



SwiftFury

To the Swift goes the race

BY RICHARD L. COLLINS

*C*inderella at the ball? The SwiftFury at Sun 'n Fun? There are parallels. The LoPresti family of Vero Beach, Florida, took their new LoPresti Piper SwiftFury to the air show at Lakeland, Florida, with the offer of brand-new production SwiftFury airplanes for \$89,900 with basic IFR equipment. They hoped for 20 or so orders, backed up with a \$10,000 fully refundable expression of interest. Peggy LoPresti called a few times during the show with an ever-larger number of or-

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER

ders and more excitement in her voice. I would pass the word around the office; nobody could believe that 50, then 60, then 70 people had signed up. When the show was over, they had a total of 124 airplanes sold, and by the following week, the order book stood at 168 with more coming, despite a price adjustment to \$95,900 with no avionics.

In the course of just over a week, the bright red SwiftFury had snowballed into one of the greatest successes in general aviation of the 1980s. Squadrons were formed; one in Birmingham, one in Vero Beach, and one at the residential airport community of Spruce Creek in Florida, where residents took delivery positions on 12 SwiftFurys.

What breed of airplane has sparked such emotion? As a former Swift owner, I can assure you that the original Swift,

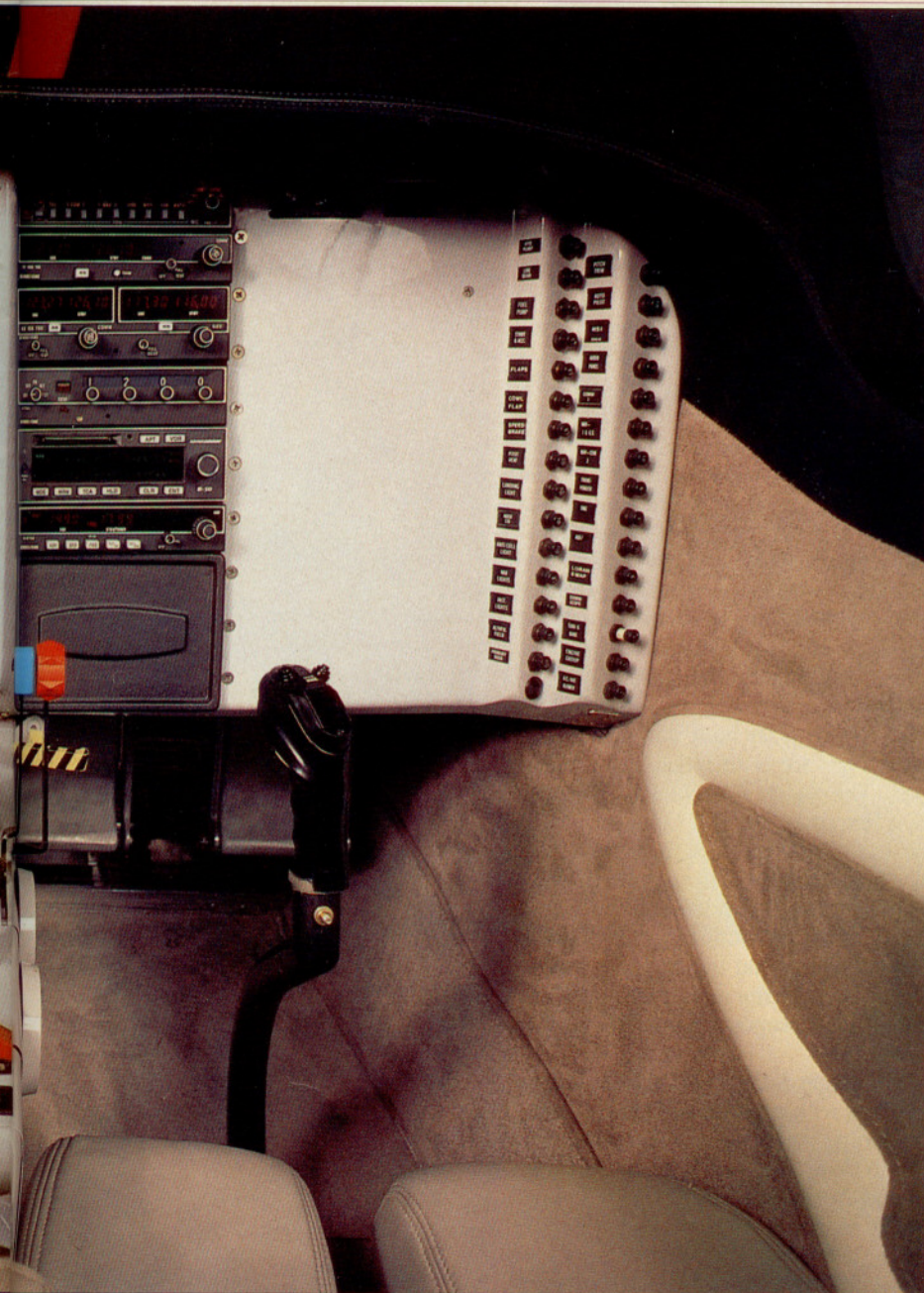


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on which the new airplane is based, did not ignite such passion. In fact, when I sold my Swift in 1955, I walked away from it without looking back. But while it shares the basic shape (with modifications) of the original, the SwiftFury is almost totally different. It will have a fuel-injected 200-horsepower Lycoming up front (the original had an 85 or 125); the new instrument panel is without question the most functional and handsome on any airplane; the longer tail-wheel assembly (retractable) gives better landing characteristics and visibility while taxiing; and the new windshield line, canopy, and cowling give the airplane a rakish new appearance.

The slots on the wings of the original Swift are gone, and the wing is actually



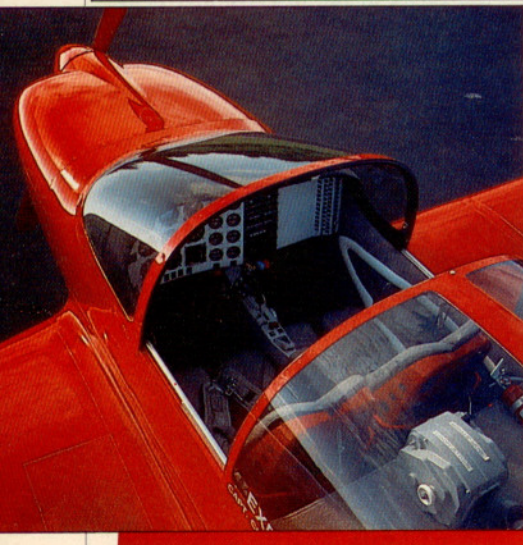


repositioned on the fuselage, four inches forward, for aerodynamic reasons. Full landing gear doors are included, and the gear door that covers the wheel well closes after the gear is extended. The old Swift was difficult to three-point because, as the nose was raised, air would get into the exposed wheel well, and the airplane would decelerate very rapidly. This is fixed with the door.

Structural changes are being made to the wing of the airplane as well as the fuselage. The corrugated skin is gone, and tail and spar changes will enable certification in the Aerobatic category (plus six and minus three Gs) if the SwiftFury can be made to pass the rigorous spin testing of that certification. An abrupt break in the fuselage and belly has been eliminated; everything that can be made flush has been; all aileron hinges are internal; and a whole year was spent perfecting the control system of the SwiftFury. Control sticks replace the wheels; push rods and roller bearings are used for pitch and roll control; and an anti-servo tab on the right elevator is used to enhance pitch feel—and possibly even to make pitch forces adjustable: light and frisky for a lark, heavier for instrument flying.

