

Falco Builders Letter



Bill Russell and the 66th Sequoia Falco to fly.

Russell Up a Falco

by Bill Russell

I guess that for 20 some-odd years, some of my friends and I have been going to Oshkosh and enjoying the wonderful plethora of aviation history and artifacts. And, during those years, I have always admired the beautiful homebuilt aircraft and the workmanship that was on display. Little did I know that I would someday myself build an aircraft like those that I saw there.

Some six years ago, I saw an ad for the F8L Falco in an aviation magazine and I thought—wow, what a beautiful bird! I hadn't done any woodworking since junior high school, but I always had enjoyed the thought of having my own shop, and making something useful.

I sent off for the plans after calling Alfred and talking about my interest in building the Falco. He told me to contact a gentleman in my area who had some two years before completed his Falco—Cecil Rives. After talking to Cecil, I ordered my first kit—the tail section.

I have had an old Twin Beech for 20 years, and I am also fortunate to have a 75'x75'

hangar where I started to build my Falco. The kits are sequenced so that if you find out you're not cut out to build this aircraft, you have time to quit without having spent a great deal of money (unless you buy all the kits up front—then it's your own damn fault!)

After I had the wing most of the way done, I got the feeling that I was somehow “over the hump” and that I was going to finish my

In This Issue:

- 4 Kairys Brings Cup Home
- 8 If It Looks Bad, It Is Bad
- 10 West Coast Fly-In Eleven
- 11 Construction Notes
- 12 S-TEC & GPS Installation
- 14 One More Falco Finale
- 14 Goings On at Sequoia
- 15 Susan/Angela's Corner
- 15 Calendar of Events
- 16 Andrea Plows Field
- 17 Sawdust
- 18 Mailbox

bird at some near future time. The fuselage was not as complicated as the wing, but I managed to get the vertical stabilizer out of position by 3/8” even though I measured that bugger every way I could think of.

I then started to look around for an engine and Cecil put me on to a deal where an individual with a Piper Arrow was trading their engine for a newly overhauled one and the dealer that was taking it for a core said I could buy it from him. It turned out to be a first-run engine with nitride cylinders and 1967.00 hours. I had it checked by a shop that I've used down here, and they put it in good condition for some 30-40 additional hours of flying so that I could get the 25 hours required before I sent it off to be overhauled.

When it came time to do the first flight, Alfred was concerned that I was going to get in trouble because of the sensitive nature of the bird's controls. I won't tell you that I was cavalier toward his concern, but I felt that I had enough experience to handle her knowing exactly what Alfred meant when he said that the controls were very sensitive, and many first-flight flyers had trouble with a “finger control aircraft.”



Bill Russell assembling the aileron/flap.

I made the flight on a Sunday morning, and no one knew I was going to do it except Ray Thompson, my partner in the Beech, who had a handheld radio and to whom I transmitted the performance figures on the Falco. I am now into 11 hours on my bird, and am becoming more comfortable with the way it flies. In smooth air it is a joy, in thermals it is a tiger!

I hope to do the interior this winter, and while that is being done I will send in my engine for overhaul possibly to Firewall Forward in Fort Collins, Colorado. This will take at least six weeks and probably put me into next year.

With the interior and engine done, I'll then take it to P & J Paint, who did our Twin Beech, and have her painted—red, naturally! I know at the next Falco fly-in I'll be given the usual examination, but I hasten to say that it will not be another Nason Airlines Special.

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As of this writing, I have not finished the nose gear clam-shell doors, although I'm on my second attempt, and the autopilot is not working as it should since it wants to go right when it should go left and the altitude hold puts it in a dive!

But these things will be corrected, and I'm looking forward to the bird being finished to enjoy its excellent performance in some trips I'm planning. In closing, I would like to say that I've really enjoyed the camaraderie and friendship of so many of the Falco owners that I've met, and I would be remiss if I did not mention the great Falco Newsletter that has helped me in more ways that I can say.

Of course, there is Alfred—when I would call for some information he would tell me “Russell, why don't you read the plans?”



Jurgis Kairys Brings Home the Cup, At Last

by Jonas Dovydenas

The last time I reported to my fellow Falco builders about Jurgis Kairys he had flown his SU-26 under ten bridges in Vilnius. He completed every beaucroatic maneuver in securing permits and amazed an audience estimated at 150,000. It was an astonishing accomplishment—where in Europe would they let you fly under even one of their bridges? What I didn't know was that he did not entirely get away with it. The tobacco and liquor commissars nailed him for advertising cigarettes: he had “West” and “Prince” stickers on his plane. Lots of them. In its haste to suck up to the eurocrats of Brussels, the Lithuanian parliament had banned all cigarette advertising with no phase-out period, a short time before Jurgis' flight. Guilty as charged, Jurgis was fined 5000 lits (\$1,250).

Then things got interesting. Vytautas Landsbergis, the president of Parliament, and fan of Jurgis, paid the fine. He said the words “prince” and “west” were just words, not necessarily advertising. In a country where everyone still puffs like they were packing to take the next boxcar to the gulag, cigarette advertising seems to me like a take-the-money-and-run proposition. In Jurgis' case, it was take the money and fly. The press ate it up. It was an absurd and poorly drafted law. In fact, the European court had thrown out the EU version as unconstitutional.

But before you blink at the thought of a politician being generous with his own money, consider this: it may have been evidence of an even rarer trait—a guilty conscience. Though it was bad legislation and he opposed it during debate, Mr. Landsbergis did not keep the bill from going to a vote, as he had power to do, thus preventing it becoming law.

That was last year. This year I arrived in October a day after the King of Sweden deplaned from a commercial flight with a couple of friends to shoot ducks somewhere deep in the pagan woods and swamps of Lithuania (Lord knows, there are no forests in Sweden). I came to continue my own shooting of photos of the still visible detritus of the Soviet Union in Lithuania. Then, two days later, Jurgis returned from Japan, triumphant, holding the Grand Prix World Championship Cup in his hands. After ten years of being in the top five unlimited acro pilots in the world, the big prize was his at last. He was front page news. He was a national hero. He was indeed a true and photogenic champion with a knock-out lovely wife and two young sons, one of whom was already doing aerobatics as he was learning to fly.

And in his moment of glory, he announced that he was not going to compete any more—he was going to run for president of Lithuania. This was a stunning maneuver no one expected nor could quite believe, like the rolling three-sixty he first dem-

onstrated twenty years ago, or the hover, or the cobra. It was absolute Jurgis, and I will get back to it so we can appreciate the genius of the man in full.

The idea of a Grand Prix in aerobatics is not new. The top pilots in that small realm have always felt frustrated by the protocols of competition flying. Jurgis thinks flying the same routines over and over hundreds of times actually keeps pilots from thinking about flight. He would like to change the way judges score a routine. He would like to see the box enlarged or eliminated. He thinks flying to music is the way to go. So when Eric Mueller had a discussion with one of the directors of Breitling at the 15th world championship competition in Switzerland in 1990, the seed was planted in the right place. Many of the directors of Breitling are professional pilots. The idea appealed to them and a decision was made to support an aerobatic competition that would not bore the public with hundreds of pilots boring the same holes in the sky hour after hour.

The Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) World Grand Prix takes place over the course of a year as a series of four events. Each event has its own winners. The pilot who has the most points after the four competitions gets the grand prize. Prizes are awarded to formation as well as solo flying. In addition, the machines are ranked and their makers awarded a prize. In the competition in Montegi, Japan, in October this year, the





Extra, flown by Peter Besenyei was judged to be the outstanding machine. But usually the Sukhois and their pilots are the champs over and over again.

The events are as much an air display as a competition. The show part attracts a huge audience. The competition part determines who gets to dwell on top of the world. The rules are: pick four minutes of music you like, fly to it, impress the judges. The judges have seen a thousand times every piece of your routine done to perfection. So you have to put those pieces together into an aerial dance that never has been seen before. Show that you can fly like a butterfly, or a crow having fun. Display continuity and structure. Invent, if you can, a new maneuver. Jurgis can claim quite a few. Do this four times, and you get to be the world's best pilot. Some of us fly our Falcos pretty well, but we'll qualify as Clark Kent's wingmen before we can reach Jurgis' level.

