

# Mr. Swanson's Coupes



The 90-hp, type-certificated version of the Kari-Keen Coupe, built in 1930. Note the rigid round-tube landing gear; all shock absorbing was by the Musselmann-designed Goodyear "Airwheels." Photo by Gordon S. Williams.

by PETER M. BOWERS / AOPA 54408

■ ■ Back in aviation's disaster years, the early 1930s, industry personnel played quite a game of musical chairs. One plant would shut down and the employees would try to find jobs in other plants. Sometimes almost the entire staff of a defunct company would pool their resources, establish a new organization, buy or lease the old plant, and soon be back in business at the same old stand.

Established designers who moved around this way frequently turned out designs for their new employers that were hard to distinguish from their previous efforts. In one particular case, the model name seemed to travel right along with the designer.

In 1928, the Kari-Keen Manufacturing Co., of Sioux City, Iowa, a builder of automobile accessories, decided to get in on the aviation boom and formed Kari-Keen Aircraft, Inc. Chief engineer was Swen S. Swanson, formerly chief engineer of Lincoln Aircraft, where he designed the Lincoln Sport, and later of Arrow Aircraft Corp., where he designed the Arrow Sport biplane.

Swanson's new airplane was the Kari-Keen Coupe, a little side-by-side, two-seater monoplane turned out at a time when such designs were rare. Further, it was a fully cantilevered monoplane with a tapered wood-frame wing and

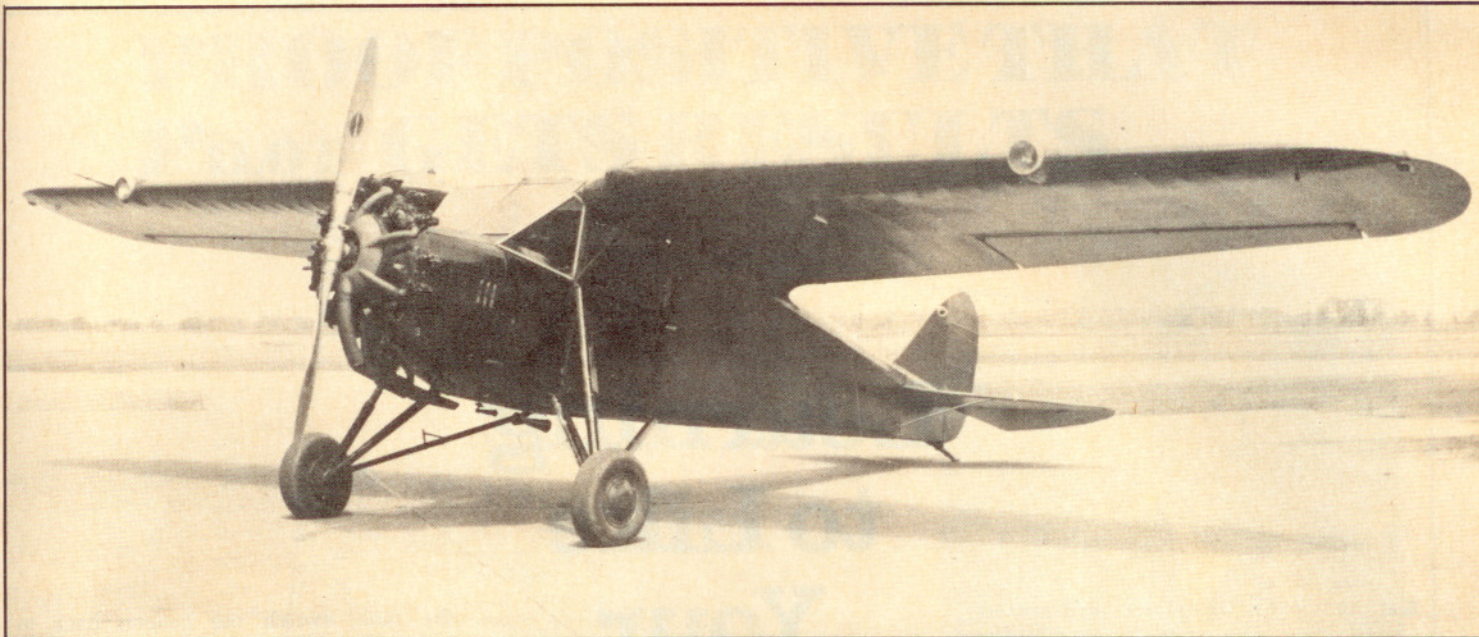
steel-tube fuselage that made it look like a scaled-down Cessna A-W. The engine was the 55-hp, five-cylinder Velie M-5, another product of an automotive firm.

The Coupe was a good little plane. It received Category-2 Type Certificate 2-81 in June 1929, and 24 were built and sold before a more powerful 90-hp model was introduced in 1930. The latter was awarded ATC 331 in June 1930.

