



My Favorite Ride

A great treat, neighbor to neighbor

BY LORRAINE MORRIS

Reading the title, you may think I am talking about my favorite airplane to fly. In fact, it is the most memorable ride I ever gave in an airplane.

We have all given someone a ride that we remember for some reason, whether it is because of the amazed and wondrous reaction of the passenger or the smoothness of our landing with a first-time flier. This ride stands out in my memory because I was able to fulfill a wish in a way few others could. I wish I could say that it was because of my wonderful piloting skills, but it was only because I happened to own one of the few types of aircraft that could fill this mission.

My husband, Ken, and I live on Poplar Grove Airport (a residential airpark), and it has 100 homes/lots that have taxiway access to the runway. It also has 40 lots and condos that do not have access to the runway. These extra 40 lots and condos (because they can't fly from them,

we call them "kiwi lots") contain a mixture of pilots and non-pilots.

As I was coming home one day, I noticed a large moving van in front of one of the condos, and I stopped and introduced myself to Bill Moses, the newest airpark resident. Bill is not a pilot, but he was lured to the airpark by a mutual friend who lives and flies here. Bill is wheelchair-bound, and over the next few months he joined in many of the airpark events and even joined EAA Chapter 1414. At one event we were talking about his goal to ride in an open-cockpit airplane. Most of the open-cockpit planes at the airport were going to be difficult for Bill to get into, but our Woody Pusher is a smaller airplane than most and has the front cockpit out in the open with no wing above it. That evening the idea was born to give Bill his open-cockpit ride.

The Aerosport Woody Pusher was first produced in 1967 by Harris Woods for homebuilding. It was designed as a braced parasol monoplane that had a fabric-covered wood

fuselage and wings and was based closely on the 1930 Curtiss-Wright Junior. It was popular in the west, as many farmers used it for spotting their stock as well as coyote hunting. With the pilot out in front, there are no struts or engine parts to block the view or the shot.

Our Woody Pusher was built in 1976 by a man named Bond, and he gave it the serial number 007. He constructed the wings and spars out of wood, but used steel tubing for the fuselage and spring steel gear. It also had a full electrical system with a wind-driven generator. It was only 75 miles away, so we decided to fly it home. Oh, did I mention we purchased it in December? What were we thinking!

When we arrived to pick it up, it was only about 32°F outside. I had been drafted to be the pilot home, so I had brought all the heavy winter gear I could think of. Sure enough, the aircraft started right up and off I went. I made it home with only a bit of chill; then Ken put on some

warm clothes and took it around the patch, just so he could say he had flown it, too.

We then put it in the hangar and started to look at it closely. It had been built in 1976, but soon after that it had been dismantled and stored. After a series of owners, it was put back together and flown for a few years before we came into the picture. At some point in time someone had painted over the fabric with enamel paint, and it was starting to crack and peel off. After talking about it for a few minutes, we decided that it might be a good idea to re-cover the wings and tail feathers. Since it was winter and only a fool would fly it in the winter (what did that make me?), now was the time.

It turned out to be a good idea, because when we got the old fabric off, we found that the glue used 30 years ago was drying out and small parts were starting to fall off inside. We re-glued the entire thing and did a general cleanup on the wings. We removed the electrical system because we had no plans on flying it at night and re-covered the wings and tail feathers. Since the plane was for fun, we chose a whimsical paint scheme and painted it bright orange and yellow with Poly-Tone paint.

Now that we had the ideal airplane for Bill's ride, the next problem was how to get Bill into the airplane. Most engine hoists couldn't go up high enough, so we decided to use our hangar door. We have used it in the past to lift items that the engine hoist and my strong husband couldn't lift, so we strapped a tree harness onto Bill, picked him up with the hangar door, then wheeled the Woody underneath and lowered him into the seat. With volunteers guiding his legs, he was soon strapped in and ready to go.

After disconnecting the harness (we left it attached to Bill), we got our required head covering on, complete with bright orange wigs (this adds to the fun). We then started the C-90, taxied out to the runway, and took off into the sky. Bill was flying in an open-cockpit airplane! Granted, it



"Thing 1 and Thing 2" of Dr. Seuss fame appear to come to life as the pair, Bill Moses and his pilot, Lorraine Morris wear a pair of well-anchored bright orange fright wigs in the slipstream of the Woody Pusher.



In the Morris' shop.

didn't have the style and class of a Stearman or a Waco, but it was just as open as could be! With only 90 little ponies pulling it along, it didn't have the rumble and roar of the big radial engines of yesteryear that most people identify with an open-cockpit biplane. But there was no canopy over his head, and there was a distinct possibility that he was going to come home with bugs in his teeth. It was a bona fide open-cockpit airplane.

Every time Bill turned his head to look at something new, I could see the smile on his face. Communicating is done with hand signals, so we didn't talk much. Ken and Bill's friend Kevin flew around us in our C-140A and got some aerial pictures.

When I thought that Bill's face

was going to split he was smiling so much, we did a pass down the runway so he could appreciate the blinding speed of the Woody (not!), then came around and landed. We taxied up to the hangar, the hangar door was lowered, the harness was hooked to the door, and Bill was picked up out of the cockpit.

We continued to have fun with the Woody until we heard about a Curtiss-Wright Junior project for sale. Ken was interested in restoring one, so we put the Woody up for sale and one of the previous owners bought it. Now he is enjoying it again! I am glad we had the opportunity to give somebody a ride he won't soon forget because I know I won't ever forget it.