



WALTER HAINES' **LONG-EZ**

One of the things **Sportsman Pilot** looks for as a potential subject for an article is the newly completed homebuilt. We didn't have to look far when we arrived on the flightline at last September's MERFI Fly-In at Marion, OH — a Long-EZ had just landed after making its first "official" flight! (There had been an earlier unplanned transit of the pattern as a result of a taxi test that got out of hand . . . sound familiar?)

Upon approaching the EZ, I found a debriefing session going on between owner-builder Walter Haines of Marion and his test pilot, Steve Oborn. Waiting until they finished, I then said howdy to Walter and proceeded to interview him for this article.

First, both he and Oborn were extremely pleased with how the newly minted EZ was performing. No major squawks had manifested themselves in the first hour and ten minutes of test flying and they expected to zip right on through the FAA imposed test period without a hitch.

The builder/owner, then, had yet to even ride in his airplane . . . but I found his story to be interesting, nevertheless. Walter began by saying he could have had the Long-EZ in the air at least a month earlier — and thus could have been checked out and flying it himself — had he not taken off earlier in the

summer for a month long, 9,500 mile drive through the Western U.S. with his wife. It was a vacation trip, but had as its main purpose a stopover in Seattle to attend the 50th Anniversary of the B-17. Boeing had invited everyone who had flown, crewed or worked on the now legendary Flying Fortress to attend — and that was one party Walter wasn't going to miss!

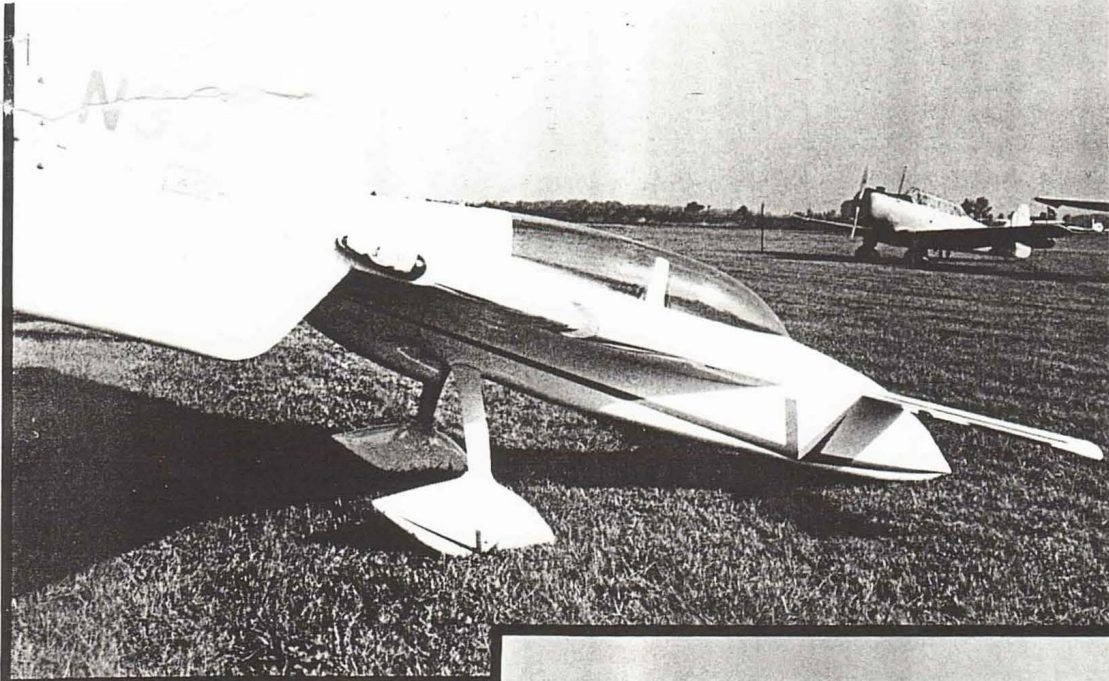
Although he has been around aviation literally all his life, Walter says he has had just two love affairs with airplanes. The first was with the B-17 and the second was with the VariEze Long-EZ. The first was the wild infatuation of youth . . . and the second was the wild infatuation of a still youthful spirit. Both burn brightly today.

