

MIDWEST FLYER

APRIL/MAY 1995



Wipaire Is Proof That The Midwest Aviation Spirit Is Stronger Than Ever!

by Dave Weiman

Every time I look around the Midwest, I see great accomplishments in aviation by people who have a love for aviation. These are not the CEOs of conglomerate corporations sitting in first class. Rather, they are the men and women who know what it is like to captain their own aircraft, and struggle to make their dreams become reality.

There's Paul Poberezny in Oshkosh, Wisconsin who started a club in his basement with fellow do-it-yourselfers so they might share technical know-how in building airplanes. Today, the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) has grown to over 100,000 members, holds the largest gathering of pilots and aviation enthusiasts in the



Ben Wiplinger in 1963 with his 1955 Cessna Skywagon.

world, and is considered one of the most influential pilot organizations

in existence today.

Inventor/pilot/businessman, Peter



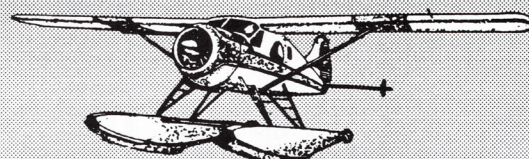
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BOUNDARY WATERS



Tanis of Glenwood, Minnesota, with his engine preheaters, insulated engine blankets, and wing covers, continues to come up with new ideas which will make aircraft ownership more safe, convenient and enjoyable.

Warren Basler's love of vintage Douglas airliners (DC-3s) spurred the idea to make a really great and versatile aircraft even greater and faster with his Basler Turbo Conversions. His Oshkosh, Wisconsin facility is now known the world over.

Dale and Allan Klapmeier saw a future demand in composite-built aircraft, and are going full steam ahead with the manufacture of their Cirrus SR20 and ST50 aircraft at their "new" Duluth, Minnesota facility.

Steve Wittman, now approaching age 91 and still flying, has numerous air race records and aircraft patents to his name, including both the flat leaf spring landing gear used on Cessna 140s and 170s, and the tapered rod landing gear used on later model Cessnas and many homebuilt aircraft such as the RV-6.

Brian Haynes of Pan Am Weather Systems in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has been at the forefront of aviation weather computer satellite technology, and has worked with state aviation offices and the Federal Aviation Administration to make weather information and flight planning more accessible to pilots.

When it comes to aircraft floats, the Wiplinger family of the Twin Cities is a leader in float technology with their Wipaire, Inc. facilities at Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota. Ben and Bob Wiplinger's love of aviation has remained the spark behind a tradition of excellence which began in 1960.

Ben Wiplinger, founder of Wipline, Inc. (now Wipaire), started out his career as a precision machinist. As a young man Ben got his start by putting one-cylinder engines with air props on ice boats in Minnesota. Shortly afterwards, he built a glider of his own design, but his family dismantled it so he wouldn't get hurt. Little did they know then that he would one day become the largest manufacturer of high-end aircraft floats.

Ben worked as an auto body mechanic while attending the University of Minnesota majoring in engineering. Prior to World War II, he headed west and worked for Douglas Aircraft as a tool designer

on the B-19. He worked the swing shift, commuting by air from the Van Nuys Airport to Santa Monica in a Ford V-8-powered Aero Sport.

Ben wanted to enlist for pilot training in the Army Air Corps, but failed because of his eyesight. Instead, he was drafted before Pearl Harbor and eventually assigned to an air base in Albuquerque, New Mexico. There, he developed a pre-oiling system for aircraft.

When the war ended, Ben bought surplus aircraft parts as junk for 3 cents a pound, rebuilt aircraft, then licensed and resold them as civilian

aircraft.

Wiplinger eventually established his business at Fleming Field in South St. Paul, and did maintenance on Noorduyn Norsemans, Beech Staggerwings and Lockheed Lodestars, and converted B-25s for commercial use. At one time, he had 60 mechanics and helpers working on modification work.

