



Two-place tandem cockpit locates both pilots on centerline of plane. Bubble canopy provides maximum of unrestricted visibility. For first ride, demo pilot Charles Gyenes has visiting pilot sit in the back seat for better approximation of attitude, level wings, etc.

Variometer at top left of panel signifies interest in thermal activity. Note that scale is in 100-foot increments with a max indication of 1,000 feet. On usual rate of climb instrument or vertical velocity indicator, reading could be from zero to 6,000 feet or more, up and down.

Cover plates which fit over wing-folding station cannot be installed unless mechanism is locked properly. Three-speed prop allows 112-mph cruise; other two positions allow max climb, and feathering for soaring configuration.



Sperber RF5B

SAILPLANE OF INDEPENDENT MEANS

How to keep flying when
you're running out of
thermals—or gas.
by Gordon Baxter

IF THE GAS PUMPS ever really do run dry, there is an airplane that will carry two people but no suitcases at 96 knots on 2.6 gph.

A good interim plane to know about, until development could begin on a coal-burning Cessna, a nuclear Piper or a rubber-band Beech. It's the Fournier-designed, VW-powered RF5B Sperber, built by Sportavia-Pützer of West Germany, an associate of the VFW-Fokker group, and sold in Wooster, Ohio by Bert Buytendyk.

Unless the oil drum really runs dry, or American buyers change their minds about wooden airplanes powered with converted auto engines, or the FAA changes its mind about certificating single-ignition engines, it is not likely that hordes of Pützer Fournier RF5Bs will darken our skies. To date, a total of 28 American enthusiasts have laid down the required \$29,950 for the fun of switching off, feathering the prop and riding free.

The Sperber is a truly beautiful hand-made airplane and a joy to fly. It is regrettable that an aircraft as fine and clever as this one has been dropped into aviation's sorting box marked "Misc.," but \$29,950 is heavy bread, and for that, a real airplane driver could buy a good used Bonanza and go like there's no tomorrow.

The Sperber is properly classified as a powered glider, but it is not at home among the pure souls of soaring society. I flew it cross-country to Marion, Ohio, where the tennis-hatted and solemn members of the local

soaring club were having a whisper-in. I clattered once round the pattern, mingling my exhaust fumes with exotic glass-winged shapes, staining their sky. Then I feathered and turned off the stink pot and pretended to be one of them as I landed. Then I fired up again and taxied past glaring ground crews to the clubhouse, where I was about as welcome as Sammy Davis, Jr. at a Klan rally.

"Hi, stink pot," said one clubber.

"That's cheating," said another.

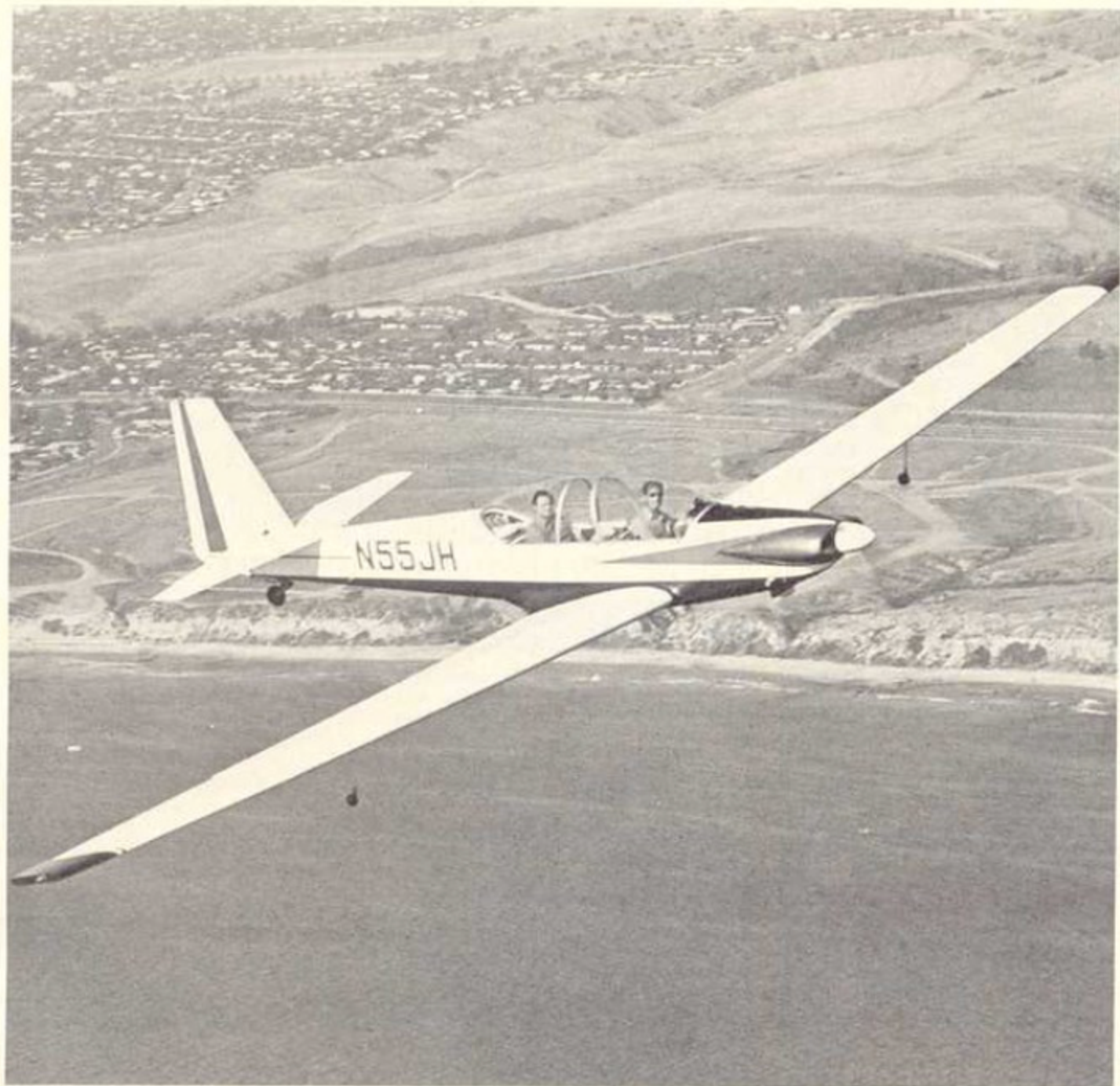
"It's prostitution!" said a third.

