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Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 33

A monthly publication of the Dr. Alexander M. Lippisch Chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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Ercoupe Flies Again

By Jay Honeck

A few months ago a group of us "pilots with kids" realized that our pilot-rated children could no longer afford to fly even the clapped-out rental 150s at our local FBO. Over a few beers, we started plotting a way to help.

All of us were already aircraft owners -- but we all owned high-performance (read: expensive to fly) aircraft. We realized that we'd have to come up with a cheaper alternative, and started casting about for a solution.

One of the original members of our group was an Ercoupe fanatic, so we started looking at these cute little antiques. I had flown one, once, back in the mid- 90s, and thought they were fun -- so when we found one for sale nearby, we asked the owner to bring it into the shop for a pre-buy inspection.

This was a '46 Model C, and it's main advantage was that it was LSA-eligible. This was appealing for some of our original partners, who were worried about obtaining or maintaining their medicals. Un-



fortunately, this bird had more troubles than attributes, even though the owner had invested significant money into fixing up the old plane. We decided to pass on that plane.

In the meantime, one of our partners successfully re-upped his medical, and the other medical-challenged partner dropped out of the picture -- so we broadened our search to include later-model (non-LSA) Ercoupes. These had the distinct advantage of a 200-pound greater useful load. Eventually we found a '48 Model-E that had been in a ground accident. While on its way to be delivered to a new owner, a fuel-truck driver backed into the wing, crushing it. That sale was off, and the seller put the plane on a flat-bed and returned it to Iowa.

The seller obtained new fabric wings (the damaged ones were metal), started painting them -- and then (for reasons unknown) decided to sell the aircraft and wings as-is. That's where we came on the scene.

One of our partners is an A&P/IA grand champion home-builder. With his abilities, finishing the painting and installation of the new wings was a simple, several-day project -- so we bought the plane and transported it to our home base in Iowa City.

The aircraft was lovely, low-time, with a good panel and low-time engine. Everything in the 60-year-old aircraft worked like new -- a true rarity -- and we immediately started sanding the wings.

Then the "Great Flood of '08" hit the Iowa City area, and the project ground to a halt. To assure its safety in the flooding (which, thankfully never reached the airport), we hung the little 'Coupe from the engine hoist hanging from the ceiling in the shop, like a big Xmas ornament!

Then, when the flood waters receded, we departed on a long-planned week-long flying vacation, so the 'Coupe project was back-shelved again. After we returned from vacation last Thursday, we drove over to our partner's shop -- and there, out front, was the Ercoupe -- wings mounted and painted! While we were gone, our partner had finished the project -- and it was drop-dead gorgeous!



Of course, even though we were just back from a week of flying, we had to fly it. The only thing keeping us grounded was a lack of insurance -- which I had been working on before we departed for vacation. So, it was a simple phone call to my broker to get things rolling, and -- within an hour -- we were covered and good to go!

Insurance being insurance, they require all of us get signed-off by a CFI before we can fly solo. I need to get an hour of instruction before soloing. My wife, Mary, needs five hours, while my son -- a new pilot last fall -- needs TEN. This to fly what was designed to be "Everyman's Plane" -- an aircraft that could be flown with minimal instruction. Ah, yes, the bureaucrats at work once again.

Luckily, Keith -- our A&P/IA partner -- has significant Ercoupe time, so he was good to go right away. So, we were able to fly with him, no problemo.

First, the pre-flight. It's a 60-year-old antique, and things are a bit different. To check the oil requires opening the cowling with a screw-driver. That's where the gascolator is, too. Not exactly user-friendly. Then, check the control surfaces -- but know that you can't move the ailerons, because the control yoke is connected to the nose wheel in an Ercoupe! That's right, you steer the plane on the ground like a car, using the yoke like a steering wheel -- rendering the ailerons immovable on the ground.

The rudders can be moved, but just a little. They are inter-connected with the ailerons, and there aren't any rudder pedals. You can't check the flaps, cuz there aren't any. The rest of the pre-flight is normal.



