

Labor of love taking shape as a sky bird

By C.J. Rissak
staff writer

Come September, Dick Horner and Bob Skingley see a 1947 Stinson airplane rolling down the Mettetal Airport runway in Plymouth and gently lifting off, gracefully climbing into a blue sky. When that happens, two years of hard work will be behind them. Their airplane will be back where it belongs.

"We were looking for a plane to own," Horner recalled Tuesday, standing next to the fuselage of the Stinson. "We ended up with a project."

The two Westland residents, both

employees for Ford Motor Co.'s parts division, found a plane they could afford to own in the fall of 1979. It was sitting in the backyard of a Harper Woods resident.

The former owner had planned on restoring the Stinson, but never got around to it. So Horner and Skingley bought the plane for \$3,500.

ON A SATURDAY morning, they put the unattached wings in the bed of a pickup truck and strapped the rear of the fuselage into the back of Horner's Volkswagen Scirocco and drove it to Skingley's Westland home.

There the plane, manufactured on April Fool's Day in 1947 at the Stinson Aircraft Plant in Wayne, has stayed for the past two years while the two flying enthusiasts have worked on its reconstruction.

"My wife keeps asking me when will I get the 'bird' out of the garage," Skingley remarked.

The project has taken twice the time and money the pair thought it would. Each has spent an average of 16 hours a week on the project.

The plane originally had a fabric skin. The fuselage was converted to aluminum before Skingley and Horner purchased the plane. They have since recovered the wings.

Completing the wings entailed using 3,000 rivets to secure the aluminum. Borrowed air compressors were used for the riveting and drilling, and will help with the painting. Total project cost, they figure, including purchase price, will reach \$10,000.

"THERE'S AN OLD saying among guys building their own airplanes," Horner said. "If I'll take one week to do, count on two weeks."

They had hoped to have the plane finished in time to fly to the Oshkosh Air Show in Wisconsin this August. The show attracts about 3,000 planes, all members of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA). Horner and Skingley joined Local Chapter No. 113, based at Mettetal Airport, last year.

"We envisioned about a year and it took two, but we're rookies, so I guess that accounts for some of it," Skingley said of the project.

Their rookie status has long since disappeared. The two read all types of books dealing with the reconstruction and have rebuilt the instrument panel, completed work on the wings and replaced parts in the engine and elsewhere in the aircraft.

"We had to pick up a whole lot of new skills," Skingley said.

The project has consumed so much of their attention, neither has had time to devote to their favorite hobby — flying. Both are licensed pilots. Skingley since 1973 and Horner since 1978.

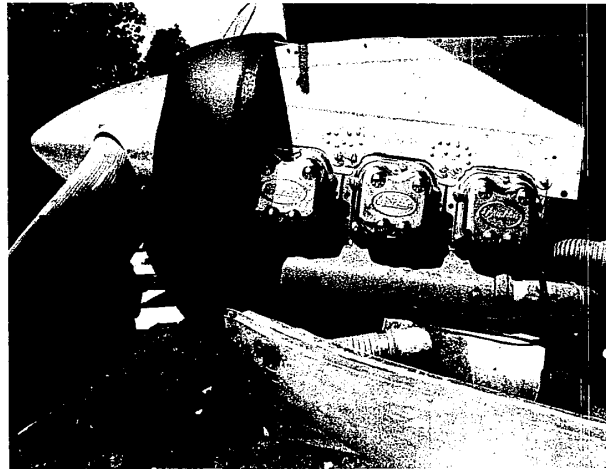
BUT AS THE work's completion draws near, the excitement of getting back in the pilot's seat grows.

"Once completed, the plane will be

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Owners Bob Skingley (left) and Dick Horner prepare the wings for one of the final steps in their reconstruction project — painting.



Powering the 34-year-old plane is a six-cylinder, 165-horsepower Franklin motor. The aircraft seats four, has a cruising speed of 120 miles per hour and a range of 400 miles.

Staff photos
by Bill Bresler

One of the first jobs they had to tackle when they bought the airplane two years ago was rebuilding the instrument panel and cockpit. The notebook on the seat contains the history of the plane, including the 1947 certification by the craft's first owner.