The company then got into financial difficulties, and Swanson left to form his own company. A new firm, Sioux Aircraft, took over Kari-Keen and marketed a few more planes, designated Sioux 90s, before closing down.

Swanson, meanwhile, established the Swanson Aircraft Corp. in Hopewell, Va., and introduced the Swanson W-15 Coupe. Still a side-by-side two-seater, this was a slight enlargement of the Kari-Keen/Sioux model but was fitted with a 110-hp Warner Scarab engine. The major outward differences were in the landing gear and the windshield/wing center section arrangement.

The new Swanson firm proved to be peripatetic, moving first to Rockford, Ill., then Elk Point, S.D., before shutting down. Swanson then became associated with Ole Fahlin (AOPA 563), former manager of Kari-Keen's propeller division (and still a custom prop maker), who had set up Fahlin Aircraft Co. in



The basic Kari-Keen Coupe lines were retained in Swanson's own W-15 Coupe, with 110-hp engine and oleo-pneumatic landing gear. E. M. Sommerich Collection.

## SWANSON COUPES

### Specifications and Performance

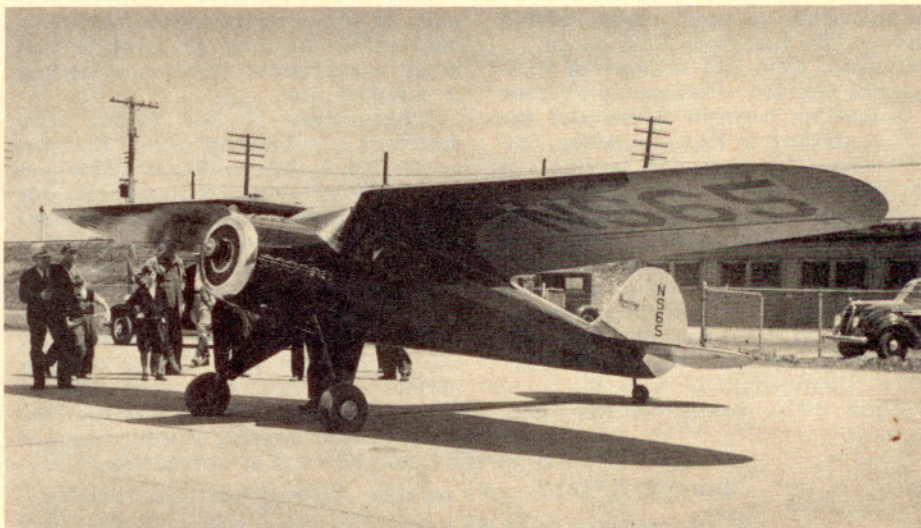
	Kari-Keen Coupe (1929)	Swanson Coupe (1931)	Fahlin Plymo-Coupe (1935)
Span	30 ft 0 in	34 ft 4 in	32 ft 0 in
Length	22 ft 9 in	25 ft 0 in	20 ft 0 in
Wing area	150 sq ft	195 sq ft	172 sq ft
Powerplant	Velie M-5, 55 hp	Warner Scarab, 110 hp	Chrysler Plymouth, 80 hp
Empty weight	883 lb	1,325 lb	1,075 lb
Gross weight	1,450 lb	2,100 lb	1,611 lb
High speed	100 mph	125 mph	115 mph
Cruising speed	80 mph	95 mph	95-100 mph
Rate of climb	680 fpm	1,000 fpm	800 fpm
Service ceiling	10,000 ft	16,000 ft	16,000 ft
Range	—	625 mi	520 mi

the old Nicholas-Beasley plant in Marshall, Mo. Their first effort was the FS-1 (for Fahlin-Swanson) and was again named "Coupe." This aircraft bore a strong resemblance to the previous Swanson monoplanes, the principal point of interest being the enclosed, British Pobjoy geared radial engine.

The FS-1 was still in the prototype stage when the Department of Commerce set up a design contest for a low-cost, private-owner airplane. Figuring that the cost of the standard airplane engine was the primary dollar deterrent to plane buying, Fahlin came up with an adaptation of the contemporary Chrysler Plymouth automobile engine. Delivering 80 hp through a Fahlin propeller geared down 2:1, the new airplane was a very slight adaptation of the FS-1 and bore the entirely logical name of "Plymo-Coupe."

While it was a very successful airplane, the Plymo-Coupe lost out to the Hammond Y in the design contest. Only two other auto-powered designs reached production in the late 1930s: the Arrow Sport monoplane and the Akron Funk B.

Swen Swanson might have gone on to produce other advanced monoplanes, but his career was cut short at an early age by a fatal case of pneumonia. Today only one of the Coupes is still flying; another is being restored. □



S. S. Swanson's final Coupe design was the "Plymo-Coupe" for Ole Fahlin. The "NS" license indicates that this example was bought by the government for evaluation in the low-cost-airplane design contest. Photo by A. U. Schmidt.