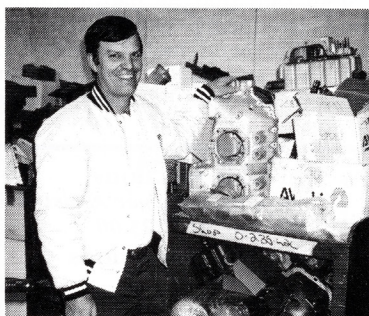
Ben's first floatplane was a 1955 Cessna 180 on Edo floats. When he experienced repeated trouble with the electrical retraction system, Ben designed his own hydraulic retract

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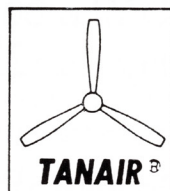
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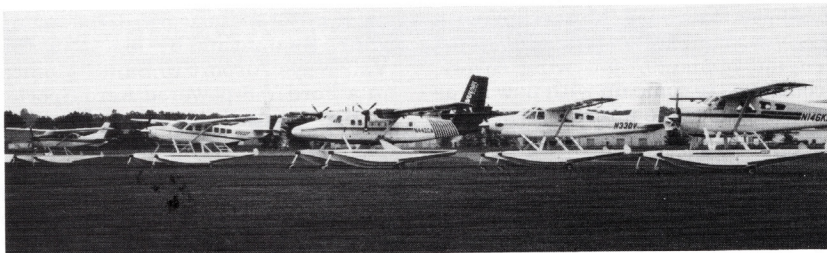


Bob Wiplinger not only builds aircraft floats for a living, but is an active seaplane pilot, and operates a private seaplane base and airstrip on his property along the Mississippi River in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota. Wiplinger is pictured here with his own Cessna Stationair 6 on Wipline 4000 floats. Photo by Dave Weiman

WIPAIRE CONTINUED

system, certificated it, and sold more than 100 sets.

Newer aircraft required a 7 degree angle of incidence to get out



Wipaire's full line of working seaplanes starting with (L/R) "Wipaire Boss #1," a Cessna Stationair 6 (C-206) owned by Bob Wiplinger; a Cessna 208 Caravan; and a de Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otter, DHC-2 MK III Beaver, and a DHC-2 MK I Beaver. Photo courtesy of Wipaire, Inc.

of the water, while the older airplanes could do so with 3 degrees. So Ben went to work and developed his own contours with a big afterbody angle and originated the Wipline flat-top design for easy loading.

Wiplinger's unique metal bonding procedure came later through the assistance of friends at 3M. The system uses wedges to apply an even pressure to the bonding until it is cured. Then the wedges come out. Three years of research and \$8,000 later, the patent was approved.

Ben said that he had a difficult time convincing people that you could glue (bond) metal together. He not only eventually got his point across in the float business, but was

also a bonding consultant on the Learfan program.

Wiplinger manufactured floats at Fleming Field before establishing his new riverside operation. He located and bought 160 acres with one mile of frontage on the Mississippi for \$20,000 in 1971.

Ben Wiplinger passed away in 1994, but left the company in good hands with son, Bob, whose nickname is "Wip." Bob bought the company in 1979.

Today, Wipaire, Inc. is still the major manufacturer of high-end floats, but has expanded to become a full-service modification company including powerplant conversions and replacements, interiors, custom avionics, and aircraft painting.

Marketing director, Jim Jacobsen — formerly a flight operations specialist with Northwest Airlines, and before that, the Midwest regional representative for Cessna — gave me the cooks tour which started at the ramp at Fleming Field at Wipaire's aircraft maintenance facility. From there we drove

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to their new 70 X 140 ft. insulated hangar, also on Fleming, which is used for executive paint jobs and aircraft rebuilding.

The painting area has dip tanks able to corrosion-proof an entire Beaver or Cessna fuselage, and their complete line of Wipline floats. The entire corrosion proofing and aircraft stripping and painting process is completed using an environmentally safe, self-contained disposal system. In addition, Wiplinger is currently experimenting with a very high water pressure, up to 40,000 psi to strip paint from airframes.

From there, Jake (as he's called by his friends) and I drove to Wipaire's float manufacturing facility down by the Mississippi a few miles to the east of Fleming.

