



The Skycoupe fuselage, just after removal of old fabric.

Stits Skycoupe

EAA members restore a 1950s design

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WHEN A MEMBER OF our chapter, Tom Hall, called me this spring with the news that his friend wanted to donate a Stits SA-7D Skycoupe to the chapter, my first reaction was, “Sure!” My second reaction was, “What’s a Stits Skycoupe?” Since then, we’ve learned that the SA-7D was one of 15 designs from Ray Stits, EAA 136. Ray was an early icon of the homebuilding movement; co-founder of EAA Chapter 1 at Flabob Airport in Riverside, California; and inventor of the Stits fabric-covering method we all know today as Poly-Fiber.

Thanks to the online archive of past issues of *EAA Sport Aviation*, we quickly collected almost all of the information that has ever been written on the Piper Colt look-alike. We were surprised to learn that not only was it one of the most common homebuilts in the early 1960s, but also the design proved so popular that Ray and his business partners took it through certification. The FAA granted the type certificate for the Stits Model SA-9A Skycoupe in December 1961 after four years of exhaustive testing.

Our SA-7D Skycoupe is of typical construction for aircraft of the late 1950s: welded chromoly steel tube fuselage, wooden wing, fabric covering, and a 125-hp Lycoming O-290-D engine converted from a

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military ground power unit. As an aside, not only did Richard “Van” VanGrunsven choose the same engine for his prototype RV-3, but his first airplane, the RV-1, was actually a modified Stits SA-3A Playboy with an all-metal, cantilevered wing.

Our Skycoupe, discovered in the back of a forgotten hangar south of Raleigh, North Carolina, had seen only two careful builders during the five decades since the early 1960s. We retrieved the restoration project in May, which coincided with our annual chapter picnic, where the chapter’s many builders were able to have a closer look at it. When our two technical counselors, Jack Phillips (whose award-winning dark-green Pietenpol was parked at the Brown Arch during AirVenture 2011) and Terry Phillips, gave the aircraft a thumbs up, we formed the Bear Creek Aero Club as a separate entity that owns and will operate the aircraft once it’s flying.

Technical counselor Terry Gardner generously lent us his well-equipped hangar shop at the Eagle’s Landing residential airport near Pittsboro, North Carolina. The hangar has one very important feature: a large, air-conditioned loft where we’re nearing completion of the wooden wings, in comfort, despite the sultry summer weather typical of the Carolinas. It is the goal of the Bear Creek Aero Club to rescue projects such as this Skycoupe from the scrap heap, provide area builders with an excellent means to gain skills, and offer flying opportunities at rock-bottom prices. And we’ll do our best to keep the Skycoupe and future projects LSA compliant.

As of this writing, the Skycoupe’s tail feathers are ready for covering, and the wings will be ready soon. We’re preparing



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1) Left wing during repairs to wood.

2) (L to R) Joel McLaughlin, Andy Thomson, and Terry Gardner add plywood doublers to rib leading edges to repair minor damage.



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3) Fuselage after fabric and main gear removal. Other than the old fabric and tires, the airframe was in remarkably good shape after being stored for most of its half-century of existence since work began on it in the early '60s.

4) Stripping the fabric off the plane.

the nicely pickled Lycoming for its first run, and then the fuselage will be prepped for covering. We expect to be in the air before the end of the year. The FAA's Greensboro, North Carolina, FSDO has been very helpful thus far, and we are receiving major support from Poly-Fiber of Riverside, California, and from Marvel-Schebler Aircraft Carburetors of Gibsonville, North Carolina.

Ray Stits, an active pilot and frequent visitor to Flabob, is following our progress and providing important advice. Since a tribute to Richard VanGrunsven is being planned for AirVenture 2012, it would be great to have as many airworthy Stits designs on hand due to the important link between aircraft from two of the most prolific and important figures in the homebuilt movement.

If you'd like to join us next year with your Stits, please contact me at kmisegades@bellsouth.net. You can follow our progress at <http://EAA1114.blogspot.com>. **EAA**



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AIRCRAFT SUBMISSIONS

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