If looking at the airplane makes pilots want one, sitting in the SwiftFury has been the clincher for many buyers. While the cockpit has a totally functional appearance—the seat cushions are attached with hook and loop fasteners so they can be quickly removed if you are doing acro and need a chute—it is so neat, and the controls feel so well balanced when the airplane is at rest, that this seems almost the ultimate personal airplane. A new term, "Hotas," describes all those controls on the throttle and stick. That's the acronym for "hands on throttle and stick," and the buttons are there to operate the wing flaps, cowl flaps, landing lights, recognition lights, transmitter, transponder ident, and pitch trim; to advance the electronic check list; and to turn off the autopilot and, should you fly into a thin layer of fog, all the external lights. A full caution and warning system will be included, and the engine instrumentation will be programmed so that any out-of-tolerance condition will sound a warning. LoPresti is also working on a system that will warn if anything is out of place for a selected event, such as takeoff.

There will be an external baggage door, and the compartment will hold golf clubs. The vision is of a SwiftFury



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landing on an immaculate grass strip next to a golf course, and a natty dude with a white scarf, knickers, and tan-and-white golf shoes hopping out and strutting from his SwiftFury to the first tee. A friend will be able to go along as well because the target useful load of the SwiftFury is 800 pounds. Fuel in the wings will be from 54 to 56 gallons usable. Projected cruising speed is more than 175 knots at 9,000 feet.