Walter is one of ten children of Harley Haines, one of the earliest licensed aircraft and engine mechanics in the U.S. Now 84, Harley began helping airplane "mechanicians", as they were called then, in 1910 when he was just 9 years old and has never been far from a flying machine since. He moved his family to Marion, OH when Walter was 6 and established an auto body shop there. He worked on airplanes, also, but there were so few of them in those days that they constituted a sideline rather than his principal occupation. He would work all week

in the body shop, then drive around to area airports on weekends to minister to the needs of ailing OX-5s and bent up Jennies and Standards. Some of Walter's fondest memories of his youth are of those weekend jaunts with his father.

The senior Haines was into a little of everything that involved motors (everybody called 'em "motors" in the 20s and 30s — no fine distinction between electric "motors" and fuel burning "engines" had yet come into vogue), and that included race cars. He built dirt track sprint cars and "wrenched" for their owners at mid-west race tracks throughout the 30s, late 40s and 50s. Walter worked for his father for much of his early life, so, of course, was right in the thick of everything. Consequently, he grew up not even realizing there were people in the world who did **not** have an interest in airplanes and cars.

One of Harley Haines particular claims to fame was . . . and is . . . his extraordinary ability to hand form aluminum and other metals. He is one of those now fast disappearing craftsmen of the old school in whose gifted hands a sheet of soft aluminum is like clay in the hands of a master sculptor. With tools no more sophisticated than an assortment of mallets and shot bags, he can create, as if by some magical process, sensuous nose



bowls, cowl bumps, fillets and fairing . . . and in days past, those classic, curvaceous race car body shells that are admired and coveted by collectors to this day. This artistic gift would one day be the switch that would shift Walter's career onto a completely new track.

Walter had one quick flying fling in 1940. He began lessons in a Cub — but before his meager finances would permit him to obtain a pilot's license, World War II began and he found himself drafted into Uncle Sam's Army.

The first Boeing B-17 flew on July 28, 1935 and immediately became one of the sensations of the airplane crazed 30s. Like everyone else in the late 30s, young Walter was constantly bombarded with news of America's mighty aerial dreadnought — in newspapers, the newsreels at the local movie houses and, of course, in all the aviation magazines of the day. In his case, it was like a snoot full of nectar to a bee — he instantly loved this "fortress of the sky" and dreamed of one day flying in one. Little did he realize that some really bad eggs in Germany and Japan were even then concocting plans to make his fondest hopes come true.

Once in service, Walter immediately began requesting a transfer to the Air Corps — to fly in a B-17, he kept telling 'em. The Army, however, wanted to make him a bulldozer operator and it took considerable effort and persistence for him to avoid that fate. Finally, he found a sympathetic soul among the pencil pushers and got the orders he sought. Walter still chuckles when he tells about his first duty station.

"I went to basic training in Miami — lived the hard life for six weeks down there on the beach!"

From the surf and sand he was transferred to Gulfport, MS for engine mechanic school, after which he and 17 others . . . the "chosen few" Walter likes to recall . . . were sent to the Boeing plant in Seattle for 2 months of intensive training on his dreamplane, the B-17. Sure, a war was going on, but here was one fellow in the midst of it all who was in hog heaven!

His technical training over, Walter was then shipped off to Las Vegas to catch up



on the military side of things — to gunnery school. Later, after a few days back home for Thanksgiving, Walter traveled to Salt Lake City to finally have his ambition realized — assignment to a B-17 as a gunner/flight engineer. A stint in Ardmore, OK for phase training and a stopover in Kearney, NE were all that remained before his crew departed for the British Isles and the real war.

