

THE HOMEBUILDER'S

Corner

by PAUL H. POBERZNY



EAA AND THE amateur built movement are moving into their 21st year of successful and safe operation. True, we had homebuilts prior to this time but not in the quantities that are coming out of garages, workshops, attics and hangars as we have today. With some 4,000 amateur built aircraft completed and approximately 10,000 under various stages of construction, it is evident that with desire and self education, man, in the atmosphere of his home, is extremely creative. EAA as the drawing card, the nucleus, the dispenser of information, the Church, so to speak, has drawn together many thousands with a common bond. Whether they all actually work with hand in restoring, building, or repairing — the spirit is still there. The high quality maintenance and workmanship turned out by EAAers over these past twenty years has been a credit to all — even the many builders and operators of aircraft outside the umbrella of the Experimental Aircraft Association.

Accidents? Yes, we have had accidents. Loss of life? Yes, we have had that, too. This must be expected when we defy motion and gravity. We find those who operate within the movement, within EAA, are more conscious of their responsibility to their fellow pilot, fellow builder, and their organization than those who have not exposed themselves to the spirit and the knowledge that is available in SPORT AVIATION, the Designee Bulletins, and the affiliation through Chapters, Fly-Ins, forums, and other such benefits.

What about the future of the amateur built airplane, the movement? We have been asked this many, many times. What effect does the tragedy involving aircraft certificated "experimental" have on the homebuilder? Can we expect more restrictions? Can we expect greater supervision? What is the public reaction? What is the reaction of your elected officials? It is interesting to read the many newspaper clippings that have been sent to EAA Headquarters — letters to the editor, editorials, and normal reporting — as a result of the tragedy at Sacramento. Even the opinions from fellow pilots and airplane owners of factory type aircraft. Most of it was not complimentary to the great spirit, the level of craftsmanship exhibited by those who design and build these aircraft.

We have been working very closely with FAA during these past several months on a project that was started over a year ago in establishing new procedures and regulations governing the operation and construction of amateur-built aircraft. FAA expects to release, in the very near future, a Notice of Proposed Rule Making which, if adopted, will set new guidelines for experimental amateur-built aircraft. I have been privileged to attend numerous meetings with FAA on this matter, and to be able to offer recommendations and suggestions on behalf of our organization. All others will have the opportunity to submit comments on this proposed change prior to its adoption. SPORT AVIATION will carry the full contents of this document as soon as it is released. We hope that all of our members and our Chapters will forward their comments to EAA Headquarters for consolidation and the forwarding of individual letters to Washington.

My meetings on your behalf with various FAA officials have been extremely well accepted. I am convinced that FAA desires to insure the future of the amateur-built movement and the privileges we enjoy in building and flying — in such a way that they are not lost because of spectacular mishaps, pressures from citizens groups or Congress. I have long recognized that there are many things that we who build and fly could be doing, could be taking credit for, but haven't. We — and FAA — are very hesitant to add more rules, more regulations . . . for they know better than we that it is the nature of bureaucracy that once rules are added to the books, they are very difficult to remove. On the other hand, what do we have to offer in the way of standards in the event we are called upon to answer for our actions?

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Some time ago EAA prepared a Service Manual, a detailed publication which, if filled in, would be a very complete historical record on each amateur-built aircraft. It would list the materials that were used to construct the aircraft, weight and balance data, operating limitations and many other valuable pieces of information that would be invaluable through the life of the airplane — especially if the aircraft were sold and someone other than the original builder were called upon to service, repair and maintain it. Unfortunately, only ten per cent of the builders have taken the opportunity to obtain this publication from Headquarters, complete it, and make it a part of the aircraft records. We have recommended that all amateur-built aircraft have a Service Manual. It is easy to complete, easy to fill out, especially during construction. If ever we are called upon to produce standards, we have made a great step forward. We also feel that we should have a propeller log book, so that we know the history of the propeller on our machines. I am sure all of us would wonder, after amateur-built aircraft have passed through several owners, what the history of that little jewel up front is. Was it cut down? Was it repitched? Was it bent and re-straightened? Has it been exposed to higher than manufacturer's engine/propeller combination fpm? All of this is very important.

We here at Headquarters have been exposed to many instances of propeller blade failure over the years. Here is another opportunity to take credit for standards for doing something.