The 1999-2000 cycle was held in China and Japan. The first event was in Motegi, Japan. Jurgis was in first place flying his SU 26. Victor Tchmal second, Nikolay Timofeev third, Peter Besenyei fourth in an Extra 300S, Kirby Chambliss, the only American at this level, flying fifth in an

American-made Edge 540, Klaus Schrod in an Extra was sixth, Segei Boriak was seventh, Martin Stahalik was eighth, and the lovely Svetlana Kapanina was ninth. These were the contenders whose names appeared in varying order throughout the series.

The second event was held in Zhang Jia Jie in China. The third in Wuxian where due to mechanical problems with his plane, Jurgis had to borrow a Sukhoi 31 from the Czech team. Nevertheless, Jurgis kept his first-place lead. The pilots were also encouraged to fly through a natural hole in a big rock. Kairys flew through it upside-down. There was also talk of flying under a bridge.

Jurgis asked the Chinese officials if the bridge was insured and if anyone had gotten the permits. There were blank stares all around but the outcome was that only Chinese pilots flew under that bridge. The last event was held in Motegi, Japan, in October, 2000. Jurgis was in first place overall. All he had to do to get the grand prize was not zero out. On the day he was scheduled to fly the ceiling was so low he had to use a back up routine. A day earlier Peter Besenyei had turned in his best performance yet, in good weather. He took first place. Jurgis was second. But overall

Jurgis was unbeatable. Back in Vilnius, asked how it felt about winning, he said "I feel like all this has happened before. If I were younger I could feel excited. Now it's part of my job."

Jurgis Kairys likes jokes, driving racing cars, and low level flying. That is what he lists under "interests" on the FAI website. One of his jokes is wearing a blue wig. He looks oddly like a demented Seiji Ozawa as he walks the ramp waving to his amused pilot brethren. But in the air the cockpit video picks up the bright blue hair shooting straight up as if he were about to collide with a flock of ghosts. Jurgis has his joke and the TV audience has a big, blue g indicator.

Every pilot has his own personal limits. Every fatuous aviation article tell us not to exceed those limits. For Jurgis, flying inverted with the fin six inches off the ground or water is his personal low altitude limit. "I'm unable go any lower," he says. But he does—when he is able to borrow a Formula 1 car from a friend. His friend is Mikka "The Iceman" Haakinen. Mikka is like Jurgis—also the best in the world. When Jurgis asked Mikka if he was coming to Lithuania to watch him fly upside down under a bridge, Mikka wanted to know who was going to be there. Jurgis told him



In Japan, practice-flying to Mozart's Piano Concerto in C.

there would be over a hundred thousand people, CNN, a lot of Euro channels, and every TV camera in Lithuania. "Of course I'll come," Mikka replied. Mikka landed in a corporate jet, with an entourage, and his own security detail. They were wearing silver Team McLaren uniforms with the West cigarette logo next to the Mercedes star. If Mikka was advertising those horrid coffin nails no weasel deep in his beaucroatic burrow dared to get in the way of Mikka's trajectory. That's the difference between Grand Prix Formula 1 and not so Grand Prix unlimited acro.

It's a difference Jurgis would like to see erased. Formula 1 races have a huge following. There is a mystique about it.

Jurgis Kairys



The little million dollar cars go round and round, their engines whining in contra-tenor ecstasy. The drivers are exposed to maybe five g's max. The cockpit is tiny compared to what's in an aerobatic aircraft. The driver and car are close to being out of control. The driver who comes closest to not crashing in the shortest time, wins. It translates well into a spectator sport on TV. Moreover, crashes are not always fatal and if on fire, the driver has a minute or so to contemplate life before his fireproof suit begins to melt. Thus, I suspect, many spectators feel it's okay to sort of want to see a crash. Whereas I don't know of anyone who thinks it would be kind of cool if an airplane fell out of the sky during an event. That makes acro seem farther away from the boundary between life and death.

Another problem is that airshows are slow. Huge crowds of people amble about looking at or daydreaming about flying machines. The warbirds come and make the sounds that tranfix us, the Blue Angels fly as one. There is the grazing on carnival food. There is an atmosphere of languor which won't play on TV—everything is lost in translation. Or, in a typical aerobatic competition, hundreds of pilots risk their lives to fly a more perfect figure, but

the pilots and their friends usually outnumber the audience. Ice fishing looks more exciting on TV than watching a hundred snap rolls on top of a loop.

Jurgis and the FAI would like to make competition flying into a popular TV sport. He has seen Mikka's world, and he wants in. He knows going from plus-twelve to minus-ten g's fifteen times in maybe a minute is worth showing to the world. He has been at the center of adulation in China and Japan so he knows aerobatics and show business can mix. Jurgis flew under bridges to get the media's attention. He raced formula cars with his Sukhoi knife-edge 15 feet above a track in Japan. He mounted video cameras on the tail, on the wing, and inside the cockpit. Several cameras on the ground provided continuity. The screen would change from Jurgis' sagging face and lolling head to a view where the earth is where the sky should be, and it looks like a fly-by of the moon in a space craft. Four minutes to music begins to seem like a long time. In China the video went out live and was later re-broadcast. Perhaps a billion people saw Jurgis and the eight other pilots. If aerobatic flight ever achieves the kind of status and budgets commanded by F1 racing, it will be in part due to Jurgis' vision and determination.

Jurgis is an aeronautical engineer, Sukhoi's test pilot, and his own aircraft mechanic. He was involved in the design and performance engineering of the Sukhoi 26, 29, and 31 models. These are the reigning acrobatic machines of the world for the last ten years. If the Sukhois are bears (oops, excuse me) to control, blame it on Jurgis. He had the planes built for pilots at his level. Presently he is working on a next generation prototype. He does not talk about it very much. He told me it has characteristics he doesn't fully understand. During a photo session in a hangar, I saw some fixtures that most homebuilders would recognize. He saw that I saw. "Please don't say anything to anyone. I will bring it out when I'm ready." Maybe when Jurgis is ready to show what the new plane can do we will see the ultimate acro machine—only Jurgis will be able to fly it.

The style of acrobatics we see today was developed twenty years ago by Lithuanians Stepas Arishkevichius and Jurgis competing with each other while on the Soviet team, coached by another Lithuanian, Pranciskus Vinickas. When Stepas was killed in an accident, his place was taken by Rolandas Paksas, a young pilot who attracted world attention flying in competition in Australia in 1982. Today Paksas is the Prime Minister of Lithuania (are pilots trying to take over the country? Stay tuned). An early convert to the new style of continuous rolling and tumbling was Manfred Schtrossenreuther, who died in an accident in 1986. Today every unlimited pilot flies in the style promoted by the Lithuanians in the sixties.

It's hard to think about acro without thinking of death by obliteration. I have been in Oshkosh when pilots augered in. I have read the preliminary accident reports that appear every month in *Sport Aerobatics* magazine. Since 1993, five world class pilots have died. Alexander Lubarets, a Russian, Natalia Sergeieva, the world champion in 1990 crashed in Moscow in 1995, a year later Rick Massagee in a Sukhoi with a defective spar, last year Christian Schweitzer and his son, this summer John Lilleberg, whom I remember from the Orlando Breitling competition in 1996, in a collision with a Learjet. Jurgis has flown for over twenty years in this environment of violently flown maneuvers, blind chance and risk calculated to an infinitesimal margin of error. And he has been blessed with luck, the beneficent presence of the hand of fate which let go of Massagee and Lilleberg. There is not a trace of bravado in his speech and demeanor. Personally, I

was most impressed with discovering that Jurgis does not take unnecessary chances. That's how I think everyone should fly.

