

Aero SUV



1999 sweepstakes



Paint, cloth, and pride

Beauty is also skin deep

UP to now, the 1976 Cessna U206F that is our Aero SUV sweepstakes airplane has undergone what might be considered the nuts and bolts part of the rework. With the major airframe alterations and avionics installation completed, the immediate next steps were to repaint the exterior and furnish the interior. ■ For the repaint, we turned to Ada Aircraft Paint in the eponymous south-central Oklahoma town. Red and Vera Brend run what is literally a mom-and-pop operation, but that's not unusual in the world of aircraft painting. Quality is what counts over quantity in this business, so what the Brends' facility might lack in high-rise corporate gloss it more than makes up for in outstanding work. Indeed, the paint

shop is also the field's *de facto* FBO, offering fuel and sodas as well as paint. ■ We chose Ada Aircraft Paint in part because of its good reputation. Both our own research and feedback from owners of various makes of airplanes suggested that we would get a properly prepared, well-applied coat of paint, delivered on schedule and budget. ■ When picking a shop, pay particular attention to its recent product. Quality varies by the job at nearly every paint shop, and a show winner produced half a decade ago is not necessarily an indication of how the facility is performing today. Ask for references and do what you can to look at recent jobs in the flesh. Photos can and do hide a multitude of sins. ■ AOPA Pilot Art Director Mike Kline designed the

By Marc E. Cook

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER



Aero SUV's three-color scheme in a deep green with a taupe accent line, all riding atop a bright white base. In person, the scheme impresses, thanks to the strong contrast between the sharp green and the scheme-softening taupe. If the scheme and colors are a bit reminiscent of the *Better Than New 172* we built in 1994, well, so be it; the Eddie

Poor prep will keep the paint from sticking and shows skin blemishes in sharp relief.

Bauer-esque colors position the airplane appropriately as an aerial sport ute. The powerful horizontal lines help to reduce some of the 206's inherent potbelliedness as well.

When the airplane arrived in Ada, Brend's staff set about scrutinizing the airframe. To their accomplished eyes, much more light hail damage was evident, and brows furrowed at the thought of all the prep work. Indeed, if one truism exists in the world of aircraft painting,



this is it: Nothing is as important as the preparatory efforts. Poor prep will keep the paint from sticking as intended and will show skin blemishes in sharp relief.

Ada Aircraft Paint has been a longtime user of Pratt and Lambert products. Now that the product line is owned by well-known house-paint purveyor Sherwin Williams, I asked Brend if he could

Painting took place at Ada Aircraft Painting in Ada, Oklahoma (top). Prototype scheme includes a mountain motif to be done in vinyl decal.

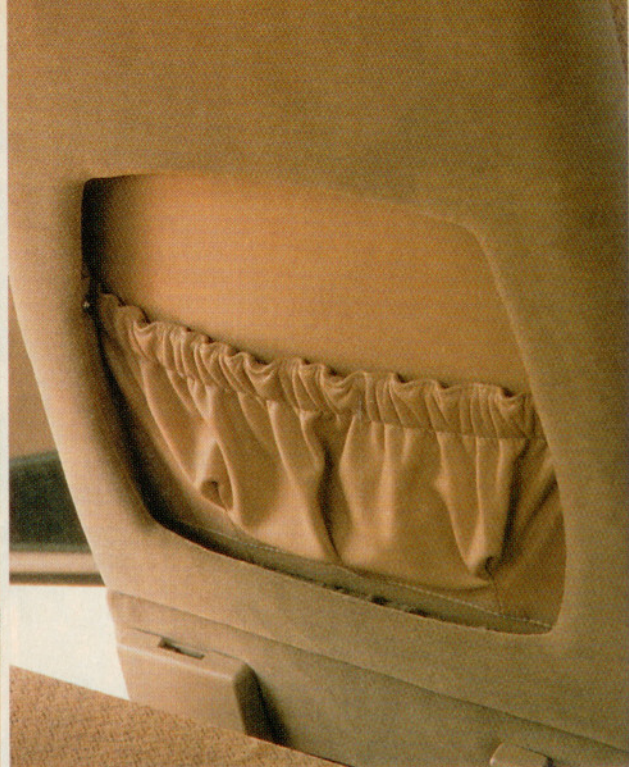
give up his paint guns for rollers and brushes. Chomping a bit harder on his stogie, he squinted and said, "Har-rumph." Brend used Sherwin's Acry-Glo, a multipart acrylic urethane, supplied to us at a discount by Advanced Aircraft Coatings of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Acry-Glo's application followed several days of prep work, which included a chemical stripper—Brend's staff was scrupulous in protecting our new LP Aeroplastics windows, thankfully—and multiple applications of a primer/surfacer. This is merely a primer system with relatively high solids—in other words, thick—that can be applied in ample layers and then sanded down to contour a surface or cover up some of the smallest hail dings. Larger pockmarks require a more substantial filler.

