

BREEZIN' ALONG IN A BREEZY

By Don Dwiggins

When Jimmy Carter stopped by Southern Field on the outskirts of Americus, Ga., one November afternoon in 1975, he was joined by a crowd of some 10,000 folks lusting for a ride in a funny contraption that looked more like a flying bedstead than an airplane.

At the controls of Breezy N19CS was this pretty 19-year-old gal from Birmingham, Karen Shivers, who had made her maiden solo flight in it on her 16th birthday, back on August 9, 1972.

Karen had taken flying lessons from her dad, Charlie Shivers, a pipeline patrol pilot for Southern Natural Gas Company, who built the Breezy as a backyard family project and got it certificated for passenger-carrying on November 18, 1970.

Being a pipeline patrol pilot gave Charlie a special point of view toward flying. None of this high-altitude stuff, where you fly cross-country at a thousand feet or so. To Charlie, there was more fun and romance skimming along at treetop level, where he could see things.

Thus it was that he caught the Breezy fever back in '67, when he attended his first Experimental Aircraft Association Fly-in at Rockford, Ill., and heard the excited comments of those who had had a ride in one.

He finally got-in touch with a former corporate pilot, Carl Unger, of 8751 S. Kilbourn St., Oaklawn, Ill. 60456, one of the three original designers of the Breezy. The others were Charlie Roloff and Bob Liposky, also corporate jocks, who felt that it would be more fun flying out in the wind than inside a cramped cockpit.

Shivers learned that an information kit cost \$3.50 and plans only \$25 a set, so he quickly plunked down that amount and got started on his Breezy project. He picked up a steel tubing kit, the wing and tail feathers from a busted J-3 Cub, and a Continental C-85 engine, and about a year later she was assembled and ready for inspection.

Issuance of a special airworthiness certificate by the FAA cleared Charlie for his test flights, and within a month he'd completed the butt-busting 50-hour flyoff to qualify it for passenger-hopping.

Despite the wintry chill at that point, one of his first passengers was Paul Harvey, an air-minded news commentator who

happened to be in Birmingham on a speaking engagement and heard about Charlie's wonderful flying framework. It was Thanksgiving Day 1970, and the temperature was down to three degrees above freezing, but Harvey froze his face in a big grin, and went back to Chicago to make Shivers nationally famous with an enthusiastic radio broadcast about the ride.

The next summer Shivers and a pal, Bud Dawes, who had built himself a Pietenpol, headed north for the EAA Fly-in at Oshkosh, and two days later, after skimming along rivers and some IFR flying (I Follow Roads), landed on the shores of Lake Winnebago in Wisconsin territory. It only took 'em 14 hours flying time, but then they weren't in any hurry.

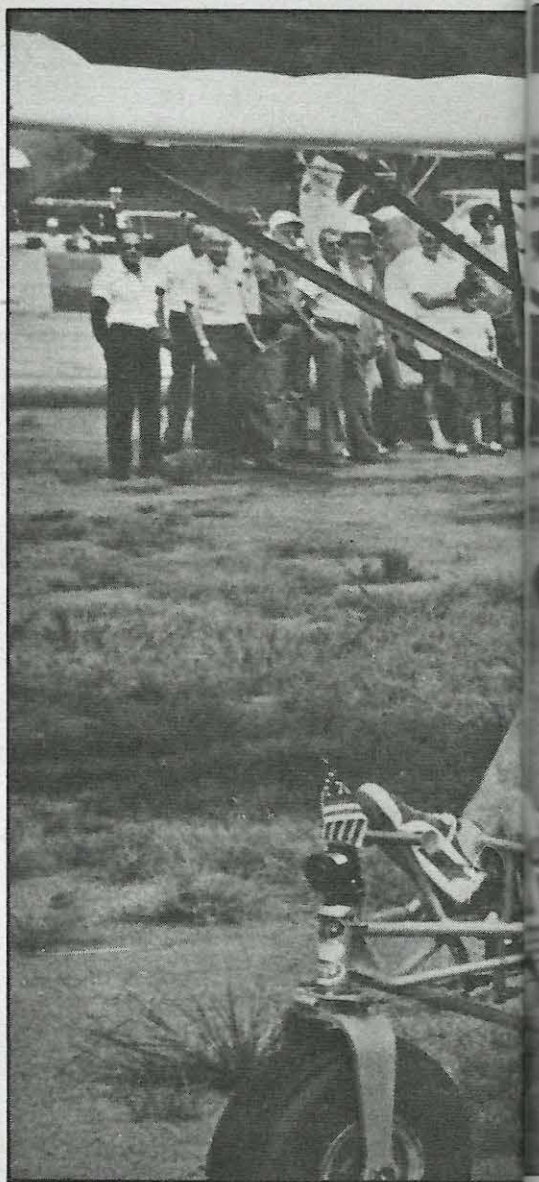
Dawes knew he simply had to have a Breezy too, and so next year there were two of them flying from Birmingham — N19CS and N19JS, which was Dawes' ship. Charlie's wife, Sue Shivers, remembers that a heavy ground fog lay deep in the valleys north of Birmingham on the morning of their departure, July 29, 1973, as N19CS and N19JS left for their first stop at Decatur, Ala.

