

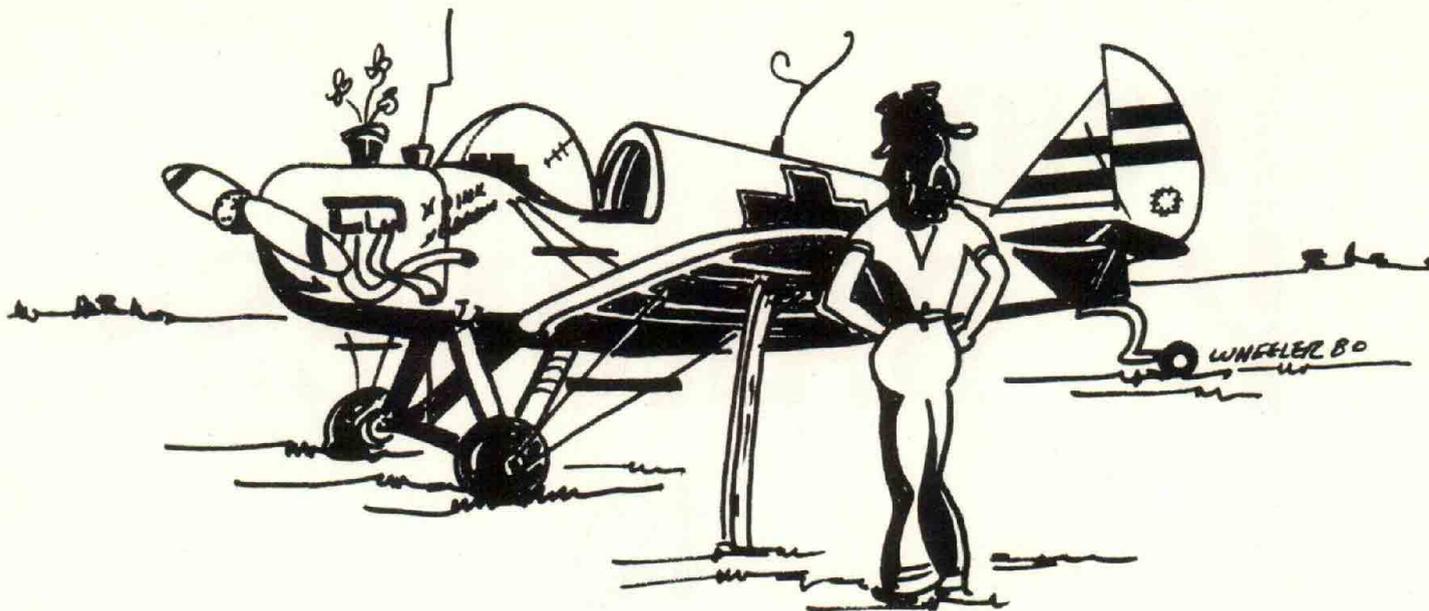
from
BARONESS
to
DUCHESS

A Modern Day Parallel To The Tales Of Rags To Riches And The Cinderella Story

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The Home Scene

Some people used to laugh at my bathroom with the wall mounted throttle, the wooden plunger handle, the pretty pink paper with the Maltese crosses and the Oshkosh route charts taped to the wall opposite the pilot's seat. Now, I ask you, what better place to study, plan and dream? Those who laughed just don't understand. They're the same ones who thought, back in 1976, that my living room looked a bit odd because it was full of airplane wings, tail surfaces, and other related parts. Now, isn't a living room the place to relax and enjoy your hobbies, be they the art of raising gold fish, TV watching, stereo listening, piano playing, or airplane building? Besides, it was a good excuse not to have to clean house.

In April of 1975 everything came together at Half Moon Bay Airport and I test flew my own creation: my shocking pink, Maltese crossed Fly Baby. Amid much shirt waving, fan fare and the popping of champagne corks, my project turned into an honest to goodness flying airplane and the Pink Baroness was born!

