

# Something for you



BOB FRAKES

There are some who continue to think that the airport has nothing for them. They need to break the mold and check things out nowadays. The latest event was the 16th annual Midwest Aviation Expo in Mt. Vernon. I made my way out on Friday the 6th, and after lunch at the café I made my way to the displays.

## IT CAUGHT MY EYE

One item that quickly caught my eye was a mock up of Charles Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis" and the actual "New Spirit of St. Louis" parked nearby. The mockup was of the cockpit and contained some interesting features.

The original "Spirit" is a custom-built, single engine, single seat, high-wing monoplane that Charles Lindbergh flew on May 20-21, 1927, on the first solo nonstop Atlantic crossing from Long Island to Paris. Lindbergh won the \$25,000 Orteig Prize. The flight lasted 33 hours and 33 minutes, landing at Le Bourget Airport in Paris, a distance of around 3,600 miles. The plane's name is derived from Lindber-

gh's supporters at the St. Louis Raquette Club. Lindbergh preferred one really good engine to multiple engines and chose the 223 hp Wright J-5C Whirlwind 9-cylinder air chilled radial piston engine. The engine was very fuel efficient, good for long flights and had a self cleaning mechanism that helped keep it clean for the flight. It also was rated to self-lubricate the engines' valves for 40 hours continuously. The engines builder, Tom Rutledge, was disappointed to be assigned to a little known aviator. Four days after the flight, he received a letter of congratulations from Wright management. The plane held 450 gallons of fuel which had been filtered over and over again. Maximum speed was 133 mph with a range of 4,100 miles. In order to accommodate the extra fuel weight, the wheel base had to be widened.

Alterations produced some different pitch, yaw and roll patterns but to save time Lindbergh felt he could easily handle these. The rumor persists that these were also beneficial as they helped keep Lindbergh awake.

As you can see in the mock-up, one tank was placed forward right in his line of sight for center of gravity purposes. A small periscope was built although it is not known if he ever used it. He would simply yaw the plane back and forth and look out the side windows. It seems he was used to doing this from flying mail routes with sacks of mail stuffed in front of him.

Weight was a big concern so as you can see, he sat in a wicker seat. The plane also carried no radio as the models of the time were not reliable anyway. He did carry a new Earth Inductor Compass which was so accurate he only missed his Ireland arrival point by just a few miles. To also save weight, the plane had a treated fabric "skin" fuselage and he went so far as to trim unneeded edges from his flight maps. Because of the weight issue, no souvenirs were taken along. The cramped cockpit was only 36" by 32" by 52" - it was his home for two days and night over the Atlantic. Bathroom? Lindbergh explained the wicker chair had a hole in it with a funnel and can below. Rather than land with it, he said he threw it out the window over France. Bombs away!

Lindbergh spoke so favorably about the plane that he dis-



cussed himself and it often as "WE". He would think to himself, "Are WE on course?" The "Spirit" is on permanent display at the Smithsonian's Institution's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

Also pictured is the "New Spirit of St. Louis", a Lancair Columbia 300, N142LC, which was flown non-stop from New York to Paris in May 2002 by Charles Lindbergh's grandson, Erik, as he retraced his grandfather's historic transatlantic flight on its 75th anniversary. This solo flight took 17 hours and 7 minutes, roughly half the time of his grandfather's flight. This plane is owned and operated by AeroCareers. Although I spent much time at the cockpit mockup and the "New Spirit," there was much more to see.

The airport describes the expo as its signature event. Its main purpose is to connect buyers and sellers of light aircraft at one convenient location. A secondary purpose is educational as there were many interesting forums and seminars offered. Attendees enjoyed discussions on weather, engines, aviation fuel, upcoming FAA regulation changes and many more.

Airport leaders point out that nearly everyone on the ramp were visitors. Whether they flew their own aircraft, flew on the scheduled airlines, or drove; these visitors spent money in Mt. Vernon. In addition to the airport, hotels, restaurants, fuel filling stations and retail certainly benefitted.

I will return to the airport down the road with the "Quonset move."

Questions, comments or answers?

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