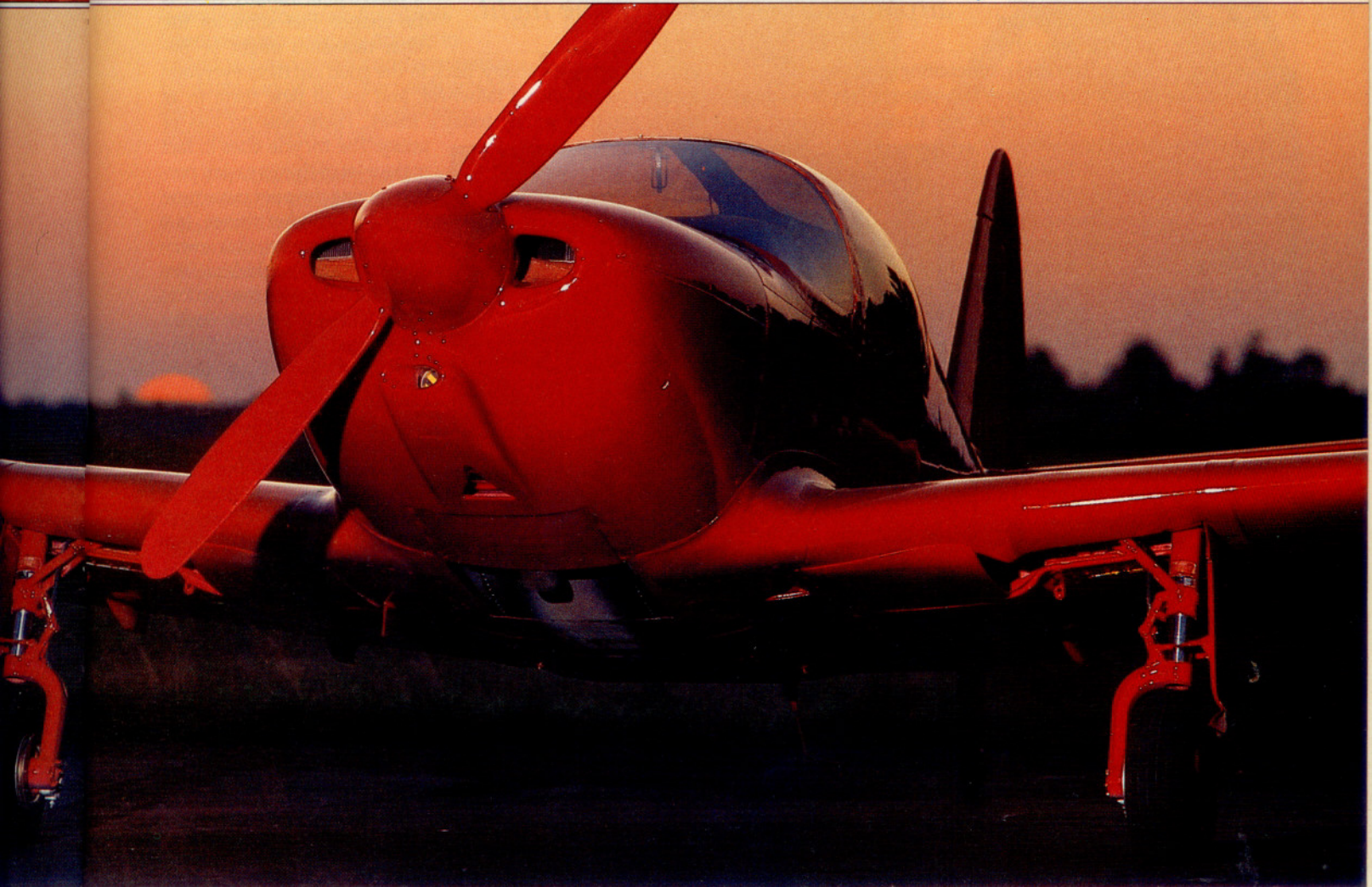
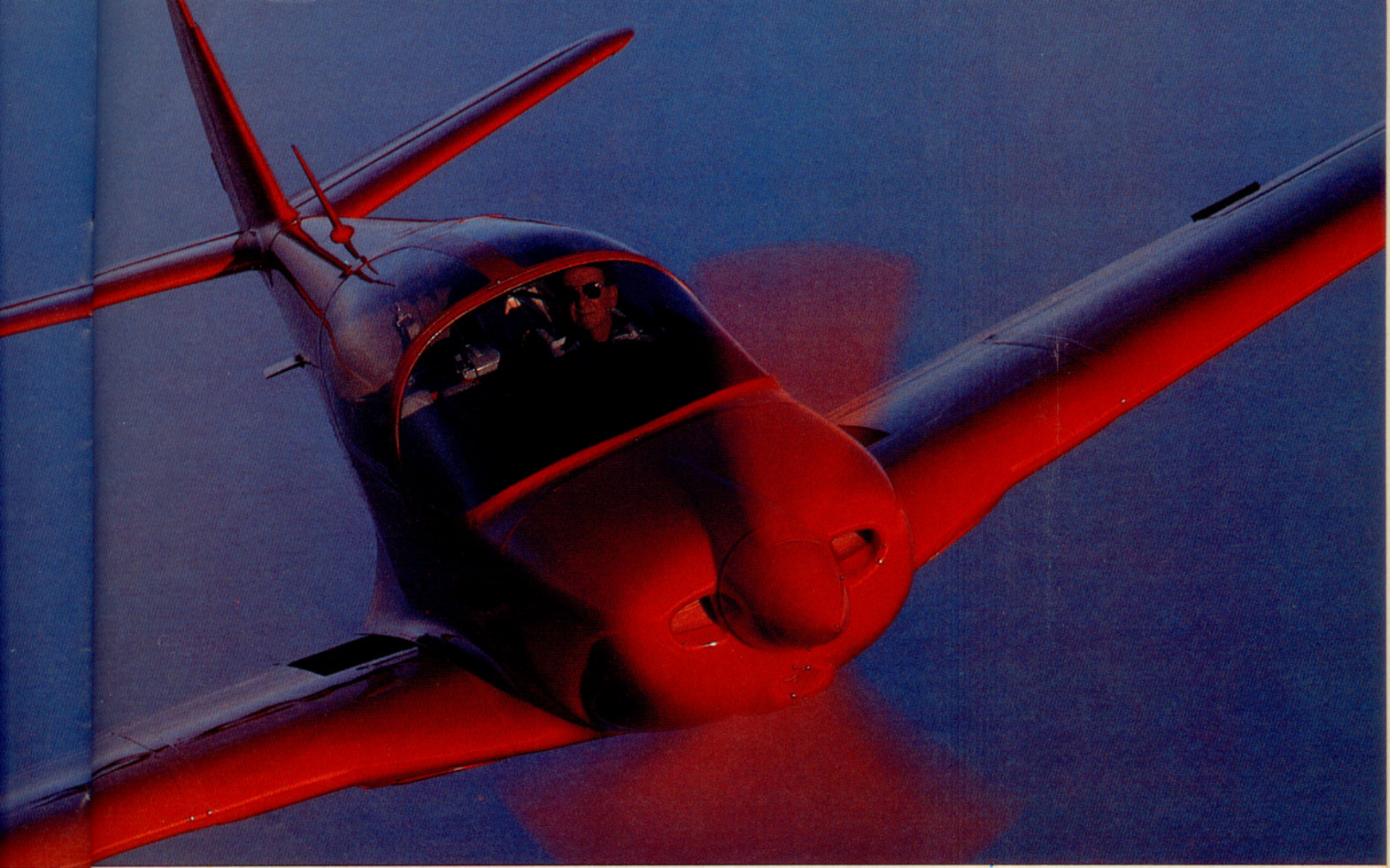
The SwiftFury comes from LoPresti Piper, a company that was formed by Roy LoPresti and M. Stuart Millar, who is the owner of Piper Aircraft Corporation. LoPresti Piper was formed for the express purpose of developing new products; before formation of the company, Roy LoPresti and his family were working toward a program to manufacture the SwiftFury, so it is a natural first product for the new company. Curt LoPresti is in charge of developing the airplane.