These were some of the more polite comments. Only one *avant-garde* sailor saw merit in my auxiliary sloop. "I would cram that contraption full of IFR instruments and go out and explore mountain waves on nerd days. Oh, what I could learn!" But he didn't say any of this very loud.

It is truly regrettable, but only fad or famine could give Pützer's powered glider the acceptance it deserves. And Pützer is puzzled by this, for he relates more to soaring than to powered flight. "To explore the motor glider as a form of transportation, it is not," said Herr Alfons Pützer.

"But, Sir," I asked this noted German aircraft designer, who has practiced his exacting craft since 1934, "didn't your American distributor assemble one at Teterboro, New Jersey and then fly it 500 miles through a snowstorm to Wooster, Ohio in three hours and 59 minutes, using up only \$4.10 worth of gasoline?"

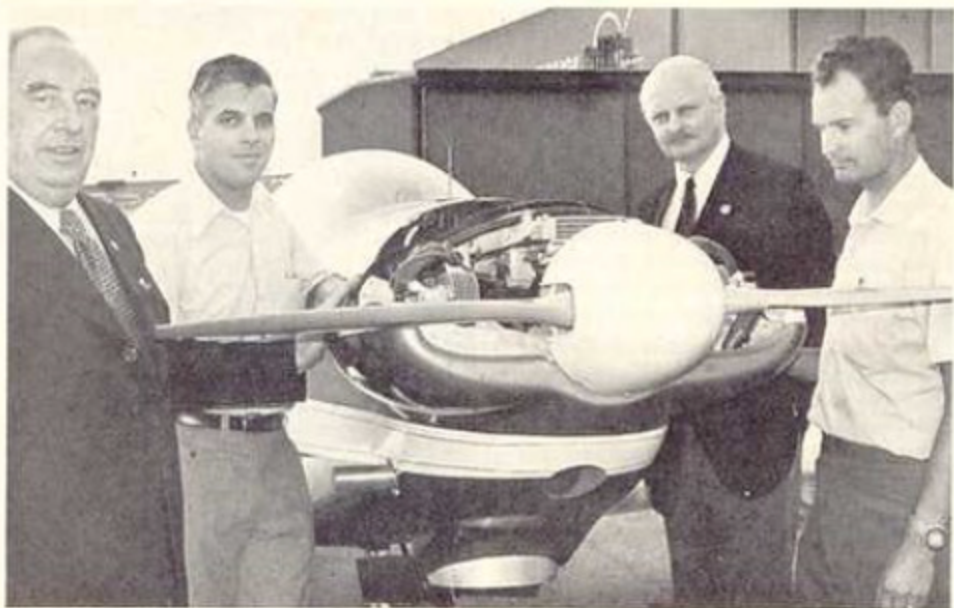




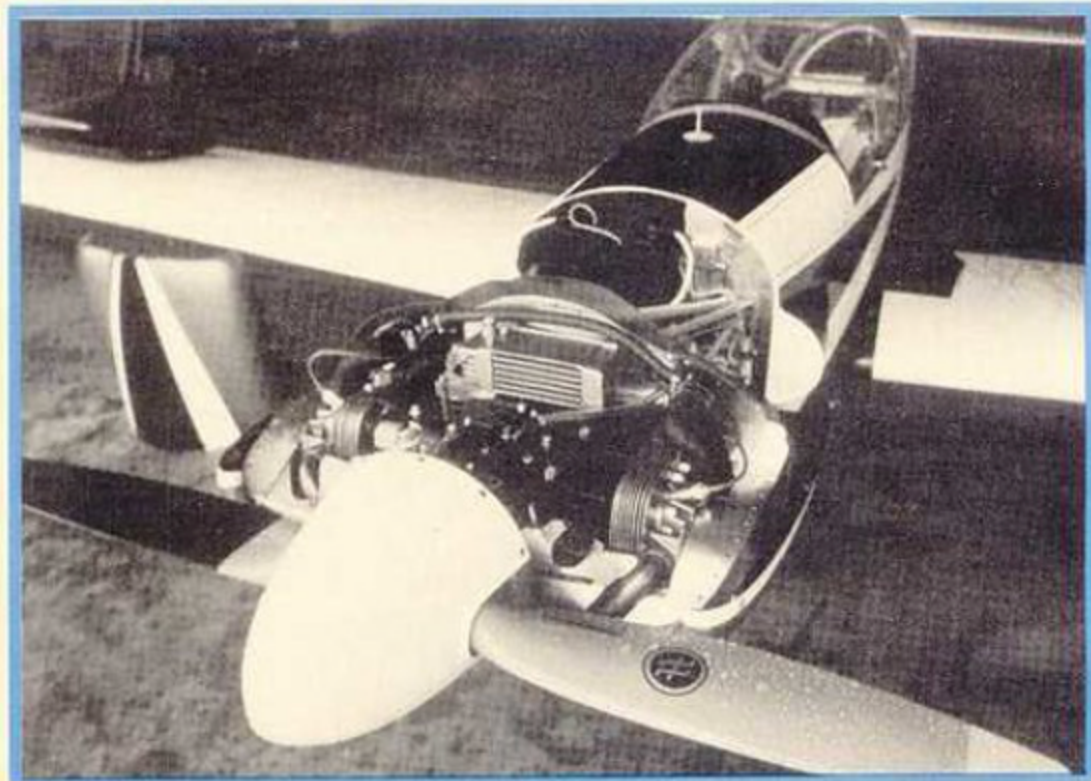
(left)
Sportavia RF-5B Sperber wings fold to take up less room in the hangar. Long, thin glider wing design is required for soaring, making the most of thermal updrafts. Charles Gyenes is president of Aerosport, U.S. distributor for Sperber, assisted here by young sons Collin (standing) and Maurice.

(top right)
Clearly, the Sperber is a two-place glider with an engine, too. Gene Cowherd and Charlie Gyenes fly Juliet Hotel down Orange County coastline.

(right)
Worldwide troops assemble at U.S. distributor — Alfons Pützer, president of Sportavia manufacturing concern, Phil Paul, Sportavia officer, Baron Jean d'Otrepe de Bouvette, and Gyenes.



SPERBER RF5B



Lift insurance: the Sperber's 68-hp engine at first seems to make the glider a neither-here-nor-there aircraft, but it powers the ship to altitude or to new thermals.

Herr Pützer appeared not to have heard the question. "The Sperber is not only a self-launching glider, it is also self-recovering. No unplanned landings, no launch crew, no recovery crew."

I persisted. "Did not that noted American aircraft designer and writer, Peter Garrison, fly one out to the West Coast to deliver it to some bird fancier by the name of Dick Bach?"