Bud Dawes' Breezy, nicknamed the Great Punkin, being painted all black and orange, suddenly vanished from sight in a fog patch. Charlie, with Sue riding behind, didn't want to get into the same cloud and risk a collision, so they did a fast 180, then circled 'til the fog lifted enough to skim the highway.

About 45 minutes later they spotted blinking car lights up ahead — the Alabama state fuzz! They had N19JS completely surrounded. As it turned out they were only trying to be helpful — Bud had made an emergency landing on the highway, and the cops were clearing a stretch of road for him to take off on. They finally rendezvoused at Decatur, and the rest of the trip was all blue sky, says Sue.

It was an exciting flight, she remembers: "Two Breezys flying along either side of the Interstate can cause plenty of upturned faces with looks of disbelief. By the time we reached Nashville we were getting sore arms from waving at everyone who waved at us. We had our picture taken by some folks who had followed us in a car from Decatur."

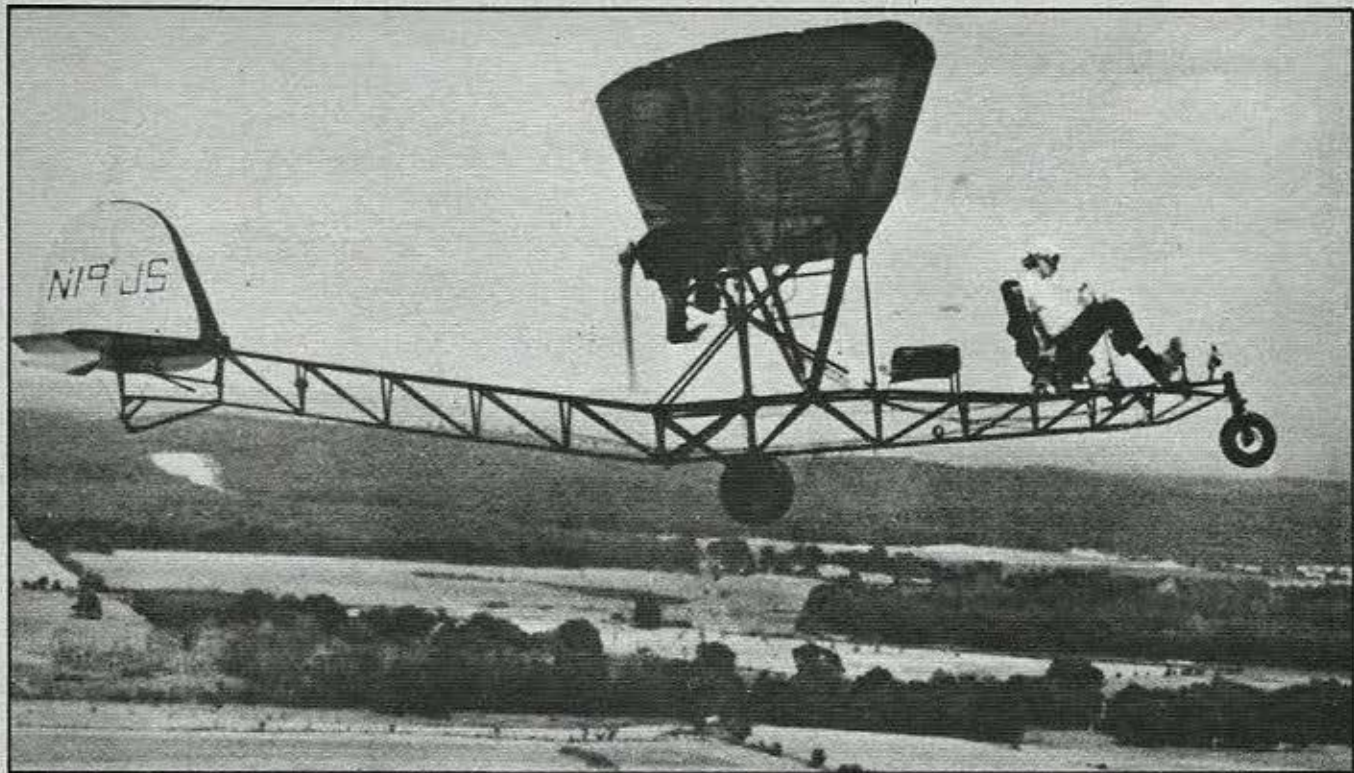
After a pit stop and a sandwich at



Karen Shivers won her Private Pilot license in her dad's Breezy, now takes friends for joy rides in the open spaces.

Carl Unger's prototype Breezy, N59Y, gets rolling for takeoff here with a pretty passenger who finds open-air flying a thrill.





Breezy N19JS, the 'Great Punkin', sails over the southern countryside on its way to the annual EAA Fly-in at Oshkosh, Wis.



Like a bucking bronc, this western Breezy, N262Y, makes a one-point landing at Brown Field near San Diego in crosswind.

Decatur's Pryor Field they were off again, flying low and slow over southern Appalachia. "The hills begin to flatten out when you reach Kentucky," Sue remembers. "This is true Breezy country. We can appreciate the beauty and capability of Dr. Brokow's B.J. 520, but he will never see from 10,000 feet and 270 knots what we can see from 500 feet at 60 knots."

