

the

9

DAY AIRPLANE... in 8!

By Jack Cox

CHRIS HEINTZ HAD said that with the assistance of a few experienced metal workers, he could build one of his two-place Zeniths during the 1976 EAA Fly-In . . . build it and fly it right there at Oshkosh in front of every beady-eyed builder and hard-case designee on the airport.

A flyable Zenith, start to finish, in 9 days!

Not only did he do it — he did it in 8 days rather than the nine he had allowed himself. In fact, the airframe was completed in 7, with the 8th day (Saturday, August 7) reserved for pulling the weight and balance, doing fuel flow tests and for a thorough inspection by Canadian MOT and FAA inspectors. Given the go sign, Chris, himself, taxied down to Runway 36, got a wave-off from the Gypsy Controllers and roared out. At precisely 3:33 P.M. the wheels broke ground . . . and the deed was done.

Watching the freshly minted little bird wing off to the southeast for some stalls and checks on handling, it was hard to believe that just a week earlier I had watched Chris and his crew pull in with their trailer loaded with aluminum, tools, machinery and all manner of aeronautical odds and ends necessary for building a metal airplane.

As many fly-in goers observed, the Zenith crew **did** hit the ground running at full tilt. They came with all the pre-formed, pre-welded and finished parts and sub-assemblies that are available from Zenair — complete landing gear assemblies ready to bolt in place, wing spars, etc. And, most important, they had an O-235 Lycoming, fully baffled, wired, plumbed and in its mount ready to bolt on the firewall. It had been test run, the carb had been adjusted and the cowling had been fitted prior to departure for Oshkosh. **BUT**, all this was part of the deal . . . Chris had specified that these things would be brought along. After all, any Zenith builder could purchase the same items and many builders hire an A & P to set up their engines. At any rate, when everything was spread out on the floor of the workshop, those pre-formed goodies appeared to be a pitifully inadequate head start towards flying behind the Lycoming 9 days hence.

I think I can best describe the progress of Chris, Gerry Boudreau, John Pickard and their band of volunteers by telling you that I initially asked our photographer, Lee Fray, to stop by each morning and take a few shots so we could record the progress. When I went



(Photo by Dick Stouffer)

And away he goes! Chris Heintz lifts off on the initial flight of the 9 Day Zenith.

by a couple of days later, I was stunned by what had been accomplished. Thereafter, Lee went by twice a day! The Zenith goes together very rapidly — at least when you have all the necessary tools and materials **and** know what you are doing — and with an absolute minimum of jigs and fixtures. A few 2x4 scraps and some plywood templates were about all I saw being used. Every once in a while Chris would come by a particular knot of workers, make a suggestion or two, sight down some edge or rivet line and maybe give some recalcitrant joint a couple of well placed whacks with his trusty plastic hammer.

Despite all that was being accomplished, it was a surprisingly low-keyed affair. No one was running wildly about screaming instructions or furiously hacking away at a hunk of aluminum. Everyone from pipe smoking Chris down to the kid deburring rivet holes seemed to know what they were doing and simply did what was



(Photo by Lee Fray)

A wing panel nearing completion. By moving major components, such as the wings, outside the workshop shed, more people were able to watch the work in progress.

quick to build and, having seen the spars and other internal structure, certainly seems to be a sturdy little bird. I'm certain a number of EAAers made their decision to build a Zenith as a result of watching the construction of this one. Beyond all this, however, I'm equally certain a lot of other people came away much less cowed by the task of building an airplane . . . **any** airplane. To simply have seen the whole process from start to finish is something not many people have had the opportunity to do. All were aware, of course, that accomplishing that much work themselves would be a matter of months and years rather than days, but they had vicariously experienced the whole run of the thing, had had the natural dread of the unknown stripped away. As a result, I believe **all** designers and the homebuilt movement, in general, benefited from the Zenith workshop effort.



(Photo by Lee Fray)

An example of the super sophisticated equipment needed to build a Zenith. Are you looking, Cessna/Beech/Piper?

necessary with a minimum of fuss and bother. The only time I saw a glimmer of impatience was when someone would trip over an extension cord, leaving some rivet hole drill on the other end in mid-stroke . . . and even that usually turned into some good natured jokes. My only mild criticism is the fact that I saw a lot of people drilling, filing, cutting, etc., **without** goggles or any other sort of safety equipment. This is all too common, as we each are aware, and not limited by any means to the fellows working on the 9 Day Zenith. "We have met the enemy . . . and they is us!" as Pogo once joked. Buy 'em and wear 'em, EAAers. You are too valuable to us as friends to suffer the consequences of doing otherwise.

The Nine Day Airplane . . . in eight . . . was a useful addition to the Oshkosh '76 program. Of course it didn't do Chris Heintz and his company, Zenair, any harm from a business standpoint. He very definitely made his point that the Zenith is both easy and relatively



(Photo by Lee Fray)

Chris Heintz, fourth from the left, supervises the skinning of a wing panel.