With the order book so fat, the next challenges are certification and production. The Federal Aviation Administration has given LoPresti Piper the choice of three paths to certification, all based on the original Swift type certificate, which the company leases from the Swift Museum Foundation. Or there is the possibility that the aircraft could be certified under the new primary aircraft rules if that proposal is implemented in time.

The target date for certification is June 1, 1990, with production of the airplane beginning on that date and with 156 SwiftFurys produced in the first 12 months. Plans for the "where and how" of production were not complete in late April, mainly because a few weeks earlier LoPresti Piper had no earthly idea it would be sitting on almost 200 orders at this time.

The deal for buyers is this: The initial deposit is a \$10,000 certificate of deposit in the bank of LoPresti's choosing but in your name. As long as the money stays there, your name stays on the delivery position. On December 1 of this year, LoPresti will give a delivery date and performance guarantees; if acceptable, then the \$10,000 becomes a true deposit on the airplane.

The strong popularity of the SwiftFury offers interesting commentary on aviation today. Many have contended that the business atrophied because there has been "nothing new." Designs are the same old thing. So here comes LoPresti Piper with a refinement of a





design that is 44 years old—and the company gets a record large order book in a record short time. If anything, this suggests that it is not the airframes that are dated but the refinements and the presentation. The SwiftFury is, simply, an exciting airplane.

There are numerous attractive two-place kit airplanes available, and the popularity of these has already illustrated that there is a strong market for personal airplanes of this size. When it gets on line, the SwiftFury will add the factory-built element to this market, and, if initial interest is any indication, it could be one of the largest in the 1990s.

Of all the people who examined the SwiftFury at Sun 'n Fun, only one questioned whether it would be available with a tricycle gear. The answer has to be "no" because it would be almost as much a project as all the other changes. And the simple fact is that there is nothing wrong with a conventional gear. It gave way to the trike in a time when aviation deluded itself with a "take a drive in the sky" mentality that probably did as much as anything else to lead us to a safety record worse than it needed to be. Flying air-

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planes is one of the most challenging and rewarding things a person can do, and if handling an airplane with a tailwheel is beyond a pilot's ability, there is the chance that some of the other requisites might be beyond the person's ability. Back in the good old days everyone learned to fly with a tailwheel, and we all flew them in as much wind as we fly today's trikes. There was no loss of utility. The tricycle does in fact make a lot of things easier, perhaps giving the pilot more time to deal with other things, but that doesn't mean that every airplane built should have the third wheel on the front.

Roy LoPresti and his family are excited about the SwiftFury, and they have every right to be. Interest in the airplane is so high that, at Sun 'n Fun, prospects were examining it in the middle of the night with flashlights. Building a prototype and generating excitement is one thing; certification and production is something else. There is full knowledge of that at LoPresti Piper, and years of experience are being used to overcome the hurdles. And if this candy-apple red SwiftFury gets under your skin, the telephone number is 407/562-1404. □