The flight up to Henderson, Ky., was the longest hop — a 2 hour 15 minute run, and leaving Henderson was an unforgettable experience for Sue.

"I am deathly afraid of water," she shudders. "That bend in the Ohio River looked two miles wide. But beyond the river were fields in various stages of cultivation making a huge patchwork quilt for us to fly over; nature has a way with colors that no seamstress can match. You get a feeling of reverence as you sit out in the open and see all this beauty unfold before your eyes.

"The long shadows of late afternoon add depth to the picture, and the knowledge that Terre Haute is near makes it even more interesting. Before leaving the airport for a hot bath and steak dinner, we had to take all the spectators for a hop around the field. They arrive from nowhere whenever we land!"

The Shivers had one knotty problem to solve on their cross-country Breezy flight — how to open a sectional chart in a 75 mph wind. The answer was to lay out three sectionals on the floor at home, tape them together, and then cut a strip map 50 miles wide and 800 miles long, following a course line drawn with a heavy pencil. The strip map was carefully folded so it could be strapped to the pilot's leg and unrolled in flight.

After another fuel stop at Waukesha, Wis., the two Breezys set off on the last leg of their flight to Wittman Field, Oshkosh.

"The sun was beginning to get low in the western quarter when we left Waukesha," Sue relates. "How pleasant it is in the late afternoon, to breeze over the countryside with no cares except to reach Oshkosh before Wittman Field is closed for the air show! When you fly over Fond du Lac, can Oshkosh be far away?"

"What a thrill to see all these beautiful planes lined up, row on row, just waiting for us to join them!"

Back from Oshkosh '73, Charlie Shivers

put his daughter Karen on a rigid flying schedule in the Breezy, and she at last won her Private pilot certificate, qualifying her to take her friends up for thrill rides in the Breezy.