More than 170 sets of Wipline 3900 straight floats, and later, 425 sets of 3730 amphibious floats (floats with retractable landing gear) were produced before tooling was replaced and new manufacturing techniques were developed to produce the Model 4000 in 1989.

Wipaire selects model numbers based on a float's maximum gross aircraft weight capability. For instance, a Wipline 4000 float can handle 4,000 lbs. Two floats will then hold an aircraft weighing 8,000 lbs. The Wipline 4000 is the most commonly used float on Cessna 185s and 206s. Other models include the Wipline 6100 for de Havilland Beavers, turbo Beavers, and the Pilatus PC-6; the Wipline 8000 for the Cessna 208 Caravan, and DHC-3 Otter; and the 13000 for the Twin Otter.

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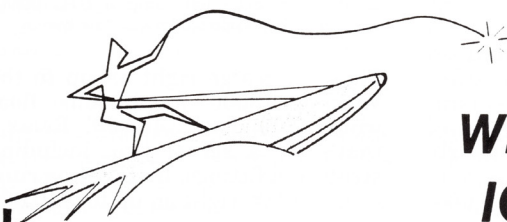
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A Pilatus PC-6 on Wipline 6100 floats in front of Wipaire's maintenance facilities at Fleming Field in South St. Paul. Photo by Dave Weiman



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WIPAIRE CONTINUED

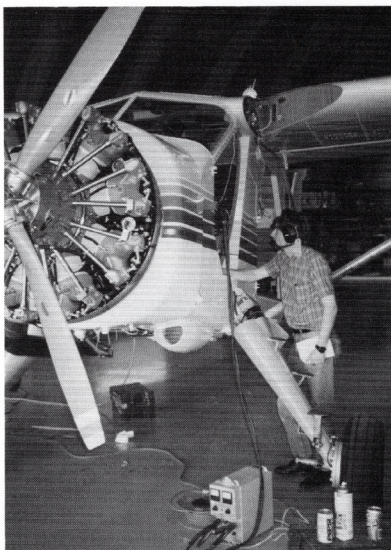
When you consider that Wipaire manufactures 35-40 sets of floats each year, and that in many ways each float is an airfoil in itself and quite a sophisticated piece of equipment (esp. amphibious floats), their prices don't seem out of line.

A FLOAT IN THE MAKING

The complete process of building a float is quite involved, from computer-aided design (CAD) and component testing in the shop and flight tests, to installation. Great care is taken by a very dedicated staff, which even includes a couple of engineers that once worked at the old Bellanca factory in Osceola, Wis.

After the floats are completely assembled and the bonding material is in place, it takes two hours in an oven at 325 degrees Fahrenheit to set the bonding. Wipaire states that the bonded seams test at 50 percent stronger than rivets, which, when you consider the stress placed on them in landing, and their leak-proof requirements, is very important.

The straight seaplane version of the Wipline 4000 runs nearly \$38,000 and its amphibious version – also in round numbers – \$70,000.



A Wipaire service technician checks out some of the electronics on a completely rebuilt de Havilland turbo Beaver. The fuselage of the aircraft was extended using a STC design engineered by Wipaire. Photo by Dave Weiman

Those prices go right on up to the Wipline 13000 amphibious float which sells for \$440,000! Relax... that's for a set of two, including struts and fittings. Installation runs from \$4,500 right on up to \$40,000

for a Twin Otter.

But the procedure to install the floats isn't all that easy. Depending on the aircraft, a crane is often used to lift an aircraft off its landing gear and place it on top of a set of floats. Seventy-five percent of Wipline amphibious floats are installed at Fleming Field.

During the winter, the banks of the icy Mississippi River are lined with straight floats owned by customers that have Wipaire put their aircraft on wheels in the wintertime. They fly into Wipaire's 8,000 by 500 ft. seaplane base in the fall, and fly out on wheels using Wipaire's 3,000 ft. grass strip. Come spring, owners reverse the operation and have their floats put back on.

BUSINESS ISN'T ALL FLOATS

Like Basler Turbo Conversions which includes extending the fuselage of the DC-3, Wipaire also gets involved with extending the fuselage of the de Havilland Beaver. Other Wipaire conversions involve converting piston aircraft to turbines, engine/prop updates and horsepower increases, seating/interior conversions, STOL kits, and modifications to increase fuel capacity and gross weight. Turning old and tired aircraft into rebuilt and zero-timed beauties is consistent with Wipaire's attention to detail and quality control.