The Long Haul

In 1977, soundly established as the Pink Baroness, and satisfied that my creation was a real airplane, reliable and reasonably comfortable, I decided to really spread my wings and take a shot at Oshkosh for the annual EAA Convention. It would be a LONG trip, but with the assurance that railroad tracks still spanned the distance and airports abound enroute, I launched into my preparation stage.

Following long periods of study, airplane checking, and crystal ball gazing, launch day arrived and the Fly Baby and I were off on July 29, 1977. Five eventful and tail tiring days later we arrived at Oshkosh and joined the thousands of flying friends who attended the air show of all air shows. The positive reaction of people to my funny little pink airplane was overwhelming and most gratifying.

As with all good things, the Convention came to a close and the long trek back to California was a reality. Again, we followed the railroad tracks (sort of a "track trek") and arrived back at San Carlos tired but happy, and thankful for a safe flight. The Fly Baby and I chalked up the impressive total of 60 air hours (in 9 days), with 45 gas and go stops enroute. It was a fascinating and

interesting trip to say the least, as I became lost over Nebraska and performed pylon turns around the local water tank, trying to read the town name! In this case, it was Ainsworth, Nebraska.

There was a landing in a cow filled pasture to await the passing of a thunder storm. The time was spent pleasantly communing with my bovine friends who exhibited quite an interest in the pink Fly Baby. It probably looked good enough to eat! Later, the Fly Baby and I had a race with a yellow Volkswagen between Lusk and Casper, Wyoming. I was making the staggering ground speed of 53 mph and the VW would beat me going down hill every time.

Time For A Change

So we were home again, with the Baby safely tucked away in her hangar. Now it was decision time. The Fly Baby, being the delicate wood and glue lady that she is, wasn't the machine I needed to punch holes in the clouds the way I wanted to punch them. She was slow (bless her), her range was short and she was limited in performance. Still, when she was born, she represented the ultimate in aviation for me! At Oshkosh it didn't take long before my eyes began to roam, and my fingers became itchy to do flip flops in the sky like the rest of my nutty friends. As a student pilot, I had experienced the joy of flying Ray Stevens' beautiful Marquart Charger. At that time, I was a neophyte and totally unaccustomed to a biplane, but the graceful Charger seemed to know what to do, despite my clumsy stick and rudder inputs. That flight remained in my mind, and when it came time to decide on the right airplane for my new world of flip flop training and fun flying, I just had to have a Charger! So, charged full of Charger thoughts, I started looking for my dream machine. I looked, asked and advertised, and it was soon obvious that the product just wasn't available. Meanwhile, Ray decided to put his beautiful machine up for sale to make room for his now well known Hiperbipe project. Schellville's Jeannie Williams soon became the proud new owner. Well, that did it, another girl had a Charger, and I just had to have one too. Soon after Ray's sale to Jeannie, a project turned up. Ernie Filmore of Los Gatos decided to sell his partially completed Charger. So, I went full steam ahead and purchased Ernie's fuselage, landing gear, tail feathers, engine and wing ribs, with no idea of how complex a Charger was to build. I soon



learned it wasn't just a cut and glue project like the Fly Baby!

Once the pieces were sorted out and an estimate made as to the remaining work, we shipped her down to Flabob Airport at Riverside, where Glenn Beets agreed to cut, snip, glue and pound the assorted pile into a flying machine. As often happens, months passed, money changed hands, and work was accomplished, but the day arrived when both time and money were stretched to the maximum, and the Charger was still in need of many hours of tender loving care and plain ol' HARD work to become a completed project. What to do, where to do it, and with whose help became a problem. Not one to be foiled, I did have previous airplane building experience, I took one thing at a time, the wings were almost ready to cover so I trailered them to San Carlos, with the help of my son Willie. It took us 12 hours, pulling the 4 wing panels against a hard wind, from Riverside to San Francisco. The little Datsun pick-up never got over 40 mph and Willie delighted in throwing ice water in mom's face to keep her awake. Once home we set them up in my hangar and undertook the task of covering, not two, but FOUR big panels plus 4 ailerons. At this point I began to realize the true value of friends, and what a priceless group I have!! Dave Palmer worked tirelessly to help apply the Stits Polyfiber. The cut, glue and shrink tests seemed endless. With Dave in daily attendance, and others dropping in to lend a hand, the time came that all four wings sparkled with taut Polyfiber. A happy day and a milestone of some consequence. We had not seriously considered, up to this point, that all those beautiful panels had to be rib stitched!