In 1975 a new Alabama Breezy appeared in the skies — N711LM, built by Ray Lett, of Lineville, and that year Lett and Shivers flew formation up to Oshkosh, where they swapped stories with a growing number of other Breezy drivers from all parts of the country.

Joan Moran and Ann Matthesius, from Washington, D.C., were there, flying their pretty purple Breezy in purple flying suits and proving that the gals have earned their place in the homebuilt movement hands down.

We talked with Carl Unger, whose original Breezy, N59Y, appears on the cover of this issue of *HOMEBUILT AIRCRAFT*. Unger told us: "We'd all flown about every type of aircraft there is, including helicopters, and we just decided one day, wouldn't it be great to have a puddle-jumper of our own to blow off steam?"

Unger, Roloff, and Liposky solidified a back-of-the-envelope drawing in welding rods, and after a few hangar sessions settled on the Piper PA-12 Super Cruiser wing. Says Roloff: "After all, you can find an old busted wing on most any airport, so why not put 'em to good use? And look what we're doing for the environment, cleaning up those junk piles!"

The prototype, N59Y, took 1500 man hours to finish, involving much duplication of effort in a trial-and-error program, but today you can build one in roughly 1,000 hours, says Roloff. Cost can run up around \$3500, but Charlie Shivers built for about \$2500.

When the prototype began flying back in '64 at Chicago's Hammond Airport, word quickly spread that some fools were flying an unfinished airplane — they forgot to cover the fuselage!

The Breezy turned out to become one of the most popular of all homebuilt designs, because of its low cost, ease of construction, uniqueness, and the sheer fun of flying it.

So far Unger's Breezy has logged more than 600 accident-free hours, and he maintains that the prototype was so well constructed that it can still outfly any of the 150 Breezys flying today. In fact, says Unger, N59Y holds the Midwest Short Field Takeoff Record — he got airborne

solo from a field elevation of 600 feet MSL in exactly 72 feet!

Some Breezys are fancied up a lot, like Ken Bunker's, an airline pilot living in Santa Clara, Calif., who finds his home-built more of a delight to fly than a Boeing 747. He uses a 115-hp Lycoming O-235-C with starter and alternator, and a full electrical system with night lights. He even added a running board and hung a picnic basket in back for a luggage compartment.

Bunker poured about \$5,000 into his Breezy, and in its first year (1971) he logged 250 hours flying time. "The beauty of flying the Breezy," Bunker says, "is that you can tell if you're going too fast or too slow by feel, and you can tell if you're banking, descending, or climbing even with no instruments. I feel the Breezy is the most basic, honest, fun-to-fly machine ever built."

The Breezy is officially called the RLU-1 (for Roloff, Liposky, and Unger, the original designers), and is classed as an Experimental Pusher Parasol type. Construction is mostly of welded chrome moly tubing with fabric covered wings and empennage. Continental C-90s are popular powerplants for two-place Breezys, and the C-65 can be used in a single-place version.

Preferred propeller is the Flottorp 72A50, and the wing chosen by the designers, from a wrecked PA-12, has a 33-foot span and 165 sq.ft. wing area. The Breezy stands 8½ feet tall on a trike gear with 600x6 mains and a 500x5 nosewheel. Cleveland hydraulic brakes are used. Tread is 6 feet, wheel base 10 feet. Design gross is 1200 pounds, empty weight 700 pounds, for a useful load of 500 pounds, or two passengers and 180 pounds of gas, roughly 20 gallons.

The prototype tank holds 18 gallons, with gravity fuel flow plus engine pump supply. Standard range is 250 miles. Performance figures are 105 mph top; 75 mph cruise; 25-29 mph stall; climb 500 fpm. A Breezy can climb up to 15,000 feet, but basically she's a ground lover by nature.

For pilots switching from most light aircraft, the only novelty is the unobstructed view of the sky, the wide horizon, and the landscape spread out below.

"It's difficult to explain," says Charlie Roloff. "Each pilot and passenger has his own description, which generally amounts to 'A rare and magnificent view!'"