



Winchester Mayor Larry Omps spins the propeller to the 1946 J-3 Piper Cub airplane he restored as he and his son, Justin, get ready for a trip from Winchester Regional Airport. Omps restored the plane in his basement during the winter. Star Photo by Don Worthington

Rebuilding This Cub Was a Bearable Task

By DON WORTHINGTON
The Winchester Star

Like many people, Winchester Mayor Larry T. Omps likes to retire to his basement or garage to tinker on projects.

He's wiled away time refurbishing furniture and overhauling a car or two.

So when Omps said he was working on a project in his basement during the winter of 1997, few gave it a second thought.

It was far from a commonplace project, though.

First, you have to understand Omps's basement and garage off Omps Drive isn't your run-of-mill storage area. The garage is three bays wide. The upstairs has been finished and is the home for Omps' train collection. There's more than 1,000 square feet of space in the basement.

He was restoring a 1946 J-3 Piper Cub airplane.

Aviation has been one of Omps' passions since 1968 when he qualified for a private pilot's license. He has more than 2,000 hours of flight time and is part-owner of a twin-engine Piper Navajo.

He's also been captivated by the Cub's tale. The license plate on his Corvette convertible reads "PIPER-CUB." Behind his desk at Omps Funeral Home is aviation artist Burt Mader's print "Homecoming Queen," depicting a J-3 returning to Lock Haven, Pa., airfield.

Originally Omps predicted it would take him years to restore the plane. Yet, after a winter's worth of work, the plane was restored. What arrived in pieces was again whole.

On July 2—with his wife Nancy in the front seat—Omps flew the plane from the Winchester Regional Airport.

It was fitting that Nancy was the first passenger. Officially she's the co-owner of the plane.

The connection, however, is more than just ownership. Call it fate, kismet, providence, Nancy Omps' connections to the plane are more than



This is Piper Cub emblem on Larry Omps' restored plane.

FAA paperwork.

Consider. • The Omps purchased the plane from Pete Basaraba of Ft. Frances, Ontario. Basaraba's nickname for the plane was "Nancy."

"There's no way we could change that," Larry Omps said recently of the nickname.

• During the 36 years the plane was registered in Canada, its registration was CF-NCS. NCS are Nancy Omps' maiden initials—Nancy Caroline Swarthart.

And for Larry Omps, working on his Cub "Nancy" was therapy of sorts. He did the restoration at the same time his wife had cancer. When she went to bed early, he retired to the basement to work on the plane.

Therapy has now turned to unadulterated flying fun for Omps, and his son, Justin.

With a top cruising speed of 75 mph there are times the



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plane is barely making any headway against the wind," Omps said. Cars often move faster than the plane. Sometimes it seems cows are moving faster than the plane too, Omps said.

"It's like sitting on a plywood board and going real slow," 19-year-old Justin said before a recent flight. "It's pretty simple to fly, it's real spartan. There are no avionics and you have to extra-wary of other air traffic."

Simple to fly, Spartan equipment. The words almost echo the sale pitch Piper Aircraft Corporation made in introducing the J3 Cub in 1938. All total, Piper built 14,125 of the single-engine planes before pro-

duction ended in 1947.

Cub No. 15793 rolled off the Lock Haven assembly line in the winter of 1946, one of 1,320 built that year.

It was sold to DePanti Aviation Co. of Minneapolis on Feb. 5, 1946, for \$2,010.

Seven owners later the plane was exported to Canada on Dec. 5, 1960 when Basaraba purchased the plane. Off came the planes' wheels, replaced by pontoons or skis, depending on the season.

Basaraba owned the plane until Nov. 13, 1966, when Omps purchased it.

Days later it arrived at Omps' home, safely strapped inside a rental truck.

The fuselage was rolled into Omps' basement and he went to work.

Off came the fuselage's fabric skin. The wings were sent to Ruckert A. Tibbs in Forest for recovering. Omps tackled the fuselage resurfacing himself.

"I did it after reading a book, seeing the video," Omps said.

The plane's skeleton was covered with Dacron. The fabric treated with a sealer and then heated to 225 degree to shrink the fabric, taking out the wrinkles.

"Replacing the fabric was fairly enjoyable," Omps said.

Fifteen coats of Piper yellow paint followed. Like Henry Ford's famed Model T, Piper's planes came with only one color scheme, bright yellow with black accents.

Omps had to completely rebuild the cockpit. The plane's rear seat was missing. New shoulder harnesses and disc brakes were added. Thomas E. Schweitz of Aero Services of Winchester overhauled the 85

horsepower Continental engine. Restoration was almost complete when Omps tried installing the plane's windshield. After carefully custom fitting the windshield, Omps tightened the holding bolts one by one. Just as he was making the last turns on the last bolt, the windshield cracked.

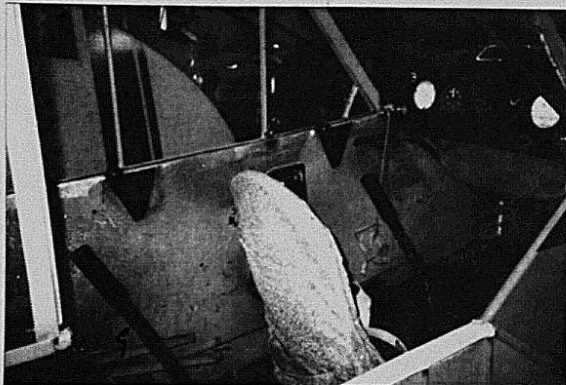
"Installing the windshield was the hardest part," Omps said.

During the renovation Omps applied for the plane's registration number from the Federal Aviation Administration. He requested—and got—N-88176, the number which the plane left the Lock Haven factory more than 51 years earlier.

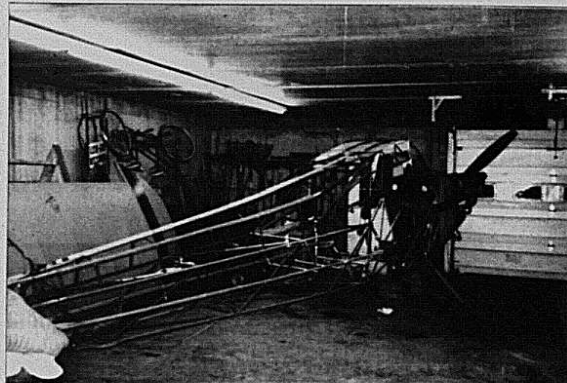
Excluding labor Omps estimates the project cost him about \$26,000. Renovated Cubs are highly sought by aircraft enthusiasts, yet Omps said he has no intentions of selling it.

"It's a better investment than a CD," he said.

And obviously, more fun to fly.



When Omps started restoring the 1946 J-3 Piper Cub airplane late last year the cockpit (in left photo) was missing the back



seat. Omps stripped the plane of its fuselage fabric skin and replaced it. After the new fabric skin was in place, Omps

Painted the Cub with 15 coats of Piper yellow paint. The wings were recovered and the engine returned before its first flight.