

AIRSPORT

Sport Aircraft Association of Australia

Winter 2022

KITFOX OBSESSION

Paul Chernikeeff's restoration



HEATH V PARASOL

A small but remarkable aeroplane

FLOODED IN LISMORE

The life + times of a Cassutt Racer

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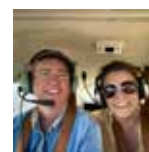


Cover :
Paul Chernikeeff +
his Kitfox

Photos supplied by
Paul Chernikeeff +
Tristan McCarthy

Welcome to Airsport for Winter 2022 and I hope you're all well.

Gary Pohlner's story sounded too familiar. He has owned his Cassutt Racer since the early 1980s and I messaged him to ask if he'd like to write us a story about this 40-year connection. He replied to my email that it would be a sad story indeed as the Cassutt was a victim of the recent Lismore floods. This is enough to make any aircraft owner's heart sink, and I didn't want to reignite the emotions for Gary, but did feel it was important to tell the story because while we see and hear plenty of success stories, we can be reluctant to share these other realities. They certainly had a good time together but after the floods, Gary couldn't bear to revisit the restoration and has sold the Cassutt on to somebody with fresh enthusiasm. I loved that Gary flew it to Valley Field in 1994 to race with/against Bob Hoover. We went to Valley Field the following year and I still remember the sound of those aeroplanes roaring around the pylons. Bob Hoover was a huge drawcard and not many will forget his long lean frame.



In seeking another history piece, it was quite a treat to receive Len Neal's Heath V Parasol story. I trimmed it down and then got to the Narromine story of landing on the flooded road. It had to stay! And I think it's wonderful to be able to look back on and record these adventures.

Our cover story this issue is Paul Chernikeeff's Kitfox, which is another restoration project that has come up so beautifully. Paul's dedication to the task is evident in the finished product and the big surprise for me was his first flight experience. 'I was getting ready for a cat-fight on touch down, but the landing was a non-event.' Perfect.

Down in Victoria, Dave Robbins talks about modifying his Zodiac to fit his long frame and I was most impressed by his efforts to save costs on the upholstery. He bought his own sewing machine and did it himself. It was an 18-year build so he definitely fits into the history category as well.

Next issue I'd like to look forward, so if you've got some techy geekiness on the go, please do get in touch.

I'm looking forward to Ausfly in September, hoping we can enjoy the socialising and flying. Tap me on my camera-laden shoulder if you'd like some airborne photos, particularly as we're always after a cover shot!

Safe travels and thanks again to the SAAA team particularly Lainey, Alicia, Su-Anne and Russell for their help in getting this issue together. And especially to our Winter contributors for their generosity in sharing their stories. Take your time to savour them.

Good news on the home front is that we got the 180 going!

Safe flying everybody.

Kathy Moxted



The Sport Aircraft Association of Australia is a group of aviation enthusiasts assisting each other to build, maintain and operate sport aircraft and educate members to continuously improve safety outcomes.

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RUST 2 RETRO ART

A KITFOX OBSESSION

PAUL CHERNIKEEFF TELLS HIS STORY, WHICH BEGINS IN THE MID 1970'S WITH BALSA. YOU KNOW THAT LIGHTWEIGHT WOODEN STUFF KIDS BORN BEFORE THE INTERNET USED TO MAKE THINGS OUT OF? HE WAS ONE OF THOSE AVID STICKY-FINGERED MODEL AVIATORS.

I began with control line models and finished in the late 1990's with sophisticated RC models of up to half scale in size and mostly powered by my own engine designs.

My favourite aircraft to model back then were those curvaceous golden era Gee Bee racers of the 1930's. I reckon I built all of them. The lines and curves were outlandish and I always joked that you could not draw a character of a Gee Bee racer as they already were one!

Skip forward 20 years and my enthusiastic model aeroplane building had made way to me

manufacturing radial aircraft engines under the banner of Rotec Engineering. I still don't know how that happened. I had such a good life.