Assigned to the 8th Air Force's 379th Bomb Group based at Kimbolton, Walter flew on his first combat mission on D-Day and completed his tour that August 6. The 379th was the most successful of all the 8th Air Force heavy bomber groups, dropping more tonnage and flying more missions than any other . . . and Walter is extremely proud to have been a part of it all.

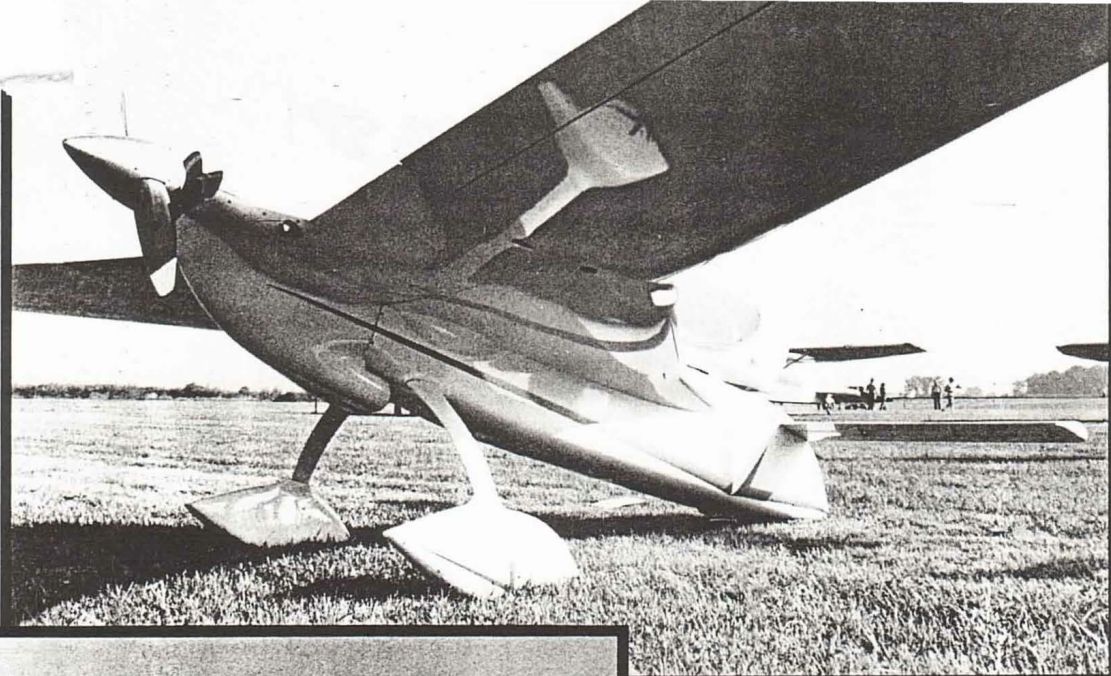
When the war ended the following year, Walter left his beloved B-17 behind forever and returned home to Marion. He took up right where he had left off in the family body shop, got married and began raising a family . . . like all those other GIs who had marched home from the war to a world that would never be the same as it was before they left. The old Marion airport, for instance, had been a 100 acre field west of town in the 30s, but like so many others, it eventually became a victim of progress, giving way to a new airport east of town where bombs had been made during the war years — bombs

that perhaps Walter's B-17 had dropped on Germany. Not that it mattered a lot, this losing of the airport that had been so much a part of his childhood; with a growing family, he couldn't afford to fly anyway. When he walked away from his B-17, he walked away from aviation . . . for the next 25 years.

Eventually, Walter would establish his own business, Haines Manufacturing Company. A firm that specializes in secondary work (welding, drilling, countersinking, etc.) on metal parts and components for the auto, office machine and other industries, it got its start when a stamping company having trouble forming aluminum sought out his father, Harley, for assistance. After the problem was solved, the Haines were awarded a contract to paint the parts father Harley had helped fabricate and the business that was formed to do that ultimately evolved into Haines Manufacturing, which Walter owns today.