Start up is a bit interesting. One pump of the primer, turn the key to "both" magnetos, and then PULL the starter handle out, hard. This engages the starter, and the little 85 horsepower Continental pops right over. The pull starter seems odd but remember that contemporary aircraft of the Ercoupe -- Taylorcrafts, Luscombes, Cessna 120s -- all had to be hand-propped, so this set up was way ahead of its time.

Once started, you taxi out to the runway just like driving your car. There's a brake pedal on the floor, and you steer it with the yoke. After many years of flying "regular" planes, this was the weirdest part of all...

Run-up and mag check is normal, and then we trundled out onto the runway. This first flight was "NORDO" because we didn't wear headsets (and there's no speaker for the radios), so we just shouted at each other over the engine noise.

And wind noise! The Ercoupe has a three-part canopy -- two side glass panels that slide UP out of the fuselage, and one moveable roof panel that can be slid to either side. When the temperatures are warm, you can fly it with the top down -- just like a convertible. And, of course, the temperature was pushing 90, so we opted to leave the sides down, elbows in the slipstream!

After a clearing turn, onto the runway we rolled. Without further ado, Keith fire-walled the throttle...and not much happened but a lot more noise. Slowly, we began to pick up speed, and -- after about 2000 feet of roll -- we hit 60 mph and just levitated off the runway! The bird flew!

Glancing nervously at the wings (that we so recently had moved on a trailer), I was gratified to see no signs of flex or twist. The little plane kept accelerating, slow but sure and we were soon climbing out at a whopping 300 feet per minute. Sedate, to be sure -- but with 420 pounds of "guys on board", and hot weather, we were happy to see even THAT anemic rate of climb.

Rounding the bend from crosswind to downwind to base to final, we were lined up with a slight crosswind from the left. Without rudder pedals, Keith simply crabbed the plane a bit all the way to the number, holding a fast 70 mph "just in case". This resulted in a floating touchdown, but we figured too fast was better than too slow for our first landing.

Then, it was my turn! This time I grabbed my headsets, so we could test the radios -- and quickly discovered a nasty surprise. At 6' tall, I was unable to wear my Lightspeed headset with the top up! My neck was bent over at about a 70-degree angle -- something that would make flying "interesting". How in hell I hadn't noticed this before is beyond me, but I guess I just never sat inside with the top up and my headsets on!

No problem -- we simply flew with the center canopy section pushed a bit more over onto Keith's side (he's 6" shorter than me), and my head sticking outside. No problem with the temperature pushing 90 degrees, but this would be a serious impediment next winter! More on this later...

The throttle is this cool, art-deco quadrant slider, and I firewalled it and waited. Normally, with the temps this hot, I'd lean to best RPM -- but the Ercoupe has no mixture control. The carb is wired to full rich (there's an STC'd mod to add a mixture control, but -- at \$900 -- we've decided to wait on that one), so no dice there.

In another slider next to the throttle (where you'd expect the mixture control to be) is the elevator trim control. Cool looking, but not exactly "normal"...

Weirdness aside, the plane flies like a dream! With dual rudders, and limited rudder movement, combined with full-span ailerons, it's surprisingly responsive in roll. Climb is artificially anemic, because of the limited elevator travel (which makes the plane "stall proof", as advertised), but certainly adequate for this class of aircraft. In the end, it's a "knock-around" aircraft for us, and a "cheap flying" aircraft for our kids -- and it fits the bill in both regards. Our estimate is that we should be able to rent the plane to our kids for just FOURTEEN DOLLARS AN HOUR, dry!

Coming around on final, I pulled the yoke back to a steady 65 mph -- a bit slower than Keith's approach speed. The Model E has a "stop" in the elevator that -- if pulled to that spot -- will hold the plane in the landing attitude.

Then, in the final flare to land, you give the yoke a good, hard pull -- which allows you to pull PAST the spring-induced stop, giving you the extra flare necessary to land nosewheel up.

So, we're happy. All that remains is for our CFI to sign us all off (unfortunately, he's currently on the "American Barnstormers Tour", flying his '29 Travel Air all over the midwest), and we'll be good to go. What a fun little plane to fly!