Well, no common over the rib stitches were good enough for my new baby. Only one way to go, the hid-

den cord and knot type used on the famous Staggerwing Beechcraft. Why knot! Butch Pfeifer, my good friend and old Luscombe instructor (who got me into this mess in the first place by teaching me to fly) volunteered to show me how to apply the mysterious stitch. "It will just take ten minutes," said Butch. Well, a full day and a case of beer later, we had the stitch mastered. Maybe it was more of a Pfeifer tie-fer than a Staggerwing tie-my-thing, but it worked! It was a little complicated to apply at first, 10 minutes a knot, but 500 knots later, with practice, the time was something under one minute! My chief stitch-in-time friend, Nancy Griffin, and I thought we would knock these wings out in about 4 days. Well sir, we made our schedule, just exactly four days, and three months, later. They were done! This required daily work with Nancy on one side alternately returning the needle to me and breast feeding baby Matthew, then 3 months old. With the surface tapes applied, another milestone was reached . . . they were ready to paint.

At times during our covering efforts, a pretty white Pitts Special would taxi up to the hangar, shut down and Schellville's Al Wheeler would wander in to see how we were doing. Sometime earlier, Al had become interested in the Charger project, and had volunteered his painting expertise to help finish the bird. So, ready for paint, we put Al to work spraying the silver. Spray, sand, spray, sand, with many friends pitching in to do the sanding, Al would come in at odd times and spray the next coats (boy! did he ever have the easy job). When the time came for the color application, Stits Polytone, the wings were moved to Al's garage, which is set up for automotive painting. Following the application of the basic yellow, it was time for laying out the tri-color trim, in a design that had been derived from water-



colors done by my son Willie and his friend Mike Cala. It was interesting to watch the initial layout for the color design. Done with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch masking tape, the curves were laid out until, after several tries, they looked right. Paper patterns were then made for tracing on the remaining panels. Then came the masking, and when I said I wanted the design on the top AND bottom, 4 wings, 8 applications, I thought I had lost a painter. Talk about muttering, mumbling and head shaking. Such a big fuss over a little work. My first sight of a completed pair of panels, in their four colors and white pin striping, had me jumping up and down, squealing and yelling. They were something else. After all, a gal has a right to get excited. They were beautiful, and a sort of preview of how colorful the completed bird was going to look. The only problem with the whole process was the demise of a little green tree outside Al's garage. In line with the blast from the exhaust fan, totally confused, what with turning yellow, orange, red and white in the middle of the summer, it just plain gave up and died.

While the wings were being painted, Willie and I went down to Flabob with Griffin's trailer, built to accommodate Vaughn's Cassutt, to bring the fuselage back. The trip was uneventful but for the fact that we had to dismantle a wall in order to get it out of Glenn Beet's shop. It seems that the Charger's landing gear was a

bit wider than the door. Carpenters we're not, but we can qualify for demolition experts.

