



# NOT-SO-MELLOW YELLOW

*LoPresti Piper has put the finishing touches on the SwiftFury prototype and now looks toward certification.*

BY MARK R. TWOMBLY

**L**et's begin with the color. Followers of the LoPresti Piper Aircraft Engineering Company's SwiftFury project will remember that the first iteration of this very upscale remake of the Globe Swift was painted from spinner to fin in an eye-popping, 80-pound blend of hot pink and Chinese red. ■ No longer. The prototype has

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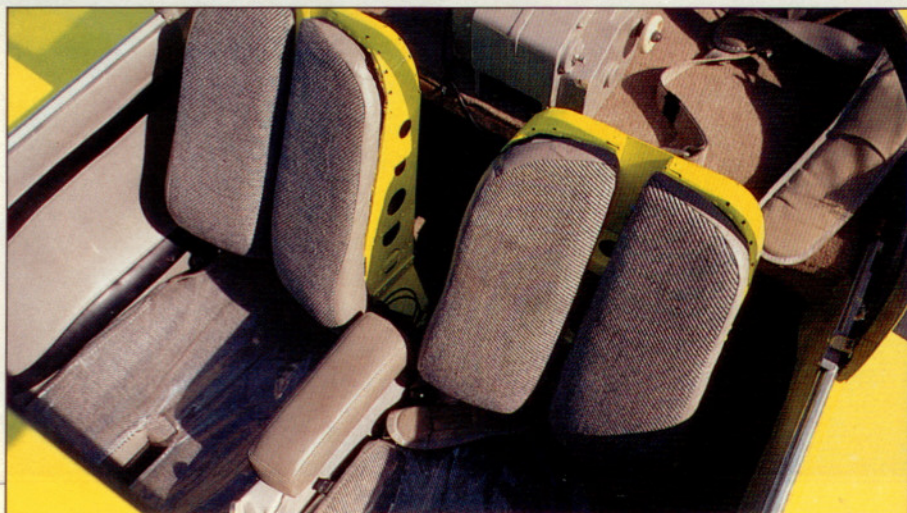
handling by reducing control system friction, increasing roll response, and tweaking pitch forces and balance. Based on my two flights in the prototype, I'd say the LoPrestis have succeeded in that effort. It is an absolute pleasure to fly but not just because of the handling. An airplane is memorable because the whole package works; everything contributes to the overall favorable impression. So it is with the SwiftFury. It should be the compleat airplane for the enthusiast pilot: It's fast and efficient; it has the looks; it handles beautifully; and it will be certified in the Aerobatic category to load limits of plus 6 and minus 3 Gs.

The clincher is the cockpit. Try out that control stick and console-mounted throttle, which between them bristle

with switches and buttons to control flaps, optional speed brakes, recognition and landing lights, pitch trim, microphone, transponder ident, control wheel

steering, and autopilot disconnect, and you'll be hooked.

The original goal was to certify the SwiftFury's modifications through sup-





tally funded by Piper Aircraft Chairman Stuart Millar through his company, Romeo Charlie, Incorporated, which also owns Piper and Piper North. Millar has had to cut back his support of the SwiftFury project because of cash-flow problems at Piper. LoPresti Piper still is operating, but the money is not there for certification and production.

Millar and LoPresti are working independently to secure additional investment, according to LoPresti. Until the money is committed, LoPresti has stopped making predictions of certification or production dates.

One end of LoPresti Piper's shop across Vero Beach Municipal Airport from Piper is crowded with new assembly tooling, built by Piper. LoPresti is building parts tooling and is making pieces for five airplanes, three for civil certification and two for evaluation by the Air Force. All of the tooling for the original Swift is stacked against one wall of the hangar. It can't be used for building SwiftFurys because the two airplanes are so different structurally.

No SwiftFurys have actually been sold. "Customers" are those who have reserved production positions by plunking down \$10,000 each in interest-bearing certificates of deposit in their own names. LoPresti Piper has no control over the money. Some 363 airplanes were reserved this way. In March, position holders were notified that because of the uncertainty over certification and production of the SwiftFury, they were free to withdraw their certificates of deposit, although LoPresti Piper will continue to hold their production positions.

The "reservation" system was intended as a way of measuring interest in the SwiftFury from qualified potential customers without risking customers' money. The feeling at LoPresti Piper is that it has been a huge success.

And continues to be. Another 64 airplanes have been reserved by virtue of the customers each giving LoPresti Piper a \$50 check to reserve a production position. The \$50 also buys a T-shirt and an invitation to an annual SwiftFury party. The interest has been so spirited that some customers have tried to turn a quick profit by selling their early delivery positions. LoPresti Piper is discouraging speculation by refusing to accept delivery position transfers.

Some early customers are concerned that LoPresti is backing away from the \$89,900 price quoted for each of the first 100 airplanes. (The price rose incremen-

tally on subsequent airplanes to \$118,900, but after the first 363 positions were reserved, LoPresti Piper stopped quoting prices.)

The company's position is that it will hold to the price "if there is any way we can possibly do it" but that there is no binding, contractual commitment. LoPresti is convinced he can turn a profit at those prices, provided production expenses for labor and overhead are kept in check.

For all the excitement over it, the SwiftFury has engendered some hard feelings across the airport at Piper. Some are asking why Millar continues to



*The prototype has been stripped, and a fresh, 20-pound coat of radioactive green has been applied.*

pump money into the SwiftFury project even as he is forced to seek significant additional investment to put Piper back on its feet. I put the question to LoPresti and Kevin Tracey, Millar's assistant at Romeo Charlie.

"In view of the big picture, the money being spent here is not hurting Piper," Tracey said. "I don't think Piper's cash-flow problems would be any different if LoPresti Piper shut down."

LoPresti, an irrepressible romantic, provided another view:

"When Millar came into this industry three years ago, he had a vision to build new and exciting airplanes," LoPresti said. "The SwiftFury is new and exciting. Millar wants to make a contribution to personal aviation, and this is personal aviation at its best." □

plements to the Swift's 45-year-old type certificate. However, the Federal Aviation Administration has said it will require the same certification effort as for a new type certificate except for wing fatigue and seat dynamic crash tests. LoPresti now plans on including those tests and going for a complete new type certificate. Aero Test, Incorporated, in Mojave, California, will do static and flight testing for certification.

A new type certificate is one major challenge LoPresti hadn't anticipated when he confidently predicted a year ago that by June 1, the SwiftFury would be in production. The other is money. A bit more than \$5 million has been spent on the project so far. About \$7 million more is needed.

LoPresti Piper is partly owned but to-