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A piece of history flies away

By BETSY CALVERT Staff Writer

Apr 17, 2021



This view shows the 1933 Stinson plan as renovators were starting to add the new skin over the wood and metal frame.

PHOTO PROVIDED

When this plane first flew, it was only 30 years after the Wright brothers proved human flight possible.

But the 1933 Stinson Reliant stopped flying probably around 1950, say its renovators here at the Punta Gorda Airport.



A front view of the renovated Stinson 1933 plane, ready for takeoff after about 70 years.

PHOTOs PROVIDED

In late March, it took off again finally – the man who bought it being the first to try it out. He was impressed, and then flew it to his home in Indiana.

“The new owner came and put the wings on and flew away,” said Al Boynton, the man who bought the plane in 2012 after finding it on a website. “Said it flew like a baby.”

Now, all the renovation team here is left with are eight or nine years of memories. That’s how long it took them to rebuild the machine – about five years longer than they expected.



The Stinson plane rehab crew at Punta Gorda airport after the eight-year job is done. From left: Rob Hancik, Allan Boynton, Gary Bosche and Milt Weeks.

PHOTO PROVIDED

In 2012, four Punta Gorda residents — Boynton, Rob Hancik, Milt Weeks and Gary Boschee — started the project. It was trucked from Texas to Punta Gorda, and the team began working on it about three days a week, eight hours a day.

They underestimated how long it would take to restore. Parts were hard to find, or non-existent. Some had to be manufactured anew. What remains original in the plane is its frame, which is made of steel tubes. For its long slumber, it was stored with linseed oil inside the tubes, Boynton said, to keep it from rusting.

Originally, its skin was made of cotton or maybe linen. Today, it is covered in a polyester called ceconite.

Boynton was schooled in aeronautical engineering.

“I can’t say that being an aeronautics engineer helped in any way,” he said, adding that rebuilding a machine built so early required an open mind.



Before they put on the new skin, this is what the 1933 Stinson looked like, ready for renovation.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

The engine is a nine-cylinder circle, which is not seen today. It is large with a wingspan of 43 feet. It seats five small people, he said, making it kind of an executive model of its day.

The amazing thing, he said, is how sophisticated it is, considering how young avionics was at that time.

The real thrill of rebuilding this aircraft was the feeling of recreating history, Boynton said.

“There are very few people alive that were there the day this airplane was at work. You’re really recreating the past,” he said.

After this project, Boynton said, he won’t be rebuilding more planes. A second later, he said, “We’re working on another plane now ... a 1939 Sailor Craft.”

There’s always another plane to work on.

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