FAA has asked EAA if we would develop a set of standards for amateur-built aircraft, a guide of minimum requirements that FAA could use unofficially as good basic requirements for amateur-built aircraft. We have agreed and it will be made available to all people, whether they be EAA members or not. We will also include standards for aerobatic aircraft. They will not be complicated and detailed or unreasonable to comply with. However, when one walks through the fields at Oshkosh and sees some of the amateur-built aircraft without carburetor heat; without a system to drain water from the lowest portion of the fuel tank; without jury struts or means of support, long span wing struts that under hours of vibration will and have failed; or firewalls that are not really firewalls but just plain wood that could burn through in short order; or fuel systems without fuel gauges or any sort of indicator to determine fuel quantity; or fuel systems so located that they have poor gravity feed conditions. These guidelines, and, of course, FAA guidelines will be for aircraft whose builders and owners would like to upgrade them into what could possibly be called the "sport" or "custom" category. They would expect to be able to operate their aircraft with greater freedom. More on this later.

Our future looks bright. Now is the time to insure our future — insure that we have standards that will stand up to criticism and that in 90% of the cases today amateur builders are already complying with.

I would like to quote something I wrote in May of 1959. This is part of a letter sent to Chapter presidents back then, and sent to the Officers and Directors of the Experimental Aircraft Association. I quote, "One important thing we must start to work on is a set of standards and the simplest possible tests to determine airworthiness of our machines, so that we can petition the Civil Aeronautics Board for our new sport category. This is not to be connected with the current experimental category, which to some degree we are sweating out our existence by acts of jets, airliners and other large machines capable of greater destruction in the event of a mishap. Yet, it reflects on us because we are experimental." Twelve years later a major catastrophe involving a jet happened and twenty-two people lost their lives and many questions

from outside of EAA and FAA have been asked and are being asked. Even the housewife in Virginia who recently wrote a letter to her local paper after reading about a successful fly-in involving experimental homebuilt airplanes was not easy to answer. "Do you mean in this day and age, I am having experimental planes flying over my house?" Now is the time, I say, for positive changes; we should take credit for our past accomplishments and document our standards. Let's move forward. Let's not take a step backward.

A new upgrading category will be a boon to the movement. It will take the stigma away from "amateur-built, experimental". It could make a great difference on personal insurance policies that carry exclusions involving the word "experimental". It will make us more welcome at many places. Possibly, the operating limitations of flying over congested areas by those aircraft which qualify to a set of minimum standards can be eliminated, thus, opening legally, a new horizon. I urge all of our members to cooperate fully with Headquarters. Have faith in our judgment to insure that our movement does not falter, does not take a step backward, and especially to encourage all builders and owners of amateur-built aircraft to be a part of EAA.

To you designers and sellers of drawings, I ask for complete cooperation in keeping EAA Headquarters up to date on any design changes and airworthiness directives on your designs. The pages of SPORT AVIATION are available to you, at no cost, to bring to the attention of builders and owners any updating of your drawings or problems that might be encountered with your design. Even a note in SPORT AVIATION asking builders of your aircraft to contact you for drawing corrections or an airworthiness directive would be more than welcome.

I would also like to state that EAA Headquarters will supply each designer, at no charge, a copy of the EAA Service Manual in hopes that each will complete the information and forward it to EAA Headquarters for placing in our Library so that all builders and owners will have a source of accurate information available to them for a given aircraft constructed to a designer's drawings.

I also plan on sending a personal letter to each designer, again asking for his cooperation. Here is an opportunity for all of us to show our sincerity, show that we are responsible and through self-policing that we need very little government supervision to accomplish our goals.

I am very pleased with the response of the Presidents of the various EAA Divisions, such as the International Aerobatic Club, the Warbirds, the Antique-Classic Division on matters pertaining to all of our welfare. Possibly some day a group within EAA will step forth on a national level to assist us on the problems facing rotary wing aircraft, its safety and its development.

We have just completed researching all of our records, and have brought up to date a complete accident file (beginning in 1948 and extending through November of 1972) concerning all accidents involving amateur-built aircraft. We are the only group inside or outside of government that has a complete record of accidents involving amateur-built aircraft. I personally have studied accidents involving these machines since our beginning. It is very enlightening and has been helpful to me in conversations and meetings with people who might feel that certain areas of the homebuilt movement are quite rosy. One cannot beat record keeping and having administrative capability to back up one's actions and views.

On behalf of our staff at EAA Headquarters, I would like to take this opportunity to wish each and everyone of you and your families a Very Merry Christmas, a Prosperous and Safe New Year. On behalf of Audrey, Tom, Bonnie and I, we wish you the same. ☺