With the fuselage home and slated as the next project, we took a good look at what we had, or didn't have. Al was seen at times walking around the fuselage, poking, kicking tires, writing notes in his ever present little note pad and mumbling things to the effect that . . . "If I'm gonna paint the damn thing, it looks like I gotta finish building it first." What a job lay ahead. No fuel system, no engine controls, no electrical system, no baffles or seats, fairings or . . . etc., etc. I've been told that Al was seen to climb into his Pitts, crank it up and plead tearfully with ground control to "get him out of here." Work on the fuselage seemed never ending. John "Pinky" Winters came to the rescue with the electrical system, the alternator and instrument hook ups and the general wiring and sorting out of perplexities. Al tackled the fuel and oil systems, made the engine controls and baffles, all the time mumbling about gear fairings, dead trees and broads who build biplanes. I spent a great deal of time reading lists, taped to the fuselage, of things for me to do or find. Rosie the Riveter had nothing on me, except that I drilled out more rivets than I installed. Eventually, with the willing help of many friends, including George Cauthon, Vaughn Griffin, George Holmes, Dave Forbes, Jim Tramel and Bill O'Connell, the fuselage reached the paint stage and was



hauled off to "Dead Tree Gulch", along with piles of struts, bits of fairings and a complete set of tail surfaces, for paint and trim application. Again, after the basic yellow, the trim layout was exciting and the final unmasking produced another thrill for your writer, more jumping up and down and squeals of delight, with a moment of silence for the dear departed little tree.

Assembly Time At Last

Now another hurdle, my collection of beautiful parts were ready to assemble, but where and how? It was decided that Al's hangar at Schellville would be the most suitable location. He spent much of his time there and knew many Schellville people who would be able to help us with the assembly, rigging, systems check out and whatever else remained, to fly the bird. This is all part of painting an airplane, isn't it? There was also the problem of not being permitted to do the initial flight in the populated San Carlos area, due to FAA regulations.

Summer came and the never ending work continued, dead lines to make. Watsonville and Merced came and went, it was discouraging. It seemed we were so close, but still had this and that to accomplish before we could fly. I was tired and I'm sure all my crew felt the same. We could shoot for Oshkosh . . . just maybe we'd make it. So, came the BIG push, and I mean PUSH. As the time to roll her out got near we were running on sheer nerve. Lena, Schellville's gourmet cook, helped hold us together with her delicious home cooked meals. Lena's fussing over me and the realization that we had reached another milestone, helped to ease the tension a great deal. The Charger was ready for weight and balance and the FAA preflight inspection.

On July 13, 1979, we moved the Charger to Al Hart's hangar. Al had agreed to do the weight and balance.



An old hand at this, Al's expertise and pleasant manner made the job of leveling, jacking and weighing the bird an enjoyable task. She weighed in at 1066 pounds, light for a Charger! Al Hart was accommodating beyond the call and did the computations. We were running our normal "few jumps" behind schedule and while she was still on the scales, Dell Ott of the Oakland, CA GADO office, arrived to do his preflight inspection. Not only was he patient enough to wait, he even assisted with the weighing. Once the Charger was back on her "feet", his examination was both expeditious and competent, with numerous constructive comments resulting from his "shake down". Mr. Ott's reputation for excellent service and fair practices is well established among the local homebuilders. We are all pleased to have him working "our area."

In moving into Al's hangar we displaced . . . you'll never guess . . . Jeannie Williams' beautiful Charger, which in turn displaced husband Jim's J-3 to an outside tiedown. All this with assurances that it would only be for a "couple of weeks." After all, it can't take long to complete an airplane that's ready for assembly, right? — WRONG. Assembly was easy but finishing the systems and fairings and a million other details was a gargantuan task. Once more, I reverted to being the Pink Baroness as the Fly Baby was pressed into service as commuter vehicle between my home in Belmont and the "Charger Factory" at Schellville.

Early in May, Pinky Winters, Dave Palmer, Bob Uptall and I helped Al assemble my beautiful bird. With just landing wires supporting the somewhat lop-sided girl, she looked beautiful. At last, a complete airplane with the tail surfaces assembled and rigged and the fantastic wings . . . she looked ready to leap into the air and become a real airplane. Beat but happy, we departed for San Carlos, leaving Al to do the rigging. To this day, I don't know if he used a crystal ball or the time proven method of levels and plumb bobs and eye balls, but whatever secret method he used, it worked. She flies straight as an arrow.