While Wipaire would prefer to work exclusively on customer aircraft, buying old Beavers and runout aircraft is sometimes necessary to keep their crews working 12 months out of the year. It takes between 2,100 and 2,300 man hours to completely refurbish a Beaver, and they all leave the shop with a brand spanking new pair of Wipline 6100 floats and a sticker price of over \$400,000. This includes modern, state-of-the-art avionics.

Wipaire has engineered, manufactured, and STC'd a copilot door for the Cessna 206 Stationair. While the 206 design already includes a large pilot's door and a double loading door at the right rear of the passenger compartment, it leaves the right front seat without a means of easy egress. For the 206 floatplane, the copilot door is almost a must to assist in docking and quicker response time in the unloading process.

Another popular conversion is the Wipaire TCM IO-550 which is specifically designed as a direct



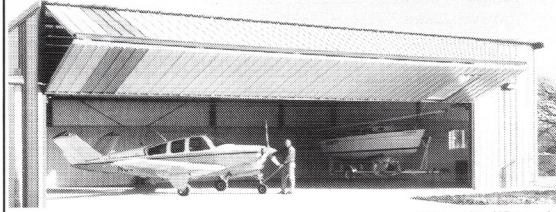
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An Army surplus Beaver sits on the airstrip at Wipaire's seaplane base, waiting to be turned into a \$400,000 showpiece. Photo by Dave Weiman

replacement for the original TCM IO-520 Continental. Coupled with the McCauley three-blade "Black Mac" propeller, this conversion enhances performance of the Cessna 185 and 206, and can deliver 300 hp at a lower rpm.

WHEN THE DEMAND IS THERE, SO IS WIPAIRE!

One morning in 1979, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) called and asked Bob Wiplinger if Wipaire could build a float for their fleet of Twin Otters. He immediately went to work on the project and came up with some preliminary drawings, but Wiplinger was in the midst of developing floats for the Super Beaver (Wipline 6000) and then Cessna came in the door wanting floats for its Caravan. It wasn't until 1990 until the Twin Otter float mockup reach a three-dimensional stage, which was a scaled-up version of the Nomad and Caravan float design. The mockup now graces the front walkway to the Wipaire paint shop at Fleming Field.

MARKAIR - an airline with operations in the Caribbean - ended up with the first set of amphibious floats for the Twin Otter. In fact, MARKAIR selected the Otter because of the availability of Wipline 13000 floats, and concern with the aging Grumman Goose and Mallard fleet and a lack of parts for these aircraft. Wipaire's Jim Jacobsen says that there are approximately 700 Twin Otters flying, and he hopes to put floats on at least 100 of them.

There are 65 employees on staff at Wipaire, from engineers and sheet metal technicians at the factory, to upholsterers, painting specialists, avionics technicians, and



A MARKAIR airline Twin Otter is mated with floats for the first time. The Wipline 13000 floats were engineered especially for this aircraft. Photo courtesy of Wipaire, Inc.

airframe and powerplant mechanics at their aircraft maintenance facility at Fleming. The president of the company is Robert Nelson.



A MARKAIR airline Twin Otter on Wipline 13000 floats. Photo courtesy of MARKAIR

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION on Wipaire services, call (612) 451-1205 or fax (612) 451-1786.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We wish to credit PRIVATE PILOT magazine (March 1991) for some of the information presented here on the history of Wipaire, Inc. □



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Pilots Share Love For Floatplane Flying

by Dave Weiman



What do airline pilots do on their days off? They either have businesses on the side, give flight instruction, or just go fly their airplanes. Two airline pilots from Madison, Wisconsin — Neil Robinson, a Boeing 757 pilot with Northwest, and Jim Notstad, a Boeing 727 pilot, also for Northwest — do all three things on their days off. Together, they run a floatplane flight school on Lake Kegonsa, about 15 miles southeast of Madison, near the farming community of Stoughton.

