

For
Release

At Will

Date
Mailed

October 19, 1989

Prepared
By

Bruce Annett
#77-89

Historic Lawrence Tech airplane
"comes home" after 42 years

Southfield, Michigan -- A 42-year-old student project has "come home to roost" at Lawrence Technological University.

Fresh from a five-year restoration effort, the one-of-a-kind student-built racing plane has been hung from the three-story atrium ceiling of Lawrence Tech's Buell Management Building on campus.

The airplane, designed and built by Lawrence Tech engineering students beginning in 1947, is well known by experimental aircraft enthusiasts because of its unusual design. It seats only a pilot and is a twin-tailed "pusher"-type aircraft -- so named because the rear-mounted propeller "pushes" the plane forward.

The "Spirit of Lawrence Tech" was designed to compete in national air races, and did so in 1949-51, where it was the first successful pusher-type plane to compete and the first ever entered by a college. The design included wood, steel tubing, sheet metal, aluminum, fiberglass, and canvas, enabling students, many of them returning WWII veterans, to work with several different types of aircraft construction. Speed was 128 mph but dive speeds of 250-300 mph were recorded. Safety concerns for the student pilots resulted in a larger than required wing area, which slowed the plane and made it less competitive as a racer.

The plane's restoration began in 1984 when the plane was donated back to Lawrence Tech after an absence of 30 years. The disassembled plane was a "basket case," in hundreds of pieces filling dozens of large plastic bags.

(more)

It had been rescued from destruction by donor Charles Stephens of Grand Rapids, who had purchased it from the then-owner, Mississippi State University, 12 years earlier with the hope of restoring it himself. Family and career commitments prevented him from doing so.

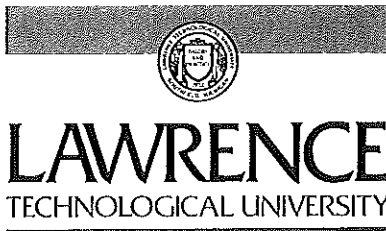
Stephens contacted Bruce Annett, Lawrence Tech's director of university relations and alumni services, who accepted the plane on behalf of the university and then coordinated volunteer assistance from several current Lawrence Tech students and airplane enthusiasts. They decided to restore the plane for display rather than flight because of the high cost of liability insurance, but were careful to reconstruct the plane exactly as it had been built originally.

Although about 25 volunteers worked on the plane during the restoration, most of the work was done by Roger Perreault of Royal Oak, MI, student Mike Audo of Mt. Clemens, MI, and Gerry Dettling of Warren, MI. Other members of Chapter 13 of the Experimental Aircraft Association were also involved.

Funding for the restoration, which cost about \$3000, came from the Lawrence Tech Alumni Association, alumni, and private donors. Restoration cost might have been higher except considerable material was donated.

"The plane is an important part of Lawrence Tech's heritage and proves that our early students were just as eager as our current students to participate in projects that were on the 'cutting edge' of technology," Annett says.

The "Spirit of Lawrence Tech" can be seen weekdays from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. in the Buell Building atrium at Lawrence Tech. Interpretive story boards and period photos on display below the plane give a complete accounting of the plane's colorful history and miraculous revival.



21000 West Ten Mile Road
Southfield, MI 48075-1058
(313) 356-0200

Specifications: Spirit of Lawrence Tech

Designer: George Martin, DIT'45, Lawrence Tech Aero. Eng. Chairman

Built: 1947-49

Restored: 1984-89

Material Cost New: \$1900

Material Cost Restoration: \$3000

Wingspan: 20 feet

Length: 20 feet

Weight (without pilot): 590 lbs

Engine: 85 hp Continental

Wing Area: 74 sq. feet

Top Speed: 165 mph w/ dive speeds of 250-300 mph.

Stall Speed: 67 mph

Fuel Capacity: 15 gal.

No. of hours flown before retirement: 100

Construction Material:

Pod: Steel tube truss with fabric covering

Wings: Wood with single spar, plywood leading edge and fabric covering

Booms: Aluminum sheet modified monocoque

Tail: Steel tube spars, aluminum leading edge, fabric covered.

(This variety of methods acquainted students with different materials and types of aircraft construction.)

School of Architecture
School of Arts and Science
School of Engineering
School of Management
School of Technology