Lithuanian TV has made a video of Jurgis' flying in China. His choice of music was the dreamy and sublime melody from Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, from the movement most of us know as the theme from Elvira Madigan. Except that it is performed on the classical guitar in a way that makes Jurgis' flying seem as languid as a slow motion ballet. The music fits perfectly with the perception of flight from the ground. We see Jurgis in a vertical spiral down, but we don't realize he rolls his plane twenty-five turns in something like eight seconds. The view from the cockpit shows a blur of earth and Jurgis' head tossing from side to side. Another camera shows his tortured face framed inside a perfect helix of smoke receding into space. And we don't believe it. Jurgis is waltzing in the sky. Effortlessly. Flight and music are a single serene expression of one man's vision of where he is in the universe.

He can be forgiven for thinking he has reached and grasped a kind of perfection. But perfection is a moment, not a life. We can replay his achievements over and over, but Jurgis cannot. The man on the screen is no longer there. As a true champion he is moving on, investing the capital of his fame. His flights under the bridges of Kaunas and

Vilnius were designed to show his little country to the world. He asked people to come and look at him, and they did. The Grand Prix gives him leverage to say things which will appear in the news the next day. He says he wants to run for president, but first he wants to explain himself.

In any country overloaded with politicians and bureaucrats populism, "peasants with pitchforks", is a scary word. Jurgis sure seems like a populist to me. He was born in Siberia. His parents were taken there in cattle cars to satisfy a political agenda enthusiastically carried out by government employees. Distrust of parties, politicians and their cronies is Jurgis' patrimony. "I have no use for parties. The people don't need them either. I have always said I belong to no party. I want to defend the interests of the people, not the (interests of the) party", he has said in an interview. "In the air you are a maniac, what are you going to be like as President?" asked the press. Jurgis calmly answered "I am going to be the same—I will know how to calculate the degree of risk. I will not attempt what is beyond my capability, what is insane. He is a patriot pure and simple.

But in politics he will not be waltzing to music with a partner he understands and trusts completely. I wish him well and look forward to the next chapter, hoping that for the good of Lithuania, there is one. □

Jonas Dovydenas on the desert somewhere in Nevada.



If It Looks Bad, It Is Bad

by Jonas Dovydenas and Laurence Gonzales

When “Empty America” arrived at the *National Geographic Adventure* offices, the staff decided that it belonged on the cover. There was a great shot showing our campsite right in the middle of the emptiest spot in America, but despite its dramatic impact—with a bonfire at sundown and the airplane in the background—it was no more than a snapshot. To work as a cover it had to be shot again. It was already on deadline when the call came on Friday night: Could we return to the dry lake bed to shoot the cover?

Jonas scrambled the Falco in Massachusetts and arrived in Chicago on Saturday night to meet Laurence. Sunday morning, there was frost on the wings as we departed Pal-Waukee Airport. Things had changed from the sweltering morning six weeks earlier when we’d left on our first trip.

Eleven hours later, we descended out of the mountains into a setting sun over Elko with gear piled high behind us in a cockpit the size of a claw-foot bathtub.

We got a few hours of sleep, and Monday morning, while getting dressed, we both noticed on the Weather Channel that a vast cyclonic weather system had moved inland off the California coast and was dumping rain and snow in its wake. The dry lake bed hadn’t had rain all summer. In

fact, a major drought had been responsible for dozens of range fires we’d seen on our previous trip. What were the chances of rain in the desert, let alone a big storm?

After a quick photo recon flight of local canyons, we had a quick breakfast and were on our way to buy some gear that we couldn’t carry. It was blowing something fierce from the south. It was about eleven a.m. Like sailors, pilots are always acutely aware of the air, the moisture, the whole ocean of energy at work in the atmosphere. Without discussing anything, we both glanced at the sky. Our pilot instincts told us that something had changed in that realm—by turns heavenly and hellacious—on which we depended for our lives. Over the tin building that housed Schneider’s Army Surplus, we saw vast sheets of creamy white cloud, rushing from south to north with a rippling horse-tail intensity.

We looked at each other. We knew we were seeing the leading edge of a low. The signs were clear: Intense winds, high ice clouds ripping along, which would eventually erect an inverted castle all the way to the ground, and a moat around it filled with rain, and the two of us locked in the dungeon.

“You know,” Laurence said, “if any rain falls while we’re on that lake, it’s going to take a Sikorsky sky crane to get us off.” With even a light rain, that superfine alkali dust would turn to an infernal sucking quicksand in minutes, perhaps before we could even start the airplane’s engine, never mind breaking camp.

“That’s if anybody finds us,” Jonas said.

Halfway across the parking lot, we turned back to the hotel to call for a weather briefing. The briefer told us that the low, with rain and snow and high winds, wasn’t due there until at least 7 p.m., and it would only bring light rain until well into the night.

“Well,” Jonas suggested, “we could fly out there and shoot until dark. Then take off and get back to Elko at night.” Risky, but if we planned the flight carefully and used instruments, we might clear the mountains.

“I’d really like to see a radar picture,” Laurence said. “I’d like to see this perfect storm.”

We drove out to the airport, where they had a computer that hooked into the weather satellites. Sonia Erikson is a Serbian flight instructor at El Aero in Elko. We got her attention when we said we were going to fly north and spend the night on a dry lake bed. She sat at the computer with us and said, “I just flew south of here with a student and saw the storm coming. The leading edge has a dust veil that goes up to seven thousand feet. We came within fifteen miles of it and turned back.”

We looked at each other. Dust veil up to seven thousand feet? That’s a big storm. And Sonia could see us considering it and added that we could sit right here and watch it come in over the field. Still we held out hope.

We returned to the hotel to reinvent our plan. Standing out by the pool, watching

Jonas’ photo: ‘No more than a snapshot’ ruled the editors of National Geographic Adventure magazine. It must be reshot.



the sky skim over with high fast clouds like a pond freezing, we talked about going out for a few quick shots and high-tailing it back. We talked about flying up the canyons for a few more of those shots. After all, the briefer had said no precip until seven p.m., and then only light rain. We were both experienced pilots with a lot of close calls under our vests, and there came a moment in the conversation when we both looked at ourselves and laughed.

"Let's get the hell out of here," Jonas said.

"Good call," Laurence said.

We threw our things in the Ford short-bed pickup we'd rented and raced to the airport. As we approached, we thought that a plane had crashed and there was a fire on the field. There was a wall of smoke rising behind the little El Aero building on the side of the field.

"That's not smoke," Jonas said, "that's a dust storm."

He raced out to the airplane while Laurence returned the truck to Hertz. As he ran back across the ramp toward the plane, the mountains were fast disappearing from view. Jonas was standing on the wing, toppling off the tanks from a fuel truck.

"Get in," he shouted, and Laurence jumped into the cockpit. Jonas shouted "Clear!" and started the engine before Laurence got his seatbelt fastened.

They taxied to the El Aero building and Laurence sat in the cockpit with the engine running, while Jonas ran inside to pay for the fuel.

As the prop blast blew the charts around, Laurence looked back. Now the mountains were completely gone, and the wall of dust was nibbling away the far end of the runway they'd use to take off.

Jonas ran out of the building, jumped into the cockpit, and gunned the engine. The little airplane swung around onto the runway and the tower controller said, "Early left turn at pilot's discretion," which told us that he was looking at the wall of dust and knew we didn't want to fly into it. Not only would we be unable to see in there, but it could choke off the engine and kill it.

The wind was 30 knots directly from our left, and as the wheels lifted off the concrete the nose swung sideways so that we skated down the runway at an odd angle.



Editors choice: Dave Nason's *Falco* is featured on the cover.

Jonas threw it into a turn, as we accelerated away, climbing toward the mountains and blue sky in the east.

We both looked back at that point and could see that the wall of dust had turned into two huge claws, one from the south, one from the north, and as we climbed up the slope in the land, they closed around the Elko airport. The visibility was being reported at nine miles when we took off and now, just moments later, we could hear the tower telling another pilot that it was four. As we crossed the first ridge heading toward Salt Lake City, the airport disappeared altogether and was gone. Now there was no turning back.

Fortunately, storms, even big ones, rarely move across the land at much more than 30 or 40 miles per hour, and we were going about 170. We quickly put distance between us and the approaching low pressure area, and we skimmed along the mountain passes and out over the Great Salt Lake and up into the Wasatch Mountains.