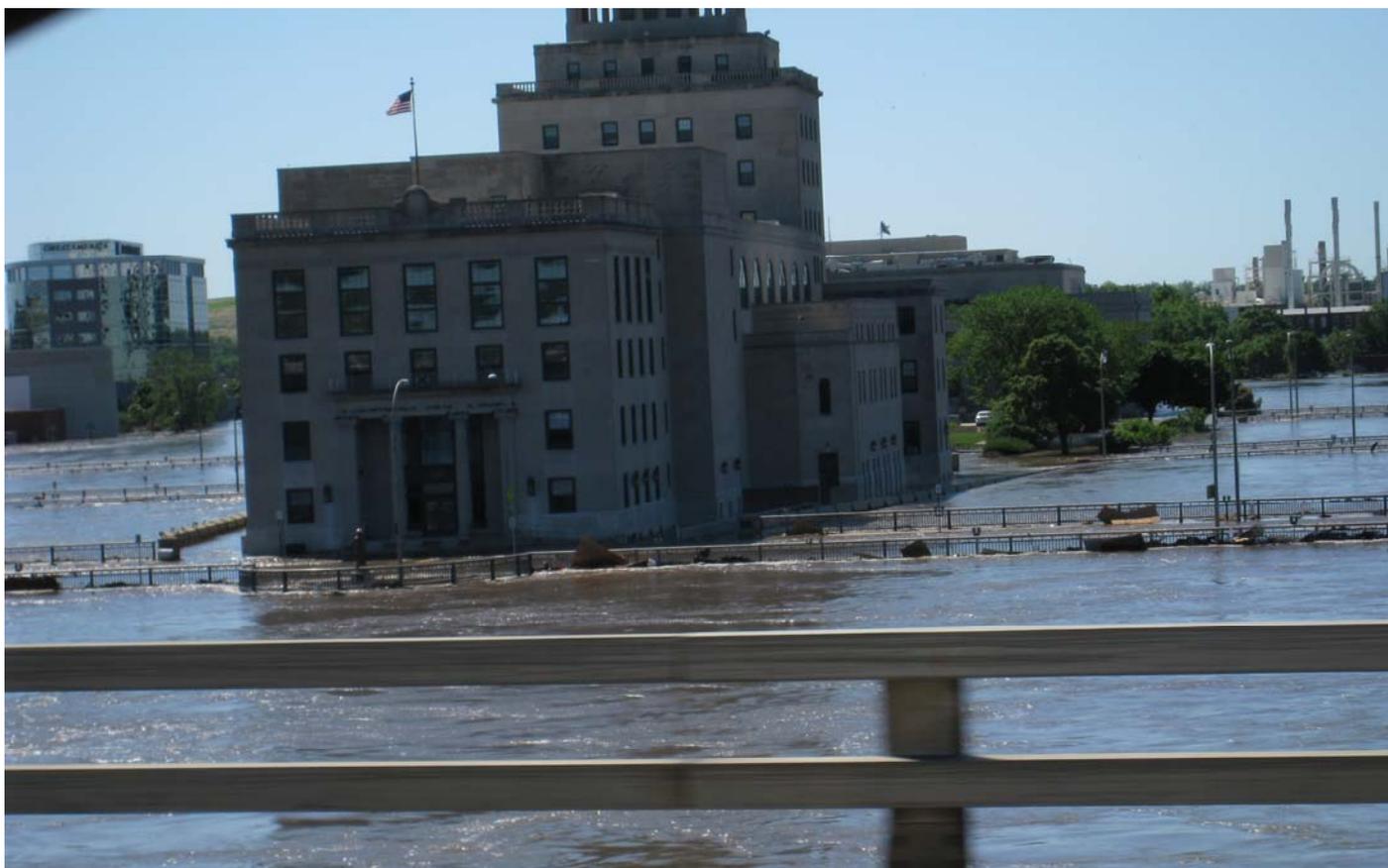
And what about that "head out the top" problem? Having a partner who is a grand champion homebuilder is a real plus. Within two hours Keith had built a modified bucket seat for me that lowers me a full two inches, and pushes me back a full two inches -- giving me all the headroom I might need. Now I can keep my head in the plane, with or without headphones...

