

# 2 years rebuilding 1947 plane gets new lease on life

By C.J. Risak  
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.

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.

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 virtually maintenance-free," Horner said.

And all the work and time put into it?

"I think the first flight will make us forget it all," Skingley said. "We'll have the satisfaction of putting nearly every piece together."

"It's been aggravating, sure, but only in the sense that we can't fly it right now."

EAA members have assisted the pair in finding parts and equipment for the Stinson. The plane has been examined "five or six times," Skingley said, by a Federal Aviation Association (FAA) inspector.

Specifications for changing the plane's skin from fabric to aluminum had to be according to an STC (Supplemental Type Certificate). Other regulations and specifications had to be strictly adhered to.

When completed, the Stinson will cruise at about 120 miles per hour with about a 400-mile cruising range, seating four. This Stinson line of planes was built from 1946-49, about 3,000 total, Skingley estimated. Piper Aircraft bought out the Stinson company in 1949.



Owners Bob Skingley and Dick Horner prepare a wing for the first flight they will take in the Stinson aircraft they have been rebuilding.

"IN A REAL remote way, this proceeds the Piper Tri-Pacer," Horner said, adding that the Tri-Pacer is a classic airplane.

The last steps at the makeshift hangar in Skingley's garage include preparing the metal skin for painting. Final assembly will be at the airport.

When the Stinson takes off on its first flight since 1975, neither Skingley or Horner are certain they'll be aboard. Since neither is familiar with how the aircraft will handle, they can't be certain if it will "feel" right, or if construction problems that might keep it from handling properly are evident.

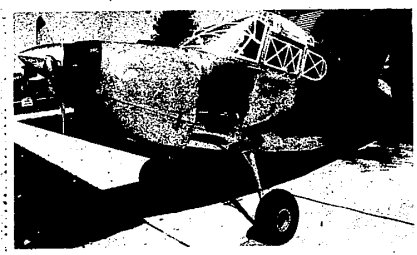
They may either get a pilot experienced in flying a Stinson to test their plane or rent another Stinson to fly themselves and get a feel for.

When the controls are finally theirs, they can't say who will be the first pilot, but Horner said, "We pretty well figure we'll both be in there."

Their first extended trip? It's planned for Mackinac Island. It should be a beautiful sight, viewing the island's autumn colors from the air.

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, members of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA). Horner and Skingley joined Local Chapter No. 113, based



This 1947 Stinson has not been flown since 1975 but its owners, after two years of rebuilding, plan to take it aloft in September. Their first flight will likely be to Mackinac Island. The first project the owners undertook was rebuilding the cockpit and instrument panel. The aircraft's log traces the history of the plane back to its first owner who bought it spanning new in 1947. The plane was found sitting in the backyard of a Harper Woods man in 1978.

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