A few days later we pushed her to the gas pits and gave her her first drink of 100 octane "gold juice." No leaks. After a minor struggle to get flow to her carburetor, I got in. Al pulled her through a few blades and I turned her switch to "start." Nothing but silence! Looking for possible problems, Al discovered the gas was turned off, and looking at me he said, "Well, turn on the gas, Stupid!" "Stupid" turned on the gas and the Charger responded by speaking her first words to me. A little smoke and some initial roughness and she smoothed out and settled down to a steady purr. It sounded like music to my ears. Tired and tickled, I climbed into the Fly Baby and headed for San Carlos, kidding her enroute with "You better behave, your replacement's looking pretty good!"

Back to the hangar and button her up, she was gonna FLY!!! I didn't have any biplane experience to speak of so Al Wheeler agreed to make the first flight. With 8000 hours of flight time, 7000 of them in taildraggers and the last 6 years mostly in Pitts, it would be hard to question Al's qualifications. The frantic Saturday for last minute bits and pieces had arrived. Everyone pitched in . . . Bob Morus, Don Carter and even Frank Etherton, who came to take pictures, was put to work as a metal-smith. On into the night until everyone was near collapse. It looked good for Sunday, truly a happy thought after all the months of work and struggle.

First Flight . . . At Last!

Sunday, July 15, dawned bright and clear and the crew was back on the job, tightening, testing, inspecting and checking. Sister Marva and Bill Duckworth ar-

rived in Bill's beautiful Cavalier. Returning from the Hollister Fly-In they had heard the Charger might fly today. As the final countdown time arrived, Al disappeared for quite a long time. I suppose for more walking, mumbling and head shaking. On his return, he was seen to walk up to the Charger, pat her on the spinner and say, "Well, girl, I'm ready if you are." So we strapped him in, pulled Ole Fahlin's beautiful prop through a few blades, fired her up and she moved out to the run-up area. At that point, I had everything crossed. There goes my good friend and three years of my life. After a fairly long run up (Al said he was trying to find an excuse to delay the day of reckoning), it was thumbs up and time to go. As Al taxied out to the sod runway, I became aware of the mob of people present. Where they all came from I'll never know. They came by motorcycle, bicycle and by foot, and this wasn't an announced event. That Schellville grapevine is something else. I've never seen anyone with more moral support than Al had at that moment. The Charger moved slowly out to the end of the runway, turned into the wind and without any hesitation, accelerated and, after a short run, lifted gracefully from the sod runway and became an airplane. At that moment, jumping up and down and pounding my son Willie on the back, I yelled, "She flies, she flies!"

Following a half hour of climbs, level flight, glides, stalls and a series of steep turns and assorted chandelles and wing overs, Al returned to the pattern and made a low level pass up the runway with both hands extending over the windshield, as though to say "Who says I can't rig a biplane." Al later confessed to holding considerable right rudder to keep the left wing up.

An uneventful approach and landing completed her test flight. With a broad grin and a thumbs up as he taxied to the parking area, our Charger painter indicated pleasure with her first performance. A slight left wing heavy condition and a backward reading airspeed indicator (cruise at 60 and stall at 140) and an inoperable alternator seemed to be her only problems.

Now, after much handshaking, relieved laughter and happy smiles, it was time for my first ride in my spanking new airplane. It was an indescribable thrill to realize that my vast collection of bits and pieces and stitches and rivets, and sweat and tears, was finally melded together into a beautiful airplane, and here we were, at this moment, off and flying. As I flew her I noticed that she needed quite a bit of forward pressure on the stick to keep her nose down and the condition seemed to worsen as we flew. Hand signals to Al in the rear cockpit netted me little more than a dumb stare. (Al never was much good at sign language.) After a few minutes of turns and some wing overs, my arm was aching and I turned her over to Al. As we approached the field my thoughts turned to the past three years of struggle and it was mind boggling to think all that time and effort had produced me an airplane that was a dog to fly. It just couldn't happen, could it? The problem was solved once we could communicate. Unnoticed by Al, until the last minutes of flight, the trim wheel continually rotated to nose-up all by itself! Well, thank goodness, that we can fix, and fix we did. With a big green clothespin.

