

EAA's "Gold Lindy Award" Goes To Spencer Aircar Builder

Story & Photos by Michael J. "Mick" Kaufman



Spencer Aircar



Douglas Palmer proudly holds EAA's "Gold Lindy Award" for his Spencer Aircar homebuilt. Friends Dave and Kris Williams (left) and Eric Gurley (right).

Like many seaplane lovers that dedicate his or her time as a volunteer at the EAA Seaplane base year after year, I did the same. I was a volunteer dockworker when a radio call came from an approaching seaplane, a 2007 Spencer Aircar (N351DP).

As the seaplane sailed through the cut from the lake into the lagoon, I knew I had a story to write. The aircraft was a work of art that no factory-built seaplane could ever equal. I met Douglas Palmer, the pilot and builder, and his mentor and flight instructor, Brian Williams. Doug was quite ecstatic after completing his trip to Oshkosh, so I agreed to meet him several days later to get his story.

The original Spencer Aircar was designed in 1939/1940, built in 1941 by P. H. Spencer, sold to Republic Aviation, and named the "Sea Bee." Production of the Sea Bee began after WWII in 1945, and 1,060 were produced. P.H. Spencer redesigned the Spencer Aircar in 1967 for construction by amateur builders.

Doug built the aircraft totally from plans, as no kits or prefabricated components were available. Doug was inspired to build this aircraft while

on an Alaskan vacation 15 years ago with his wife to be. The aircraft took 10 years to complete. The project originally started in Doug's apartment and later moved to a hangar at the Half Moon Bay, California airport (KHAF). The hangar had no electricity, so Doug used a generator to power the tools and lights while he worked.

The Spencer Aircar is constructed mostly of wood with many composite parts that Doug fabricated from his own molds. A Continental Tiara engine powers the aircraft. The engine is unique in the fact that the camshaft, rather than the crankshaft, drives the propeller. This allows the engine to run at a higher speed and turn the propeller around 1700 RPM in cruise. The aircraft has a special reversible "MT" propeller that is invaluable for docking and beaching. Doug's Aircar has a cruise speed of 120 MPH and a fuel capacity of nearly 85 gallons.

Doug Palmer was not a pilot when he began the project. He started to take flying lessons soon after the project was started, but had to put them on hold until the project was finished.

When the project began, Doug worked as a commercial photographer. He is now employed as a fabricator of

components for a company, which is building pilot-less aircraft.

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