 1977, I made the first flight of my VariViggen and thus achieved my life-long dream. In May 1978, Sally and I flew our 'Viggen to Mojave. Shortly after we arrived, Burt flew it and announced that it indeed met his standards.

That day he asked if we would consider coming to work for him. This was all we talked about on the flight home and...well, the rest is history. Sally and I joined Burt at the Rutan Aircraft Factory (RAF) in his new facility on the Mojave airport. Dick Rutan retired from the U.S. Air Force and also joined RAF where he took me under his wing, teaching me all I know about air combat maneuvering, close formation flying, and aerobatics.

Burt saw promise in my abilities and began coaching me on the basics of test flying. Soon I was sharing test-flight duties with Dick. Sally and I moved to Scaled Composites full time in 1985 when RAF closed down. We both retired in October 2007, but soon I was recalled and have been helping out by flying the Proteus as well as the original WhiteKnight. Occasionally I fly chase on the new WhiteKnightTwo.

Over the past 31 years I have been privileged to make 10 first flights of Burt's original designs and have been involved in flight testing almost all of his remarkable designs.

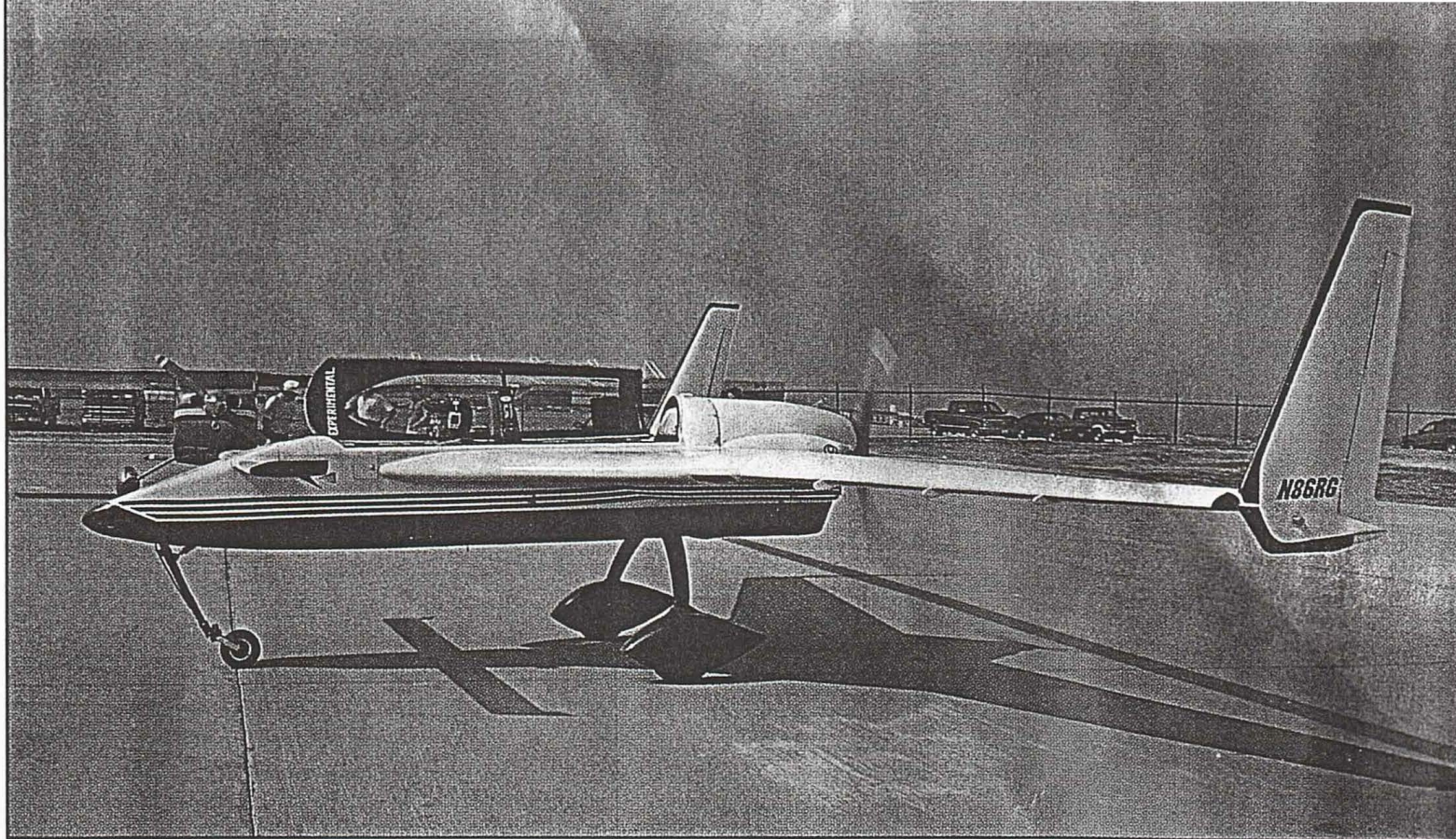
Thanks to EAA and the vision of its leadership, I was able to build and fly my own flying machines and to ascend into the wild blue, feeling the magic of flight. This privilege is precious, and through the constant vigilance of all EAA members, it must be preserved. Each of us must take the responsibility to continually improve the safety record of amateur-built aircraft, using the tools available to us through EAA and its members.

I encourage anyone interested in flying to visit EAA AirVenture Oshkosh. Who knows, you too may be able to experience the thrill and infinite satisfaction of building and flying your dream as I have. From there, the sky is the limit! **EAA**



Sally joined Mike in the SpaceShipOne cockpit after it landed safely following its second glide flight in August 2003.

Mike Melvill, EAA 53387, made history becoming the first commercial astronaut when he piloted SpaceShipOne on its first flight past the edge of space on June 21, 2004.



JACK COX PHOTOS

A LONG-EZ THAT GOES HM-M-M-M

Power by Mazda

BY DICK CAVIN

If you were one of the fortunate ones who attended Oshkosh '95 you probably noticed there were two full lines of auto engine powered homebuilts on display. If you saw the extra heat around the area, it was probably the result of imaginations being set afire again.

One of those who caused blood to pound in EAAers veins again was a Mazda 13B powered Long-EZ by a young Delta Airlines mechanic, Ron Gowan of Roanoke, TX.

It was a decade or so back when news of the NSU Wankel rotary reached the U.S. and excited EAAers with the prospect of a turbine-like en-