Growing Pains

My first solo flight was uneventful . . . she flies so easily. I loved her from the first landing — I think she made it all by herself!

Additional flying indicated the need for an oil cooler and a change in the engine baffles. Using Jeannie's Charger as a "pattern", Al made new front baffles. There was a frantic search for a brand new oil cooler

I had bought weeks before. We turned Schellville Airport inside-out but it was no where to be found. Al borrowed the cooler from his Pitts, made brackets and installed it on the Charger. As the old saying goes, "Something old (Al), something new (Charger), something borrowed (cooler) and something blue — (me — sometimes)."

The following 25 hours of restricted flight in the Schellville area were spent getting to know my new bird. She was beautiful and flew with a grace and ease all her own. Al Hart's comments after flying her (and there's a guy who has flown everything from Jennies up) were that she was one of the nicest airplanes he'd ever flown, a fine compliment to Ed Marquart's design ability, our many months of building and Al's excellent job of rigging.

Freedom To Fly The World

Later Mr. Ott re-examined her, gave her her pass to freedom — her amateur built airworthiness certificate. Now we could go home to San Carlos! The many assorted components that left could return, a beautiful airplane, a glorious colorful butterfly! It was the first real cross country for my Lady and I. From the time we left the now familiar Schellville traffic pattern until we arrived at San Carlos, I was super conscious of her every movement and listened intently for any change in the sound of her engine. Her performance was great and it was a good feeling to land her at her "home airport."

After moving to San Carlos I had to have a "Charger" hangar party, and a gala affair it was! Many friends came from all over, music was by Mama's Mobile Disco and much munching and lots of "wash down" stuff was available. A contest to name her netted some really neat names . . . from Madame Butterfly, Teacher's Pet, Butter Cup, Texas Rose to Sass-E-Yass . . . with everything imaginable (and some not printable) in between. The final selection was Al Hart's suggestion. She is now "Duchess Papillon", and after all these years, the Pink Baroness has flown off into the sunset. From now on Gail Turner will be addressed as the Duchess Butterfly, or at least she will wear yellow instead of pink.

Following her good behavior at Schellville — at least 30 hours of pretty trouble-free flight — she suddenly shed her puberty and became a real live, stubborn young woman. She wouldn't run — at least not for long. As Butch Pfeifer found one day, she preferred to quit right after take-off and did it so many times that San Carlos' Tower Personnel asked Butch, following another request for take-off, "Are you sure you really want to do this again?" The fuel system was changed from gravity to a pump feed and Dave Palmer installed a new carburetor and airbox. Since then she has behaved like a lady. We've flown many places, rolled around the sky and gotten to know each other. I like her and I think she likes me.

Al recently took her back to her "birthplace", Schellville, and reported that she smiled all day long. Like a young spirited filly, she seems happiest in the grass.

What Next?

So, here we are, all polished up, looking great with Chuck Stock's super beautiful seat cushions, and looking forward to the many California fly-ins and hoping for Oshkosh '81. Maybe this year my Cinderella Duchess and I will make it!!



What da ya mean, pylon turns, I am trying to read the name!

While over Nebraska
I lost my way
And I would still be lost today

Except for the fact
That Ainsworth N.B.
Displays its name for all to see

On a water tank
In the downtown square
They printed it there for all who care

And when you're lost
And the light grows pale
A look at that name can save your tail!

You know where you are
And that's real neat
When the gas gets low and you're dyin' to eat

So the airport you find
And you swing her in low
It's sure good to stop, and gas, and go!