It was raining up there, and as we crossed a high saddle at about 12,000 feet, we flew over a blue mountain lake. Above us and on either side were clouds. As we flew through that dark cave of cloud, it began to rain. We could see beyond the range to the valley below that stretched on into Wyoming, and as the rain hit the windshield, it evaporated instantly. Sheets and veils of rain streamed down from the clouds to the mountain lake, and we passed beneath it to the sunlight on the other side.

We landed at Cheyenne that afternoon in perfectly clear cool weather. We went inside the office to check the weather computer and saw the intense yellow mass of rain that had come down over the exact spot where we had proposed to land in the desert.

It was only four o'clock, many hours before any rain at all had been predicted there. If we'd gone there, the airplane would be sinking right now into mud that would dry to concrete if it ever dried at all. □

West Coast Fly-In Eleven

by Dave and Tamera Nason

September was the date, Seattle was the place. In typical NW fashion the weather was forecast for rain and wind. The Falcos started arriving about 10:00 Thursday morning. Per Burholm was first with a long-time friend, who had grown up in the local area. Larry and Ann Black were close behind. John and Pat Harns came in the early afternoon. Jack Lange and pilot friends/support crew arrived in a nice Bonanza A36. We shoehorned the three Falcos into our hangar, and our Falco went into the neighbor's. Our old Bonanza and the A36 had to sit out in the weather, but the wood airplanes were protected.

We had planned to have an informal barbeque on our deck, but the rain arrived with the rest of the guests. We had about 40 people, including family and local fan club, stuffed into our house. Quinns from Texas, and Dorrs from California, flew commercially. Others drove, Martinellis and a new face from Canada, Gordon Cook. Jeff Morriss and his father-in-law (from the east coast) came from Oregon, and the Doppelts brought their motor home from Colorado. We even had a brave soul, Mark Wainright, from the bay area of California ride his motorcycle. He isn't even a builder! He spent the rest of the evening trying to thaw out.

Friday morning was blustery but at least no rain. We gave a few rides to those interested but with the rough air and strong winds it wasn't much fun. We got to practice crosswind takeoffs and landings. So most of the time was spent comparing notes and ideas. Dave McMurray was forced to fly his Cessna 340 to get above the ice and weather between California and Seattle.

Saturday, the weather was better, more blue sky and less wind, so we elected to fly instead of go out to breakfast. John, Larry and I, made sure everybody got to have a ride! I even got to fly on John's wing (slightly extended). That turkey took me into the clouds! I could see where we were headed, and I wanted to be closer so I wouldn't lose sight of him. We were only in the clouds for a few seconds, but I'm not used to that. John then had me back off about 1,000 feet in trail behind him while he demonstrated an aileron roll to his passenger. He then did a barrel roll, and we left him to play individually. It was interesting to watch maneuvers from that viewpoint. At one



Top: Falcos in front of the Nason's house. **Center:** Some things never change. **Above:** Blacks and Burholms leaving for home.

point Larry joined us for a three ship over the field for those on the ground.

The ladies went shopping, we took a scenic dinner train ride, some made it to the Boeing flight museum, so there were plenty of activities for everyone. Sunday morning dawned 'pea soup'. Pouring rain and 600' ceiling. The A36 took off IFR, and John and Pat Harns left later. They had to wait for the weather in Idaho to improve. Per,

Don and Blacks spent the day around the kitchen table waiting for the weather to clear. They had to go back into crew rest and were finally able to leave for home Monday after lunch. Even though the weather caused us some challenges we had an enjoyable time sharing our passion with good friends.

See everyone next year in Texas with the Rives and Russells as hosts. □

Construction Notes

I had been toying with the idea of installing an S-TEC System 30 Autopilot in my Falco for some time. Cecil Rives' article on his installation gave me the push I needed to go ahead and do it. My experience was much the same as Cecil's, but I have a couple of additional observations:

1. As Cecil said, both the roll and pitch polarity are backwards for the Falco, and may be corrected by reversing the wires to the servo motors. It is also necessary to reverse the "UP LED" and "DOWN LED" wires, to make the required trim indication correct.
2. It is not necessary to move the panel forward in order for the Turn Coordinator/Roll Computer to fit. Simply removing the connector shell leaves plenty of room. This defeats the connector locking mechanism, but the connector can easily be safety wired in place. I suspect his panel was moved to accommodate the S-TEC Directional Gyro, which I did not use.

Being able to fly completely hands off while looking at a map, finding things, etc. is a real luxury. The altitude hold function is one more step in reducing IFR pilot workload, and is a valuable addition, in my opinion.—*Kim L. Mitchell*

Last month I checked the air in my tires and after I added some in all the tires and checked a few other things, I went flying. I popped the circuit breaker on retraction and for several days I continued to have that old problem. I put the aircraft up on jacks and manually cranked the gear up. It came to a stop two turns before it should have.

When I looked up in the nose wheel well, I could see very plainly the tire resting on top of the jack screw. The other doors were still short of closing.

I decided to correct the problem in as simple a way as I could, so I glued two tapered strips of spruce five inches forward of the back wall of the wheel well. The strip on the left side goes all the way to the top of the well and rests on top of the rear of the bolt bracket that is in the top of the well. The other tapered strip stops just short of the screw jack. Both strips taper to a thickness of one inch. The longer strip is approximately ten inches, the other is seven inches.

After gluing the strips in place, I painted a thick coat of epoxy on the rubbing surface



Joel Shankle's nose gear bay.

of both strips, and then sanded smooth after it dried. Now if the nose wheel gets turned for any reason in either direction the side of the tire just kisses the strip and stops in an almost perfectly straight alignment in the top of the wheel well. It is not rocket science, but it works like a charm.

—*Joel Shankle*

Cecil Rives and I just finished going over my bird, and while we found several things that had to be done, we feel she would be ready to fly on Saturday.

Unfortunately we also found another break in the pitot system tubing! We're now contemplating how to pull the damn thing out of the wing without making a hell of a lot of inspection holes to accommodate putting a new pitot line in the

wing. I would advise any builder who has not covered up his wing to use one of the following for their pitot: a. Aluminum b. Nylo seal. There seems to be no way of telling if you have an affected batch of Poly-flo tubing. So we are going to try to fix it without making too many inspections panels in the wing to get the job done. But you really need to pass this on to the current builders.—*Bill Russell*

I'm sorry to hear about the problem with the poly-flo tubing. I'll be happy to pass your warning on to others, but I think it's a matter of identifying a bad batch and not necessarily the material. People have been using this type of tubing in aircraft for many years, and we seem to have had the very bad luck of coming across a bad batch.—*Alfred Scott*

S-TEC and GPS Installation

by Jim Petty

Four years ago I promised an article on my installation of a Navaid Devices autopilot in my Falco. I'm a little late (I really do hate to write), so instead I'm now writing about installing an S-TEC System 50 autopilot, a Garmin GPS 400 and a MagnaFlite lightweight starter in my Falco. I've removed the Navaid autopilot, and it's on its way to Mike Wiebe. It did a good job as a wing leveler, except in heavy turbulence, and a decent job tracking VORs, though I didn't use it in that mode very often.

First, I'd like to say that Cecil Rives' article on installing an S-TEC System 30 in his bird was very timely and a big help to me.

The System 50 differs from the System 30 primarily in having the computer as a separate panel-mounted unit which contains both the roll and pitch control computers. Both systems are otherwise functionally the same and cost the same, as far as I can tell. When I ordered the System 50, S-TEC didn't have a Falco installation kit (and probably still doesn't), so I ordered an SF-260 kit instead after talking with the S-TEC folks. It worked out fine, all the cable lengths were good except the cable to the altitude hold pressure transducer could have been a few inches shorter. Oh, one other thing—the SF-260 apparently has heavier control cables, so be sure to specify bridle cable clamps for 1/8" cables.

With the panel sitting on my breakfast table, I modified the panel hole below

Cutting the capstan hole.



the CDI to take the System 50 computer (it takes an octagonal hole), installed the computer, replaced the old turn and bank with the turn coordinator, replaced the DG with an S-TEC DG with autopilot heading bug, installed the pressure sensor on the side of my glove box, and wired and plumbed everything together.