The 1973 Cessna 172 they use is owned by Jim Notstad, as is the seaplane base on the lake. The 150 hp aircraft is equipped with EDO-2000 straight seaplane floats.

Jim, 46, began taking flying lessons in 1972 from an uncle who was an airline pilot. Neil, 38, started flying in 1981.

There's only three seaplane bases in Wisconsin at the present time: Hayward, Oshkosh and Stoughton, and a fourth is being established in Tony, Wisconsin. There are only 433 seaplane bases in the United States which makes up only 2.4 percent of the total number of airports. It is estimated that there are 6,000 floatplanes in the United States, and 44,000 licensed seaplane pilots.

Between them, Jim and Neil train as many as 20 students each year, with some going on to become bush pilots, and others who will purchase their own floatplanes. Most seaplane students, however, train for the fun of it.

Insurance is the biggest problem to renting floatplanes. Dual instruc-

tion is approved by most companies, but renting is almost unheard of.

Six hours of dual is required for a rating, with most students getting between 8-14 hours before taking their checkride. Jim Notstad is also an FAA pilot examiner and gives all the checkrides for their course.

In the first lesson, Jim and Neil find out how good of a swimmer the student is, because as Neil points out, *"that's how you walk away from a floatplane accident."* If a student can't at least tread water, they are required to wear an inflatable life vest.

Considerable time is spent experiencing the effect of wind on taxiing, and learning how to dock, moor and beach the floatplane. If the wind is calm, the takeoff run can be as much as three times as long as when there is a breeze.

Even though floatplanes are less maneuverable than boats, boats have the right of way. Neil says while this might not be right, it is the only practical policy to have considering the "unconscious" behavior of most boat drivers. *"We are also politically outnumbered in floatplane flying to expect that it would ever be any other way."*

Cross-country flying doesn't have to be hazardous, says Neil. *"You just have to do some careful preflight planning to make sure you have adequate waterways to land and takeoff, and fuel enroute."*

"We try to buy avgas whenever we

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FBO/CARETAKER WANTED - Maquoketa, Iowa, seeks FBO/Caretaker to operate/maintain its municipal airport. Facilities include lighted 3,300 ft. asphalt runway and taxiway, concrete parking apron, 60 x 140 ft. corporate hangar building with two 60 x 140 ft. hangars. Also featuring eight-plane T-hangars, rotating beacon, lighted wind "T," complete fuel farm with 3,000 gallon 100 LL permanent tank and Jet A temporary, NDB, and unicom radio. For further information contact Gus Glaser, City Manager, (319) 652-2484.

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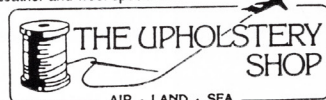
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ARTICLE WRAPUPS

FLOATPLANE FROM P. 20

can, but unleaded auto fuel is sometimes a necessity, as are plastic fuel cans."

Neil says that a seaplane rating has plenty of romance associated with it. *"It is truly the ticket to the north country. You can essentially create an airport wherever you go, and rarely need to use the radio. It is a free form of flying, and very much back to nature."*

As for restrictions, any body of water which is navigable is fair game, but Neil warns that some lakes and rivers have speed limits for taxiing. He advises anyone interested in doing a lot of floatplane flying to join the Seaplane Pilots Association, a division of the Aircraft Owners & Pilots Association. They publish a "Guide To Water Landing Restrictions" which should be an essential part of everyone's cross country kit. For additional information on the Seaplane Pilots Association, call 1-800-USA-AOPA.

For additional information on Madison Area Seaplane Training, contact Neil Robinson at (608) 238-4429 or Jim Notstad at (608) 221-8116. The cost is \$130 per hour which includes instructor, aircraft rental and fuel, and the company will assist students in obtaining hotel accommodations and car rental, if needed. □

IOWA CONF. FROM P. 26

cal lab supervisor, have restored several airplanes and will describe what to expect before starting.

For those planning to conduct an airshow, the FAA Airshow Planning Training Session is a must. FAA representative Larry Young will be the featured speaker.

HELP WANTED

AVIATION PARTS SALES REPRESENTATIVE

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