Fourteen working days later—



Dennis Wolter of Air-Mod offered this preview of the Aero SUV's interior.



The Aero SUV's seats are done in durable fabrics but include integral map pockets just where you need them. The interior also features luxurious leather inserts on the cabin sidewalls.

exactly as promised—the Aero SUV was ready for pickup. Normally, Brend and his crew like to have a few extra days at the end of the job to let the paint cure and, in the case of an airplane with a similar

amount of hail damage, an extra few days to work out the blemishes. Because of our tight schedule—the April Sun 'n Fun show in Lakeland, Florida, was the next stop for the airplane—Brend and compa-

ny worked weekends and evenings to have it ready for display. Upon its departure from Ada, bound for Lakeland, Brend reportedly watched the 206 take off and commented, "Well, I don't see any



Air-Mod did not take our project lying down. The folding bed makes the most of the 206's cavernous interior and can be easily removed, so you can haul six people instead.

paint coming off, so it's probably cured." They like their sense of humor dry in this part of tornado alley.

Ada Aircraft Paint has a fixed-price schedule based on airplane size and a few other variables. A three-color scheme

on a 206 normally costs \$5,995. Additional labor charges for body work and clean-up run a very reasonable \$35 an hour. When you consider the high quality of the work and the amount of hand labor that goes into a paint job, Ada's prices are

downright cheap. In part, that explains why the firm's clientele hails from virtually every corner of the country.

Nearly all of the flying in the 206 up to now had been without an interior—it was removed in January during the airframe-repair portion of the project at Aero-West Specialties in Santa Maria, California—and we were all eager to get the airplane into Dennis Wolter's capable hands for a new interior and, just as important, new soundproofing. Wolter's company, Air-Mod, in Batavia, Ohio, performed miracles on our Better Than New 172, and we wanted his shop to take on this project, which is perhaps even more challenging.

Wolter convinced us to forgo a total leather package and focus on more durable

fabrics for the seats and the majority of the interior. To keep the luxury quotient high, he suggested a leather section in the side panel, "So wherever bare skin touches the interior, you're touching leather," he says. Moreover, the fabric

that Wolter picked should be—and, in fact, has proven to be—much cooler in hot weather and nearly impervious to tearing; this last point should not be understated, given the take-it-camping nature of this beast.

Designing an interior to look modern and swoopy in the boxcar-like shell of a 206 is a feat unto itself, but Wolter pulled it off with almost contemptuous ease. Arched character lines in the side-walls help to offset the squarish windows and shipping-crate proportions of the Cessna's insides.

Seats are something of a passion for Wolter, who finds many standard aircraft seats uncomfortable. He is not alone. High on his list is fitting seats with ample lumbar support and sufficiently firm foam to prevent its compressing (or sacking out) for heavier passengers. Surprisingly, with new foam and fabric, the Stationair's six seats are actually lighter now than when fitted with stock upholstery.

Installing the interior came only after significant efforts had been lavished on the cabin. Wolter and his staff spent two



Osran reading lights are positioned for pilot and passengers to aid reading maps (above). Air-Mod's fabricated ski tube helps keep boards out of harm's way.

or three days just removing the adhesive-backed lead rectangles that Cessna used on the inside of the fuselage skins to deaden noise and help damp oil-canning. Unfortunately, over time these segments can allow corrosion to take place underneath, which our airplane exhibited despite its having lived in dry country. Then the Air-Mod crew removed all of the original ventilation system and what remained of the interior plastic. Some of it was saved and some replaced;

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Aero SUV assistance

AOPA would like to thank the following companies that donated or discounted their products and services to improve the Aero SUV or otherwise assisted in the project.

