

The GRANDDADDY of all the homebuilders' projects at the Jack Barstow Airport is actually a BABY...as in, Baby Great Lakes, which was finished from blueprints in July, 1977, by master builder Bob Baringer. It took him 5 years and 3 months to complete after 3,500 hours of work which turned all of the wood, steel tubing, and fabric into a beautiful flying biplane. This white plane with gold outlined red trim will cruise at 125 mph with its Continental O-200 100 hp engine and stalls at 55 mph. The wing span is 16 feet 8 inches, length 13 feet and 5 inches, and its empty weight is 571 pounds. The completed plane cost \$7,700 and Bob estimates that this same plane being built today would cost anywhere from \$25,000 to \$35,000.

Even though Bob had a 'day job' at the time of its completion he said that he flew about every day that first year putting on 300 hours. He grinned and said, "I was trying to wear it out!" Bob loved to do aerobatics in it and got to a top speed of 180 mph which was 20 mph shy of its never exceed speed of 200 mph. If the plane were upside down it would have been hard to read its N number, N30RB, but easy to spot Bob in his leather helmet and goggles as it was an open cockpit biplane. When asked if he flew it in the winter his reply was, "Sure, but I had to wear warm clothes such as wool shirts, and long underwear. If it were really cold then I would wear a snowmobile outfit." This picture of Bob must be completed by picturing the flowing white scarf which he said he 'always' wore – after, all they were very accessible at his Baringer's Men Shop in downtown Midland. He admitted to losing a few scarves over the years but never recovered any even though he had conducted ground searches for them.

Bob did mostly local flying with the plane but had a wonderful cross county trip of 3000 miles back in 1981. He joined a group of planes known as the 'Forty Knotters' and they traveled from Michigan to Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Alabama, and back to Michigan. The group which at times numbered 65 airplanes included all types of planes.

When asked about the avionics on the plane, he smiled and said, "A hand-held radio".

Bob got his license in 1942 and can vividly recall from his childhood in the 1920's and 1930's the sight and sound of planes flying over his house to land at the first Midland Airport. This Baby Great Lakes is the 4<sup>th</sup> airplane that Bob has owned – the others were: Aeronica Chief, Cessna 120, and a Piper Cherokee 140.

When Bob retired this airplane in 2000 he had 1300 hours on it. It's not lonely in his hangar though as it has the company of his Kolb Firefly and also Bob brings the Baby out for viewing at our pancake breakfasts and Aviation Camp – a fitting retirement!