In 1974 when OPEC panicked the world with its phony oil crisis, Walter's life took a sudden turn in a new but not altogether unfamiliar direction. Always in a hurry, he was accustomed to blasting around in his car at the then legal speed limit of 70 mph . . . and was infuriated when the infamous "double nickel" speed limit was imposed.

That did it for me," he recalls. "I had to have an airplane!"



His mind made up, and at last in a financial position to take up flying again, Walter drove out to the Marion airport for the first time in 20 years and engaged Steve Oborn to teach him to fly. He was 50 years old when he slid into the left seat once again.

Shortly after he began flying, Walter bought a Cessna 172 . . . and thought he would keep it for the rest of his days. 30 days later, however, he had traded it for a Piper Seneca, which he **has** owned ever since.

Using the Seneca for business travel scratched his flying itch for a time, but then one day Walter picked up a copy of Sport Aviation and saw the VariEze for the first time. As it had been in 1935 when he had seen his first picture of a B-17, it was love at first glance!

"It just fascinated me — it was the darndest thing I'd ever seen. I love speed and that thing looked like it was going a thousand miles per hour just sitting on the ground."

For the next few years, Walter followed the VariEze closely. A builder in Marion started one but moved away before it was completed and flown. That project served the purpose, nevertheless, of providing Walter with the opportunity to see first hand how the new foam and glass work was done, so that when the Long-EZ was introduced, he knew what he had to do. He was going to

have one of those little starfighters!

The first step was to find an engine. Heeding the oft stated advice of Burt Rutan, he looked for a "high time" Lycoming O-235 to power his project. Burt, along with many others, including Dick Wagner of Wag-Aero, maintains that Lycomings with 1500 or so hours are just hitting their strides and (assuming they haven't been abused) can provide the average homebuilder who flies only 50 or 60 hours a year nearly a decade of good, reliable service. Best of all, their value is near its lowest level at this stage, so such engines are tremendous values. Eventually, Walter was able to locate just such a bargain, a 1500 hour O-235 L2C from a Cessna 152, at McElroy Aircraft Salvage in Shelbyville, IL. He promptly bought it and hauled it home in his Seneca.

"With that much money already invested, I **had** to build the airplane," Walter rationalizes . . . with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

The first package of raw materials arrived from Wicks Aircraft in February of 1983 and work began almost immediately. From the beginning, the Long-EZ was a weekend project — with summers off for golf and vacations. It was also something of a family project. Several of Walter's brothers, particularly the youngest, Raymond, helped quite a bit, and his son, Jeff, built the radio from a

RST kit.

"I did the major part of the work," Walter told me, "but there were a number of very nice people who made it possible, including the two gentlemen from the FAA who came down from the Cleveland office to inspect it. They were absolutely super. I can't say enough nice things about them."

The Long-EZ was built strictly to the Rutan building instructions, according to Walter, the only deviations being the installation of landing lights in the wing strakes and an additional breather in the cowl.

"If the book had said to build it upside down and that it would fly crossways, I would have done it that way!"

He thought the building instructions were "excellent", which is pretty high praise when you learn that Walter's standards of comparison are blueprints he sees every day in his business from some of the world's largest corporations.

When the airframe was completed and all the sanding and filling and still more sanding had been done, it was finished in Ditzler paints. The base color is Antique White, which is a Corvette paint, and the trim is a green that has no other distinction than the fact that it appealed to Walter. The N number and the shape of the trim on the side of the fuselage have special significance to the Haines family. Look closely at the fuselage stripe and you will see that it is a stylized "V" that blends into an "L", Walter's and his wife's middle initials, respectively. The N number is 35VL, the 3 representing the couple's three children and the 5 their five grandchildren.

The Long-EZ is purely and simply a toy for Walter Haines. He has worked hard for a lot of years, has raised a family and is wise enough today to be taking time to smell the roses on occasion. The trip back to Boeing and a trip to England a short time ago to show his wife what remains today of Station 117 at Kimbolton are celebrations of his youth . . . of survival in a perilous time . . . of his beloved B-17. His Long-EZ is today's indulgence . . . and is one he richly deserves.