OSHKOSH

My focus had shifted and after a few years of building Rotec radial engines I found myself promoting our wares in the USA at EAA Oshkosh in 2002.

This is when I first came across a really sweet blue and cream Kitfox powered by one of our R2800 radials. It looked so sharp and turned literally thousands of heads. I even got a chance to take her up with the owner during the show. What a buzz. I was sold as a seed was sown.

On my return to Oz, I set about seeing if I couldn't hunt down a Kitfox of my own, one that I could use as a base for my own project, Rotec R2800 powered of course.



I recalled a customer had visited us a few months earlier seeking information about an R2800 for a Kitfox. I still had his number and so I called to see if I could reverse things on him, so rather than him buying my engine I may buy his Kitfox.

We arranged to meet at his home garage in Carnegie, Victoria where he had this so called Kitfox project.

I arrived and was instantly underwhelmed. Where's the rest of it? There was a rusty steel frame and a wing kit. That was it, no doors, brakes, wheels, transparencies, no cowls, nothing!

I'LL TAKE IT

It was pure madness and I paid way too much. It reminded me of that scene from the movie *Christine* where the spell bound Arnie becomes possessed by an automotive pile of junk and while under its spell he buys it. I think the line went 'whatever you're asking it ain't enough'. But unlike Steven King's *Christine* my Kitfox was never going to build herself.

SHOW ME!

OK, so if I have to make everything, then we may as well make things how I like them, and this is where I called on all my past influences of those early 30's racers. Let's get some curves into this thing. Though I did not make any changes to the main Kitfox structure the overall shape and fairings were completely restyled to fit the bill.

I was shooting for a poor man's Mono coupe. I had reshaped the tail feathers, rounded the wing tips, lots of custom root fairings, big fat leg fairings, blistered bump cowl and cartoon-like wheel spats. These were many of the features I loved from those golden era racers of the 30's.

Custom parts were mostly made of composites, I used the exact same techniques I had developed building my RC models decades earlier. In fact most, if not all, my technical skills in one way or another stem back to those early days of RC modelling. I really am so grateful to that hobby.

Working back each night I was making steady progress on the plane and in less than a year or so it was mostly built, still in bare bones, but mechanically done.

Then as always, life got in the way: we had children, my brother and then business partner had left Rotec to go get himself a proper job (can't blame him), Rotec was restructured, I built a new shop at the Tyabb airport. So much was happening all at once that the poor old Kitfox was ignored and sat around in storage for a few years.

It still needed covering and finish, so I was about half way, as they say.

Then In 2016 with things finally settling down and with Rotec now properly established and the Kitfox now located at Tyabb, in a brand new shop, I got stuck in for one big final push.

I spent most of 2016 and the first part of 2017

covering and painting all the parts. I'd had some time to think, ideas were still coming to me, I had added a bump cowl and a few other small details.

I had to quit with all the extra details as I could see this was never going to end. But those details were sure worthwhile in the end.

Then in mid-2017 the plane was all painted and ready for final assembly. As each part was installed it was not coming back off, this was it. I would say this was the most exciting time of the project, as I could literally see the plane coming to life. This is where all the careful pre-fitting and planning pays off. Prior to this stage the builder can't see his project ever coming to light, then during this final process it all happens suddenly. It's just wonderful. I still can't stop staring at her!

PAINT

Oh and the idea of the black and silver paint scheme came to me late in the piece, It was inspired from watching the Franklin's flying circus that has aircraft painted in a similar scheme. I'd seen them several times at Oshkosh over the years.

Well there she is, sitting in the middle of my shop, with her glossy black and metallic silver paint glistening under the artificial shop lights. The feeling of satisfaction right then was hard to describe. It felt like I'd created an object of art more than an aeroplane. From here, if it never flew I don't think I'd even care.

FLYING

I booked in Big Darren *Dazza* Barnfield and he waved his magic pen and *voila*, the paper work was done and we were ready to fly off the test hours. 'Oh, by the way, nice plane,' he muttered as he made his exit from the shop.