I installed a 28-pin connector at the empty J4 hole on the back of the panel and brought all the autopilot wires (there are 17 of them) that leave the panel through it.

I don't know if my bird has a slightly different frame 3 location than Cecil's, or if it's the difference between the Systems 30 and 50, but I didn't have to move my panel back for the connector on the computer to clear the front fuel tank. However, I did have to modify the cable connector so the cable came off at a right angle instead of going straight back (the S-TEC folks probably wouldn't approve) and it clears the fuel tank by about 3/8". The cable is protected from chaffing with shrink tubing, and I put some Teflon tape on the fuel tank just in case they should touch when I'm boring unusual-shaped holes in the sky.

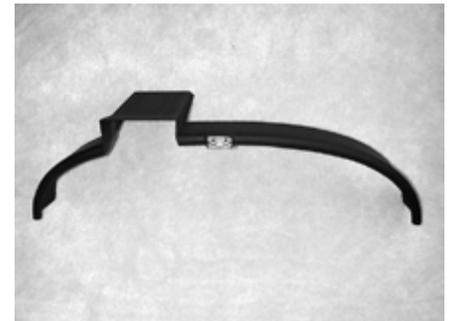
Like Cecil, I had to carve out the lower spruce mounting for the roll servo capstan. Since I don't have a right-angle drive that would fit in the space, I made a hardwood jig and used a 2-1/2" hole saw which I rocked back and forth by hand using a hex socket and persuader bar. The actual cutting took about a half hour with frequent rests to wipe the sawdust off my face. Also, I had a transponder blade antenna mounted in the center of the roll servo access cover which I had to move

outboard about 2" because it interfered with the servo shell. Right now the old holes are taped over. Someday I'll make a new cover.

The installation of the roll and pitch servos was straightforward. After reading that Cecil found his servos wired backward, I chose to turn my pitch servo around and mounted it on the right side of the centerline. For the roll servo, I just swapped the proper wires at the panel connector.

I haven't installed any autopilot switches on the stick, although I did run the wires in case I want to later. In use, I've found the computer on the panel is within easy reach and the switches convenient to use.

Okay—part two. As I mentioned in my letter in the June-September FBL, I've also installed a Garmin GPS 400 at the top of my panel, so that it's like a heads-up display. (I would have bought a GPS 430, but Garmin was too slow in coming out with a 14-volt version, and I'll be damned if I'll spend \$600 and waste 5 pounds for a 14-28 volt converter which has to be mounted behind frame 6.)



The glareshield with the cover for the GPS 'heads-up display'.

By the way, the display on the GPS 400 is so bright that it's clearly readable even with the sun shining directly on it—this is really necessary in the Falco—I tried using my laptop in my Falco once and couldn't even see if the damn thing was turned on.

My first chore with the GPS installation was to draft up the arrangement I wanted and see if it would fit—it did, clearing the windshield by a scant 1/2". I also determined by testing that the GPS 400 in this location wouldn't seriously affect the magnetic compass (it induced a max 3° error, power on or off). With the engineering out of the way, I proceeded to reinforce frame 3, cut out the opening in the plywood between it and the windshield/fuel tank diagonal frame, reinforce the sides of the cutout, and fabricate and install brackets for the GPS rack. I cut the notch in the top of the instrument panel, then took the

GPS 400 and the panel to a local avionics shop for wiring. The shop had to replace my Narco CDI with a Garmin model because the Narco one won't work with a GPS in the OBS mode.

While the shop was doing their thing, I modified the glareshield by cutting out a section and splicing in a fiberglass cover for the GPS. For the cover, I first made a plywood model, then a mold and pulled the fiberglass part from the mold. The finished glareshield looks quite good.

(As an aside, the only really good flat black paint I've found for the glareshield is Coast-to-Coast's Black Non-Sandable Primer. It's tough and doesn't gloss-up with rubbing and wear. Unfortunately, since Ace Hardware absorbed Coast-to-Coast I haven't been able to find a good substitute anywhere. Anybody have any suggestions?)

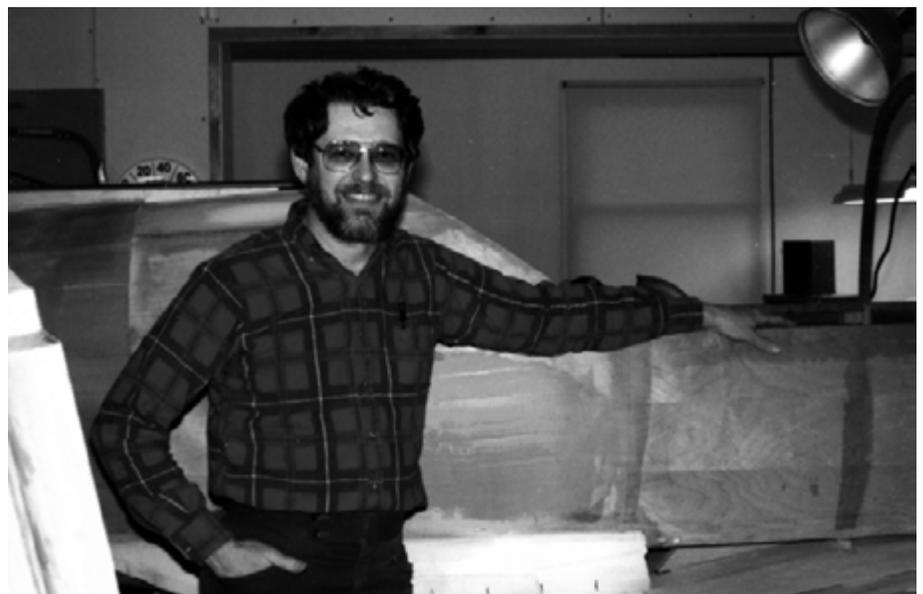
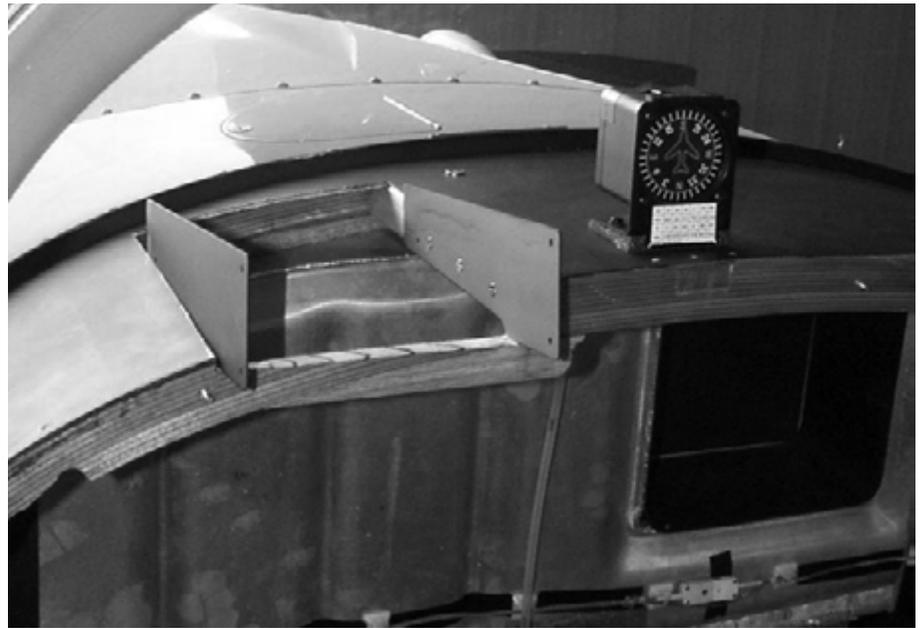
Everything went back together without any problems and systems checkouts were good.

The last thing I did was to install an ElectroSystems Magnaflite lightweight starter. If you don't mind the fact that it has a bendix, this is the one to use. The only mod required to the Falco is to put a 90° bend in the positive starter cable mounting lug. It only took about an hour to pull the Prestolite and install the Magnaflite—easy, and you save 12 pounds.