A CHORUS LINE of 14 10-year-olds who took first place in a competition on the Chesaning Showboat last week will be performing several times on the showmobile during the Farmington Founders Festival. The girls will be dressed as cheerleaders and will perform a rousing non-stop routine with jazz dance to "You Got to be a Football Hero." They're called the Mini-Sherylles from the Sheryl School of Dance and already have two gold medals for dance to their credit. Three of the 14 are hometown girls: Cindy Hawk, Maribeth Galasso and Holly Nowack, all 10-year-old Farmington Hills residents. To qualify for the Chesaning competition, the dancers had to beat 106 amateur acts before they got on stage with Debbie Boone, showboat headliner this month.

THE BIG DRAWING will be July 25 for the Founders Festival annual raffle, which this year offers prizes ranging from a trip to the Bahamas to a ride in a hot air balloon. Raffle chairman Oscar Rhonon needs ticket sellers to return all books and money to the Chamber of Commerce office by Thursday, July 23, or mail returns to Founders Festival, P.O. Box 2694, Farmington Hills 48018. Those who want tickets can still purchase them from local businesses, clubs or the chamber office.

FARMINGTON'S FEARLESS HIKER and his three adventurous cohorts are in Montana on their way down the Continental Divide to Mexico. Stewart Merrill and friends David Kahn, Pat Ball, and Clarke Ball are on a six-month expedition to raise funds for treatment of blindness. Proceeds from the trek will go to SEVA (Society for Epidemiology and Voluntary Assistance). SEVA is a non-profit international organization working with the Nepal Health Ministry and the World Health Organization to alleviate the widespread blindness in Nepal. As many as 300,000 people in the tiny Himalayan country are blind. According to SEVA, 50 percent of the blindness is curable or preventable. To make a contribution, write: Sight Trek, c/o SEVA, Chelsea 48118.

KUDOS TO MSU senior Lisa M. Elian, of Farmington Hills, who was selected by the Michigan State chapter of Women in Communications for a media five award. Media five awards are plaques presented annually to students making outstanding contributions in the field of communications. Elian won for her audio slide tape in the public relations division. The presentation, This is MSU, coproduced with Karen Weinberg and currently in use by MSU Information Services, traces

the university's growth and anticipated development. WIC is a professional organization of women in telecommunication, public relations, journalism and broadcasting. Elian, a 1977 graduate of North Farmington High School, is pursuing a career in public relations. She is publicity director for WIC and a member of the Public Relations Society of America.

PLAN A FAMILY adventure that can last a lifetime: Youth for Understanding is now accepting applications from American families in the Farmington area to host international students for a six month or full year program. The '81-82 school year students arrive throughout the month of August and the six month South American students arrive in January. Particularly needed at this time are homes for boys aged 15-18. Host families provide room, board and companionship. Students families provide clothing, spending money, insurance and other personal expenses. Youth for Understanding is a non-profit, educational organization devoted to the promotion of international understanding through the exchange of high school youth between the U.S. and 26 other countries. Families interested in participating should call 553-8432.

IN CASE OF a postal strike today, Manufacturers National Bank Corporation wants customers to know how to continue banking transactions. Account statements can be obtained on their usual dates at the customers branch office. Loan, mortgage and credit card payments are due on their regular payment dates and can be made at any branch office. New credit card and ManWay customers will be notified by phone as to where their cards can be picked up; bank by mail customers can make deposits at any branch, direct deposit of Social Security and other federal recurring payments is not affected by the strike; the deposits will be credited to recipients accounts as usual.

BOATERS CAN ENJOY their sport more by knowing how to cope with its hazards. To instruct boaters on watercraft safety, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 11-02, in cooperation with the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission, will offer a lecture with demonstrations Wednesday, July 22, beginning at 7 p.m. at the Waterford Oaks-Wave Action Pool. Demonstration topics include personal flotation devices, visual distress signals, radio communications, boat handling under adverse conditions, anchors and drogues, rescue techniques, knot tying and righting and dewatering small craft. The Waterford Oaks pool is at Scott Lake Road between Pontiac Lake Road and Dixie Highway.



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