lots' neglecting to extend the nose gear for landing accounted for the largest share of VariEze and Long-EZ accidents and incidents. Fuel starvation due to defective tank selectors, nonstandard unvented fuel caps and fuel contamination was cited in several accidents. The only reported in-flight airframe failure involved a VariEze on a high-speed, low-altitude pass over an airport. According to the FAA report, the winglet and wing-tip skin failed due to improper construction.

The uninitiated may have difficulty distinguishing a VariEze from a Long-EZ unless the two are parked side by side. One clue is the Long-EZ's larger, straight winglets. VariEze winglets form an angle at the wingtip juncture. That was one of the few characteristics that distinguished Fred N. Wimberly's six-year-old VariEze from Nolan S. (Red) Morris's two-year-old Long-EZ when both appeared on the AOPA ramp in Frederick, Maryland.

Wimberly, AOPA 395810, a civilian electrical engineer with the U.S. Navy, bought his VariEze plans soon after the aircraft was introduced, in part because he had become disillusioned with a partially completed BD-5 kit purchased from an acquaintance. He spent three years building the VariEze and has flown it 650 hours with no loss of enthusiasm. "It still is the most fun you can have in the air," he said.

Morris, AOPA 806964, who operates his own vending service, has logged 250 hours in his Long-EZ, the first aircraft he has built and owned. Morris earned his pilot's license about 20 years ago but gave up flying until building his Long-EZ. Before flying it, he took instruction in a Cessna 152, then spent several hours with Wimberly, who is an instructor, in the VariEze. (RAF recommends that pilots be current in at least two aircraft types before attempting to fly a VariEze or Long-EZ and that checkouts be performed in calm conditions from a hard-surface runway of at least 3,500 feet. Grumman singles are considered good transition trainers because the differential braking and responsive handling are similar to RAF aircraft.)

VariEze and Long-EZ pilot and passenger sit in semireclining seats. Some builders complain that Rutan designed the cockpit for his own six-foot-plus frame, and unless adjustments to fixed seat positions are made during construction, diminutive pilots must use a number of cushions. When latched shut, the expansive bubble canopy is only inches from one's head. In bright sunlight, the canopy seems more a solar collector than a windscreen. Sunglasses and a floppy chapeau are a must. The backseater is provided with a sidestick controller but no rudder pedals, power controls or instruments. The canard blocks a portion of the pilot's view, and the passenger cannot see past the front seat roll bar, but otherwise visibility is superb.

The price to be paid for high-flying cruise efficiency is to be found in tepid runway performance.

Weight restrictions prevent most builders from equipping their aircraft with electric starters, so proper hand-propping procedures must be observed (see "Pilot Advisory: The dangers and precautions of hand-propping," Sep-