



ZIG BERZINS'

# CYGNET

Jim Koenick

When an EAAer is called to the stage at Oshkosh to receive a major trophy, there is no way on that particular evening for us to know the length of the path the builder/restorer has traversed to get there . . . or the difficulty encountered along the way. That's what these articles in **Sport Aviation** are for . . . to present the "rest of the story", as Paul Harvey would say.

Zig Berzins was born in Latvia in 1929, which foreordained that his teenage years would be spent in the European battle zone in World War II. In the last desperate year of Hitler's Nazi government, impressment gangs roamed the streets of neighboring occupied countries searching for able bodied men and women to be forceably taken

1989  
RESERVE  
GRAND CHAMPION  
PLANS BUILT  
HOMEBUILT

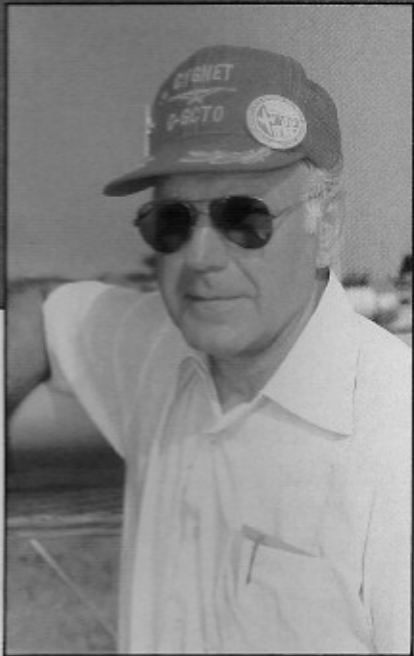
BY JACK COX

to Germany and made to work to sustain the German war effort. One of those grabbed off a street in Latvia was 15 year old Zig Berzins. He vividly remembers seeing wave after wave of B-17s and B-24s sweeping high overhead and raining down their deadly loads of bombs.

"I was hoping they wouldn't hit me,

but that they would hit everything else," he recalls.

He managed to survive the bombing and the fighting that ensued when the Allied troops finally advanced through the area where he had been enslaved, and spent the next two years in a Displaced Persons (DP) camp. He was allowed to move to England in 1947 and lived there for five years. Then, in 1952, he managed to immigrate to Canada where he has lived ever since. Zig had his own auto repair business for a number of years, but had the opportunity to go to work as a mechanic for Air Canada in 1966. Eventually, he would advance to the position of Airworthiness Inspector and today he works exclusively on the powerplants on all of Air



Mike Strook

Zig Berzins

6 years to build this thing."

Zig used the Stits covering materials and finishes, but ran out of Poly-tak before he began covering the wings. In order to save time, he substituted another brand of adhesive that was represented as being compatible with Stits . . . and glued the fabric to the top sides of his wing panels. With all the surface area presented by the lattice work struc-

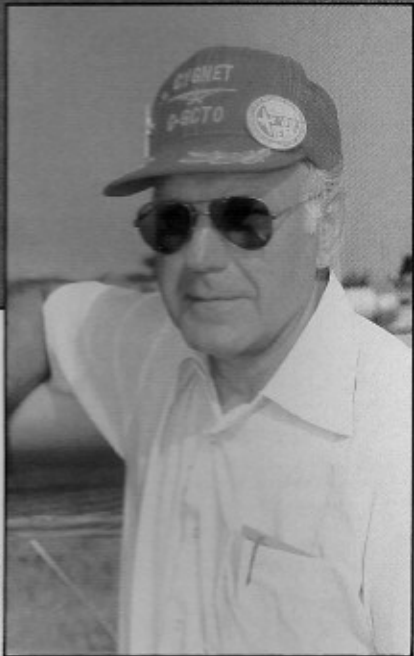
ture, most Cygnet builders do not bother with rib stitching, choosing to glue the fabric on instead. This solves a big problem because the lattice work makes it virtually impossible to rib stitch completely through the wing. Zig had decided to compromise and rib stitch just the top surfaces . . . doing so before attaching the bottom surface fabric. After all that work, however, when he turned the wings over, the fabric began to fall away from the glued areas. The adhesive was not compatible with the Stits fabric!

"The lesson in that," he says, "is to stick to the same manufacturer's products. I had to cut all my rib stitching, scrape the bad adhesive off my fabric and do it all over again, this time using Poly-tak. It worked perfectly, of course. If I had done that in the beginning, I wouldn't have had to cover the wings twice."

Being an engine man by profession, Zig naturally built up his own VW engine and he fitted the rest of the airframe

with good quality parts and components . . . things like Cleveland wheels and brakes. The latter proved to be almost too good. On the way to Oshkosh in 1987, he ran into a line of wind and showers in Michigan's upper peninsula, and ducked into the nearest airport to wait it out. He got the little taildragger on the runway, but when the wind began to weathervane it on roll out, he got on the binders perhaps a little too enthusiastically, he concedes, and stood the plane up on its nose. He managed to get the tail down and his ELT deactivated . . . yes, it worked . . . and lugged the fortunately lightweight Cygnet to the ramp and got it tied down on what turned out to be a deserted airport.

That evening he called friends in Chicago to tell them of his plight, and early the next morning they were on the scene to help him out. A survey of the damage revealed it to be limited to the prop and spinner, plus a scraped wingtip. Driven to Oshkosh, Zig was loaned a prop by Rex Taylor . . . who



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