Now, we're gonna have to arm wrestle to see who gets to fly the 'Coupe to Oshkosh this year



The Great Flood of 2008

We here in Eastern Iowa have had a stressful few weeks. Less than a month after the devastating F5 tornado that hit Parkersburg, the Cedar and Iowa Rivers rose to record levels, flooding towns and cities all along these rivers. The flooding also shut roads and bridges including I-80 and I-380 making travel difficult. Many events were canceled including our Chapters B-17 visit as well as our June Meeting and also the Barnstormers event in Iowa City. As I write much of the waters have receded but many people will be working for a long time to get their home and business back into the condition they were before the floods.



Washington Young Eagles

Before the flood came we did have excellent weather for the Washington, Iowa Fly-in Breakfast and Young Eagles event. We flew 34 kids and we all had a great time. Many thanks go to all the pilots and to the ground crew for making it a successful event.



Last Meeting - Canceled

Due to the flooding we had to cancel our June meeting. We hope to get Tom Potts back some time to talk about aircraft electrical systems.

Next Meeting – Project Visit and Cookout.

With a little help from the weather gods, we will hold our July meeting at the Eastern Iowa Airport, East T-hangars. Jack Rezabek and Jerry Maxwell will show off their Zenith Zodiac CH601XL. We also hope to get several other of the East-T dwellers to show off their planes, including a newly recovered T-craft, newly re-engined Sonex, newly painted Lancair, newly upholstered Stinson Voyager and what ever else might show up.



We will gather Saturday 5pm July 12th at Jack and Jerry's hangar. Drivers can take I-380 to the Wright Brothers Blvd. exit towards the airport, then turn south on 18th St. SW, go past the approach end of runway 27 and the East-T's are just before the Guard Armory. If you don't have an CID gate pass then you can park outside of Alpha Omega Aircraft's Hangar #51 and come through there. Or fly-ins are welcome, just ask the tower for directions to the East-T's.

We will provide burgers, brats and drinks. We ask everyone to bring a side or desert to share. We also ask everyone to bring their own chairs. I hope to see you all there.





Fly Market

FOR SALE BUSHBY MUSTANG II KITPLANE, Folding wings, completely unassembled, 25 gallon fuel tank, can accommodate an engine up to 210 hp. \$9000 Aviation tools pertinent to this kit are available and can be purchased separately. More specific information can be obtained through the Bev Streba bevstreba@cox.net 402-493-2198

FOR SALE One tenth share in a 1975 Piper Arrow. Cloud 9 Flying Club. Full IFR. Hangared at CID. Asking \$6,000 or best offer. Includes 12 hours flight time. Moved, must sell. Keith Johnson (217) 483-7929.

FOR SALE Garmin 96C in at \$450.00. I think they sell new for around \$495 but I've included the auto kit which is another hundred or so. This is a small battery operated color display with obstructions. It will run for 12 to 13 hours on two AA batteries. I've got a 496 now and have to use my gell cell to keep it running! Jim Zangger 712-477-2230 (home) 605-370-1139 (cell)

FOR SALE GOLD WING aircraft in flying condition - Ken Dodson 319-629-4669

FOR SALE Wing & tail parts for UltraLite type airplane. Any Offer - John Banes 319-846-2033

FOR SALE P-38 Lightning ultralight for sale. - Dan Knoll at 848-4406 for details.

FOR SALE 2000 Phantom X1 Ultralight, 125 total hours, Rotax 447 engine, BRS 750 parachute, 10 gal tank, Great Flying Aerobatic Airplane, More info available at www.phantomaeronautics.com \$7000 or make an offer, - Jerry Maxwell Phone (319) 393-8560

Chapter 33 Calendar

July 12 5pm Chapter meeting, Zenith Zodiac CH601XL project visit, CID East-T hangars.

July 12 Zangger Vintage Airpark Fly-In Supper

July 18-21 Visit from "Sentimental Journey" B-17, Ames Airport

July 19 2nd Annual Planes, Trains & Automobiles Pancake Breakfast, Oelwein Municipal Airport

July 20 Algona Pilots Association Flight Breakfast, Algona Airport

July 20 Annual Pancake Breakfast, Forest City Municipal Airport

August 8-10 FLY IOWA 2008, Wings, Wheels, and Water, Storm Lake Municipal Airport



Do you see me NOW?

In The July 2008 Issue...

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