Over the next few weeks a tone of ground running, taxiing and shake downs ensued. On one of those taxi runs she popped into the air about 20 feet, oops, this girl wants to fly. I thought I was hardly moving. I set her back down safely. It was too much excitement for me in one day. I needed a beer(s).

It was now October 2017. I had been waiting for the grass runways to dry out at Tyabb, then with some warm weather behind me and a perfectly calm blue day in front of me I thought, 'Well Paul, you've run out of excuses. Go!'

With the hearty R2800 radial warmed up and running like a top, I lined up on the grass on 17

- 1 Sold as is - Kitfox frame arrives at Rotec
- 2 110 Hp Australian made Rotec radial engine installed
- 3 Starting pattern for engine's composite bump cowl
- 4 Sanding newly styled rudder to a rounded shape
- 5 Plywood bows added to the stock Kitfox rudder
- 6 Period racing numbers, 28 is short for R2800
- 7 Clear over base paint sees the wheel spats pop!





and seriously, much like my earlier taxi runs, no sooner had I started rolling than I was airborne and climbing like a rocket. The Rotec R2800 has tons of power for the light weight Kitfox and mine has the full length, under cambered wings with lift to burn. It was great. Before I could blink, I was at 3,000 feet above the airfield, engine hardly working at just 18" Hg and 85 knots speed.

I did orbits above the field for about 40 minutes. The plane felt great, with no issues. I didn't really want to come down as I knew that meant having to land this beast. The Kitfox may look cute and friendly, but they are a short coupled tail dragger with a high nose angle and a big radial engine out front, (well big for a Kitfox). This airframe was designed around a Rotax 582 engine in its day.

I was getting ready for a cat fight on touch down, but the landing was a non-event, the leaf spring landing gear made for a nice cushioned landing.

Wow, as a Flybaby pilot with rigid gear I thought to myself, 'how long has this been going on?'

With the test flight done, I took her out two more times that day. I'm glad I conducted the test flight. After all, it was my duck to pluck and I was never going to let anyone else do it for me. Sorry Gerard!

I now have 110 hours up and I just love this little aeroplane. She's been a delight from day one. I have received some crazy offers to let her go, but I've turned them all down. This one's a keeper and I can't wait to get to some airshows and fly-ins to show off my long-legged girl. 🦋

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Top	The proof is in the pudding. Paul has a very big smile post test flight
Middle	Final touches for iconic radial bump cowl
Bottom	Rotec R2800 has tons of power for the lightweight Kitfox



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DUM'S CHALLENGE

When my grandchildren arrived, they called me Dum Dum (courtesy of my daughter-in-law) and so the project was called DUM's aeroplane.

From seeing my father's interest in building a Benson Gyrocopter in the 1960s, I was fascinated with the challenge of building my own aircraft. Years went by and I went from a gawky kid to a big gangly and still gawky adult who couldn't find a home-built aircraft that fit his height, 195cm and mass (not saying how much). I settled on a Zenith Zodiac 601XL from plans purchased in 2007 with the challenge of cheaply building my own aircraft over the 'next cuppla years'. You know how it goes, you buy a few sheets of aluminium, modify the cockpit to accommodate your own size.

It was just a packaging problem. I had to move the firewall forward, the seat rest aft and I had an extra 10 cm length in the cockpit without changing the external dimensions. So I went off and built a timber mock-up of the cockpit to confirm my ideas and find the cockpit is now 4.5 cm wider; can't be a bad thing, can it? Well the spar centre section needs to be wider and I need to re-loft this whole area to make things join up (apparently gaps aren't I.A.W. AC43)

Work proceeds, form blocks are made, aluminium is cut and possible criminal offences committed in assaulting the poor metal. Ribs and bulkheads were formed, fuel tanks made and welded and I was having so much fun I often remade things to the exasperation of fellow Chapter 18 members. Lots of sage advice was proffered. I actually listened and used my fellow members' experience and knowledge, but given a choice between easy and difficult I chose badly.