After putting everything back together and checking out the starter (works very well), I filled the fuel tanks, changed the oil, and did a new weight and balance (it's easier to calculate out the fuel weight and moment than to drain the tanks). The end result of all this stuff is that my bird lost 5 pounds and the c.g. moved a few tenths of an inch aft.

Flying with all this new stuff is a dream—really a lazy man's way to fly. I second Cecil's assessment: In flight, the S-TEC works beautifully. It holds altitude to within about 20' and tracks the CDI to within about 1/10 mile. I really like having the GPS at the top of the panel—all the nav info is right there in front of me, so I don't have to look across the cockpit to find it. The GPS 400 has so many bells and whistles that I'm still learning how to use all its features. My only problem now is that one of my lady friends is worried that I'll fall asleep and wake up a hundred miles out to sea.

Oh, yes, a final note for the cost-conscious reader—the total cost of all this was \$16,000, more or less. □



Jim Petty visiting Al Dubiak several years ago.

One More Falco Finale

by Per V. Brüel

First Alfred Scott and then Stephan Wilkinson have given up flying Falco. Now it is my turn.

I was born in 1915, and my first solo flight was in an old glider in 1933. On September 1, 1999 my licence was not renewed, because my eyes did not pass the medical examination. I really felt sad. It was difficult to believe that I was not allowed to fly any more. Not even VFR in my Falco.

I had my Falco as my personal, private plane. In my company, we have always had other planes which I flew. I accumulated approx. 9,000 hours in my life as a pilot. I have flown the Falco IV, which I bought in Trento, Italy in 1968, around 1000 hours. It is such a pleasure and satisfaction to fly a Falco. I only flew it in nice weather and never outside Europe. On longer trips in bad weather I flew an Aztec, C90 or Mooney 252.

In 1991 I sold my company and started a small business making R&D in electronics. I bought a Mooney 232, also a wonderful plane. The Mooney was officially owned by my company whereas the Falco was my own. We have an awkward tax rule in Denmark. If a company owns a car or a plane which can be used privately by an employee, the employee has to pay income tax of at least 25% of the total cost of the car and plane expenses. That can be quite a lot of money. The only way to solve the problem is when you own a car or plane yourself. So here the

Falco came in handy. It was much cheaper to pay all the expenses for the Falco than pay the 25% tax for a Mooney and still worse for the C90. During the time the Falco was always there, whereas the other planes only were ours for 6 to 12 years.

I loved the plane and felt a pang when I could not use it any more. Then I got—I thought—a brilliant idea. I have a friend, who is some years younger than me and who has lost his license five years ago. He had 5,500 hours, some of them as an instructor.

At the hospital they found with a new instrument that his cardiogram showed a small irregularity. He has probably been born with it. We then applied for permission to fly together. My friend has very good eyes, and I have an excellent heart. We made a serious risk probability study. The result was that the risk was much smaller than for a person flying alone.

The risk was small because we both as single pilots easily could pass the yearly performance check without the approved instructor noticing anything. At first it looked as if it would be approved. So I did not sell the Falco hoping that I would be able to fly for some years more. But finally after five months the bureaucrats rejected our application.

So now I shall sell the Falco hopefully to a person who will like the Falco just as much as I do and will keep it the same way as I have done: always in a hangar, always clean, fly it gently aerobatic and only stall and spin far from the ground and always make long straight landing approaches. □

Per Brüel and OY-BKC, which has since been bought by a pilot in Denmark.



Goings On at Sequoia Aircraft

In our last newsletter, I pondered the thought of cutting back on the printed version of the Falco Builder Letter and moving more to the Internet. There seems to be a strong bias among everyone to keep the Falco Builder Letter as it is, and so we'll continue with it,

but I'd like to have more and more contributions from each of you. So don't wait to be asked to write an article. Just do it.

For the past couple of years, Susan Stinnett has been planning to move back to her home

state of Maine, and so I knew I would have to find a replacement. I long ago adopted the philosophy that whenever anyone leaves me, it's an opportunity to get someone better. I don't mean that as a put-down of anyone, but nothing affects your life as much as the quality of people that you work with, and the longer I stay at this, the more particular I get. I've never failed to get great people to work with me, and each has brought a different set of skills to the job.

Brenda Avery was here for ten years, and she was a great person to work with. When she decided to retire, it took us three months of interviewing people before we found Susan Stinnett. Susan has really made a difference to Sequoia Aircraft. She has whipped the warehouse into tip-top shape—everything is unbelievably well organized, neat and labeled. She pushed me to get rid of the dreadful old Falco garments someone (else!) did in the 1970's, and to get the current line of Falco garments we now have. What a difference. And, most importantly, Susan pushed me to get on the Internet, and what a difference that has made! She also knew when to yell at me to get out of her office.

So thanks, Susan, for eight great years. If you would like to stay in touch, we will have Susan's address and email in the 'Falco People' section of our website. I'm also planning to create an entry for Brenda Avery there as well.

Angela Winstead is taking over Susan's position, and she's going to be great. Susan spent five weeks training Angela, and Susan is going to be checking in and helping Angela over the next few months until Angela is completely at home with everything—there is a lot to learn. That shouldn't be a problem, because Angela is very smart—dean's list in college. She's catching on quickly, and she's enjoying working here. Angela is also family, she's engaged to my nephew Christopher Stanley.

Last summer, Andrea Tremolada's trip to Oshkosh was cut short by some problems in arriving at a meeting of minds with a certain Brazilian customs official. But Andrea is planning to make the trip again, this time via the North Atlantic. Since Andrea is coming, and because Angela has never seen Oshkosh, we are planning to make the Oshkosh show this year, and we'll have our usual Falco Builder dinners. Part of the reason is so Angela can meet many of you, so I hope you will find this a reason to make the trip to Oshkosh. We will post our Oshkosh plans on our website as the time draws near.—Alfred Scott

Susan/Angela's Corner

Season's Greetings everyone. I hope this issue of the Builder Letter finds you all in good health and good spirits.

By the time you read this, I will have landed on home turf in the great state of Maine, a move has been in the serious planning stages for a couple of years now. I moved to Virginia back in 1976 and have wanted to come home ever since, but it's just been recently that circumstances have allowed me to do that. I'm very excited about heading off in a new direction in my life, but at the same time it's always a little scary leaving the comfortable and familiar behind.

Angela Winstead, who is stepping into my shoes at Sequoia, will do a great job for all of you. Angela and I worked together for about five weeks before I left, and I did my best to teach her everything I knew! I'm convinced that she'll be picking up the ball and running with it even better than I did. Alfred has always said that every time he makes a change he gets someone better, and I believe that will ring true this time as well.

Along with having a new face at Sequoia, there's a lot of other exciting things happening as well. Angela has gotten a bit of a baptism by fire, as we have begun a new batch of the main wing spars. Not easily intimidated, she has jumped in with both feet and doesn't seem at all daunted by new challenges. Also, we're finally getting in some of the backordered parts that we've been waiting for, and I know that those of you that have been waiting for them will be pleased. Angela will be sending the parts out to you as she gets them in.

Bill Motley has also been a big help in the warehouse, explaining to Angela what goes where and how everything fits together. I think she's already realized what a valuable resource he is.

I do want to tell you all how much I have enjoyed working with you. You are all, by far, the nicest group of people that I've ever met.

Alfred has often said what a bear he is to work for, but I've never found that to be the case. I think we're a lot alike in many ways, so maybe that's why we got along so well—at least most of the time. Alfred and I only knocked heads a couple of times, and I'm here to tell you that it isn't something I would want to do on a regular basis. I did survive it though, and actually came out of it a better person.

All kidding aside though, working with Alfred and all the Falco builders has been



Susan Stinnett and Angela Winstead

the best job I've ever had. I will certainly miss you all.

I hope everyone has a wonderful holiday season, or as is better said by someone we all know, "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night".—*Susan Stinnett*

Hey ya'll. Yes, I said ya'll. I'm from the south—can't help it. I've been here a little over a month and stuff is starting to make sense. Susan taught me what she could while she was here and was a great help. Truthfully, the first week or so I was in a total whirlwind. There is a lot of information and a lot to learn, but I think I'm putting it all together now.