Aircraft painting

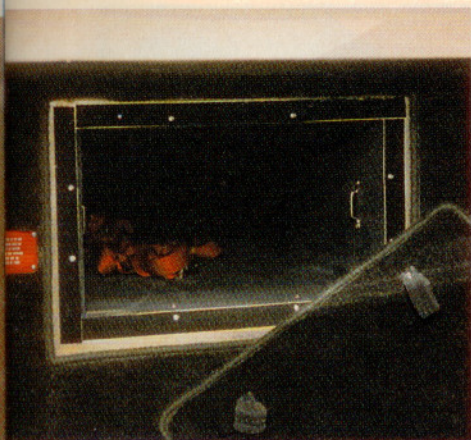
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Telephone 580/332-6086
Fax 580/332-4547
E-mail: adaairpt@chickasaw.com

Composite soundproofing

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Inertia reel harnesses

BAS, Inc.
13319 419th Street, East
Eatonville, Washington 98328
Telephone 360/832-6566
Fax 360/832-6466



over time, Royalite becomes too brittle to repair. In particular, we used new Cessna parts to replace a couple of window surrounds and the center pedestal. The remaining repaired plastic headliner was repainted a light taupe to match the instrument panel and to complement the other interior colors.

Wolter and company replaced all the original spindly plastic ventilators with high-zoot (but expensive) Wemac nozzles, including the notoriously loud and leaky orange juice cans at the windshield header. In another effort to reduce noise—remember, bare interior noise levels approached 100 dBA at takeoff power—

Wolter fitted composite soundproofing from Skandia, Inc. Before-and-after tests show a reduction of 12 dBA, which is a massive improvement. Indeed, with complete interior, it's possible to use lightweight active noise-reduction headsets without complaint. And the farther back you go, the quieter it gets; the last row of seats posts an amazing 85 dBA in cruise.

Our 206 came with three-point belts at all locations, so we merely rewired the rear four seats with belts from Aircraft Belts, Inc. Up front, Wolter fitted a set of B.A.S. inertia-reel, four-point belts

that are a tremendous improvement over the stock setup. Now you can lean forward to look ahead of the wing or to adjust the cowl-flap lever without first loosening the shoulder harness.

Wolter went all out with the convenience items, which include pull-out drink holders front and rear, individual Osram gooseneck reading lights at four positions, additional reading and map lights in the headliner, and a dual-color (red or white) floodlight package tucked into the glareshield overhang. If this 206 doesn't have enough night lighting for

Interior installation

Air-Mod
2025 Sporty's Drive
Batavia, Ohio 45103
Telephone 513/732-6688
Fax 513/732-6690

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you, then you probably need to take off your sunglasses.

Perhaps the coup de grâce of Wolter's interior work is the portable aft-cabin bed he designed and built. With the rearmost seats removed, the bed slides onto the outboard seat tracks and locks in place. In flight, the bed is folded in half and stowed upon itself; this leaves room for the second row of seats to be used. (Indeed, because the feds consider the bed to be a carry-on item, it cannot be used while the airplane is in motion. That may answer the next

series of questions in advance.) When you're ready to camp, simply remove the second row of seats, unfold the bed, and slide it forward. The aft edge of the bed rests just above the baggage bay floor, making a nearly flat platform that stretches from the backs of the front seats to the aft bulkhead. That's about seven feet.

Those of active lifestyle will no doubt want to spend the summer camping, but if you're a ski nut, take heart—Wolter designed and fabricated a three-foot-long ski tube that extends into the tail



We chose durable fabrics for the seats and the majority of the interior.

cone. There's not quite enough depth to put in a tube that would hold full-size skis, but this setup will get most of the blades out of the cabin, allowing you to carry an extra row of passengers on your ski trip. When you're not carrying skis or fishing poles, the tube—placarded for a maximum of 25 pounds—acts as an unobtrusive repository for extra oil, as well as step, window-washing gear, and what have you.

Ultimately, what you see here is what you'll get—a handsome paint scheme that's distinctive without being outlandish. And an interior that's functional, comfortable, and quiet. Better yet, with the paint and interior completed, we're just one major step—that of the engine transplant—from being finished with your next, most adventuresome airplane. □

i For previous articles and other details about the Aero SUV sweepstakes, visit AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/sweeps) E-mail the author at marc.cook@aopa.org

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