We're in the process of getting that electrical kit straight—whew, what a job! The warehouse was my biggest concern when I started, but Bill Motley has been a great help. It all looks overwhelming until you find there is some sort of order to the place. Susan did a great job of that.

So far everyone that I have come in contact with has been super nice. Thanks! Right now, I'm in a bit of a transition stage, so please be patient with me. I believe the hardest thing is picking up where someone else left off. I also want to say thanks to Joel Shankle for letting me see his beautifully completed Falco on such short notice. I was seeing all of these parts and none of them were making sense, so Alfred suggested I see a Falco put all together. I could actually make out where some of the parts I had been dealing with were located on the airplane.

As you all know I will be related to Alfred. I am his nephew's fiancé. I guess some-

times it is who you know not what you know. I've heard comments on being able to handle Alfred. So far so good, I think. I'm still in the learning stage.

We are going to Oshkosh this year, and I am looking forward to the experience. I can't wait to see how everything works and to meet some of you. On that note, it would be great if ya'll would send me pictures of your progress, and let me know how things are going. We'd love to be able to put them in the builder letter and on the Internet to share with other builders. Along with pictures, some sort of explanation would be great.

I'll be heading back to the warehouse—got to keep going. If ya'll have any questions, concerns, problems, opportunities, anything—please feel free to ask. If I don't know the answer, I'm not afraid to find it. I know some of you are waiting for backordered parts, and we have a lot of parts on order. So when they get here, I'll get them out to you as soon as possible.

I hope ya'll have a great holiday season.

—*Angela Winstead*

Calendar of Events

West Coast Falco Fly-In. September 27-30, 2001 at Galveston, Texas. Contact: Karen & Cecil Rives (713) 467-9894, email: falco@flash.net or at 547 Three Corners, Houston, Texas 77024.

Oshkosh 2001. Andrea Tremolada is flying in from Italy. Angela Winstead is arriving from Richmond, dragging along Dr. Ing. Alfredo Scoti. Builder dinners, etc. to be announced on www.SeqAir.com.

Andrea Plows Field for Farmer

by Andrea Tremolada

November 1 was a sunny Wednesday. The next day would have been Falco's birthday.

I had flown back from the U.S. the previous morning, and I still was feeling jet lag from an active week spent between busy days of business.

On the way, I spent half the flight watching the North Atlantic landscape and dreaming of flying over it with I-BARO.

As soon as I woke up I saw the sun, and I immediately decided to go flying. I drove to the airport, and there my Falco was waiting to be flown. Such a beautiful day.

I was excited also to think that "one day tomorrow will be her birthday"!

After the usual check and refuelling the plane, I took off from Milano to Biella.

I didn't fly my usual route. Instead, I went north to the mountain. I played a little bit close to the mountains, and then I descended toward Biella. Everything was going well up to the moment I switched to the front tank and prepared for landing.

Three miles out, and at 1500 feet, the engine quit. I immediately headed direct to the airport. I tried a restart, switched to the aft tank, leaned the fuel, and tried a differ-



One day before the anniversary of the first flight of his Falco, this happened to Andrea.

ent throttle position. I switched again to the front tank and prepared for an emergency landing. The propeller kept turning.

The plane was flying very well and proved that the efficiency is high. The landing strip was arriving fast.

I prepared for the landing. I was still hoping to make the runway, if only I had 500 feet more. At an altitude of 200 feet, I lowered the gear, and I landed 400 feet short of the runway.

The nose gear collapsed after a few seconds in the wet mud, and I stopped in 100 feet. I opened the canopy. I was unhurt, but I couldn't understand what happened. The sun was shining, and my plane was broken.

Nobody was around. The airport was closed. For 30 years there's been a notam and the airport is closed.

There's a legend that 30 years ago, a plane crashed and the pilot died. Next year the same thing happened. They kept saying that nobody should fly in or out from Biella on Nov 1.

Ten years ago, one airport manager laughed about this and opened the field. Another plane crashed, and two pilots died. They decided to keep the airport closed on November 1 forever. I was unaware of all this. I would have not flown.

A few days later, we found the fuel vents were clogged.

Sawdust

• **Media Watch.** See the January/February issue of National Geographic *Adventure* magazine for a cover article by Laurence Gonzales and photography by Jonas Dovydenas on flying Jonas's Falco around out west. Jonas made a special trip to Nevada just to shoot a new cover shot, but they ran into a dust storm and turned back, so they got another photographer to shoot Dave Nason's Falco on the cover. Don't get Jonas started on this! And the February issue of *Interview* magazine will carry an article on Andrea Tremolada and his flight in the Falco to Brazil.

• **Having your way.** Virginia's own Nancy Langhorne went on to become the famous Lady Astor, and foil to Winston Churchill. You've all heard the famous quotes. Winston, if I were married to you, I'd put poison in your tea.—Nancy, if I were married to you, I'd drink it. Winston, you're drunk.—Nancy, I am and you are ugly, but on the morrow I will be sober and you will still be ugly.

Her first marriage was short-lived, to Robert Gould Shaw, a drinker and a philanderer. According to the recently published "Five Sisters" by James Fox, the marriage got off to a bad start on their honeymoon at the famous Hot Springs resort.

"Nancy, aged eighteen, and Bob Shaw, twenty-four, knew so little about each other that their first taste of proximity shocked them both profoundly, and effectively ended the marriage quite literally before it had begun. Nancy later, in a rare moment of candor, told her niece, Nancy Lancaster, that she had slept on her stomach for three nights before Bob took her back home. There was the question of sex—a subject that Nancy later put very low on the scale of human activities. Hot Springs was either a disastrously failed initiation, which marked her deeply, or she naturally hated the idea of it."

"Despite fleeing the Shaw home several times, or obeying her husband's command to get out, three months after her marriage Nancy was pregnant. The only clue as to how this came about was Nancy's later claim that she woke up one night to find her husband in the bedroom with a chloroform-filled sponge."

• **Why you don't mix greases.** We use two types of synthetic greases on the Falco, the red Mobil 28 for almost everything and Aeroshell 7 and 17 for the screwjacks and landing gear motor. When we selected the greases to use, the lubrication specialist who



Joel Shankle at the Great Oyster Fly-In.

helped us advised not to mix the two greases because the mixture will set up corrosion in the metal. This is apparently the cause of the crash of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 which crashed into the ocean north of Los Angeles on January 31 killing all 88 on board because a mixture of the two greases set up corrosion and stripped the threads of the stabilizer jackscrew nut. Even as they were inverted and completely out of control, one of the pilots took the time to reassure the doomed passengers that they were having some control problem but that they should get it under control. Incredibly cool and heroic crew, two guys in their 50s.

• **Faster than a speed pullet.** From *Feathers*, the publication of the California Poultry Industry Federation comes the following story: The FAA has an unusual device for testing the strength of airplane windshields, the chicken gun, which launches a dead chicken at the plane's windshield at approximately the speed the plane is flying. The theory is that if the windshield doesn't crack from the impact, it *will* survive a real bird strike.

The British were interested in this method and wanted to test the windshield of a fast locomotive they're developing. So they borrowed the FAA's chicken gun, loaded the chicken and fired. To their surprise, the ballistic bird shattered the windshield, broke the engineer's chair and embedded itself in the back wall of the engine's cab. The British engineers were stunned and asked the

FAA to recheck the test to see if everything was done correctly. The FAA reviewed the report and had only one recommendation: Next time, use a thawed chicken.

• **Few people have done more to make aviation journalism colorful than James Gilbert, who began as an advertising writer, moved to *Flying* magazine, and then bought *Pilot* magazine in England where he has been the publisher for the past twenty years or so. He is easily one of the most talented writers ever to hit the aviation scene, and a bit 'stroppy' in his own words—a tendency shared by the most talented people in all fields. He didn't last too long at *Flying* because of his temper and fiercely independent mind, but at *Pilot* he ran the magazine as he saw fit, and it was fun. So if a young couple started going at it in a plane and left the mic on, you were sure to read about it in *Pilot*. James was also a snob about airplanes, once owning a Jungmeister, and he was a passionate admirer of Stelio Frati, the Falco and the SF.260. Indeed, it was through James Gilbert's articles that I first learned of the Falco. How many red Falcos exist today because of his "Red Italian machine" line? James Gilbert recently sold *Pilot* to a large publishing company, and all indications are that they will continue the tone and personality of the magazine. But this is a man that I will miss. Thank you, James, for all you've done to enrich our lives.**

—Alfred Scott

Mailbox

Just finished reading the FBL. You MUST keep publishing the print version. It's a real treat to find it amongst all the bills and junk mail!

Not much progress on the Falco, but there has been a little. I'm about ready to start gluing the longerons. But first... we have to remodel the house. The best part of this massive project for Robin is a new kitchen, complete with Binford 9500 12-burner stove, double oven, duelling dishwashers and such. But for me, it's the eight-foot extension to the garage! Now I'll be able to work in more comfort, and I'll even have enough room to build the wing.

My other recent distraction is the acquisition of an ex-Swiss De Havilland Vampire (2 seater). If there is anything that rivals flying a Falco, this might be it! I got to fly it with John Harns, and we had a blast (he is VERY good)!

The best news of all is that last Thursday I had the Lasik procedure performed on my eyes. Wow! I now possess 20/20 vision (improved from the previous 20/200) and it is just wonderful! I was in and out of the operating room in 10 minutes, and could immediately see the results. A little discomfort for a few hours but the next day and ever since then it has been just great.

Keep up the good work!

*Pierre Wildman
Menlo Park, California*

The poster is totally AWESOME! I'm framing it today to hang in my office. Thank you!

*David Carrol
Acworth, Georgia*

I just got the marvellous poster with the Falco paint schemes. Thanks for that, my favorite will be Modena.

*Harry Castermans
Nonweiler, Germany*

My name is Mike and I'm a (virtual) Falcoholic. The primary reason is your amazing website, which I would rank as one of the finest aviation sites in all of webdom. It seems that this site comes closer than any other I've seen in fulfilling the promise of the web: a close, very human community [although a Falco dreamer like me sometimes feels a bit like a voyeur] where information, ideas and inspiration are exchanged almost effortlessly—at least, for everyone but the webmaster. My congratulations and thanks. The openness you advocate in



Top: Lynette Zuccoli's Falco. **Center:** Australian Falcos of Lynette Zuccoli, Stephen Friend and Ian Ferguson. **Above:** Leon Boizot's project takes shape in France.

your "Message from the President" is sometimes startling in its application: where else will one find a collection of technical aviation articles living side by side with reflections on depression and impotence(!)? You and Steve Wilkinson appear to be kindred spirits, and yes, your site is definitely full of life (and literacy).

*Mike Skinner
Victoria, BC
Canada*

Both G-OCAD and G-CWAG have suffered punctures to the nose gear this year and both exhibited the same failure mode. The tubes developed numerous cracks in the wall and also bore apparent scuff marks from the inside of the tyre—the marks seemed to reflect the visible tyre construction on the inside. There has been no creep between the tubes or tyres and neither have been run below correct pressure. Have you any ideas on this? Have other



Top: Dan Dorr, Neil Aitkenhead, Alfred Scott and Jack Amos at Oshkosh. **Center:** Alfred Scott, Neil Aitkenhead, Susan Stinnett and Gwyn Aitkenhead at Oshkosh builder dinner. **Above:** Neil Aitkenhead's project back in Australia.

Falco owners reported the same problem? Perhaps this is just a case of the tube perishing over time—if so, I wonder what the average serviceable life of the tube is. Your thoughts would be welcome.

*Clive Garrard
Burton Overy
Leicestershire
England*

This is all new information to me.—Scoti

We thoroughly enjoyed Oshkosh and the opportunity to meet you and the Falco "family". We were very thrilled for Dave and Tamera Nason to have received such an award for their Falco, a just reward as his aircraft is a real credit to them.

*Neil & Gwyn Aitkenhead
Main Beach, Queensland
Australia*

This is a really busy time for me at work, but I find time to visit the website every week. I appreciate you posting the articles on the website. It gives me a lot of pleasure to read what's happening in the Falco world. I also enjoy re-reading the articles of a few years ago from the library.

My son Chris has a friend who is a professor of chemical engineering at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He and his 15 year old son wanted to take a ride in a small airplane. Neither of them had flown in a light plane before. I took the father for a ride, then the son. When we got back to the airport, both of them were so excited they couldn't wait to sign up for flying lessons. They immediately went into the FBO and signed up. That was in July. Both of them are still working toward their private license. I understand the son is interested in a flying career. The credit doesn't go to my flying but is just another tribute to the wonderful Falco.

I thought you would like to hear some good news!

*Glyn Russell
Hartselle
Alabama*

I had the pleasure of a visit from Giovanni Nustrini today, and I enjoyed showing him my Falco, or at least what I have to date. During his visit he shared a funny story.

Apparently, during races, Giovanni's job was to monitor the engine instrument (whichever one... temperature I think) but, under strict instructions from Luciano, he also had to lean as far forward as he could, along with Luciano, in order to keep the C of G as far forward as possible.

Anyhow, on this particular day, here they are, metres above the water (for ground effect assistance) screaming along at some colossal speed both with their noses inches from the panel when Giovanni noticed that the needle he was trusted with was a hair into the red arc, which incidentally, was marked on top on the glass with tape. Clearly it was far too noisy to use any kind of verbal communication (I can vouch for this, I never knew what the “threshold of pain” meant with respect to hearing until I flew in I-ERNA with Luciano) so he prodded Luciano in the ribs. No response. Try again. Prod, prod.

With that Luciano pulled up slightly, glanced at the instrument, reached across, peeled off the tape, moved it a bit, then stuck it back on and continued racing!

*George Richards
Auckland, New Zealand*

Look for the Falco(s) featured in the Jan/ Feb issue of National Geographic *Adventure* magazine. Jonas Dovydenas and a friend flew to some remote parts of the western states. They submitted an article and pictures about their adventure. We were drawn into the adventure when the magazine called needing a ‘stand-in’ to re-take some pictures to use for the cover. We couldn’t believe anyone would land in the desert, or fly through narrow river canyons and live to tell about it. We also landed on a country road, (watch out for the sign posts), and taxied up to a small country store next to a cattle truck with two gnarly guys and mangy dogs lounging in front.

Thanks to Jonas, we did it too. We certainly never would have done any of this on our own, but now we have some awesome pictures and lots of stories to tell anyone who will listen.

*Dave Nason
Seattle, Washington*

I attended the Falco fly-in at Kent, WA this past weekend. A great group of people and Falcos. I flew with John Harns and found him to be probably the best person to show off the attributes of this great airplane. Even when I had the controls the plane exceeded my expectations. Frati seems to have found that fine line between stability and quick response to control inputs. Needless to say, I had a great time.

*Gord Cook
Surrey, BC, Canada*

I flew to Thomasville, GA which is a great grass roots regional fly-in on Saturday 10/14. There were 320 some odd airplanes—homebuilt, classics, antiques.



Top: Laurence Gonzales and Jonas Dovydenas in search of nothingness and solitude in Nevada. Center: Jonas low over the desert. Above: Camping on a dry lake.

and warplanes. I happened to see Ralph Braswell who had flown his Falco up from Ocala. We exchanged a few war stories and spoke kindly of you.

*Buzz Glade
Jacksonville, Florida*

copy. Is this going to be an advertisement that I may see in *Flying* or some other magazine? I especially like the fact that they are going straight up....

*Joel Shankle
Culpeper, Virginia*

That is a nice colorful display of the Falco family. I am going to get it framed and put it in a prominent place in the hangar. I certainly appreciate your sending me a

Actually, the way the poster was designed, the airplanes were horizontal and the text was vertical, but it's an aerobatic airplane, and you can mount it on the wall either way!—Scoti