"We prefer that you use the engine at a minimum. Make as little noise as you can. Restart the engine in the air to dash from one area of lift to another—when necessary."

"But, Sir, what of Mira Slovak? The story is that he flew one of your powered gliders across the North Atlantic, from Germany to Los Angeles."

"A very foolish thing to do."

"And then he flew it back again to the Paris Air Show and won the prize in the *Daily Mail* transatlantic race."

"Not first prize."

"How about Helmut Lehmann setting the official world altitude record of 7,780 meters over Innsbruck with the engine off?"

"That is something you should print in your magazine."

Herr Pützer does not regard the Sperber as anything more than a sailplane of independent means, regardless of strong evidence that some of them have slicked along for very great distances on the 68-mousepower VW engine.

This attitude may show that Pützer is being very careful not to jostle his small clutch

of eggs being hatched by the FAA. His application for certification is only for a self-launching glider. At last report, the Sperber still bears the stigma of "experimental," although powered gliders have long been certificated in the normal category in Europe and in Canada. Dealer Buytendyk believes that recent certification of the type in Canada may help to move the bowels of the FAA, where the paperwork has been since 1969.

The Feds object to single ignition, the glider pilots object to any ignition at all, and American airplane buyers do not take seriously any airplane made of wood and powered by an auto engine. So much for the trivialities, how does it fly?

I mentioned to Herr Pützer that it seemed that for twice the price of a German high-performance soaring plane, or twice the price of an American training plane, a person could get almost both of them in one. He drew himself up, glancing first along the tapered span of flawless airfoil and then at me, and said, "One pound of aerodynamics is worth more than a pound of horsepower."

And truly, there is perfection in every detail of the fit and finish of this machine. The rows of tiny screws that mate the canopy to the fuselage look like the work of a neurosurgeon. Everything moves as if on ball bearings. Everything is on ball bearings. The throttle travels with certainty along a machined rack-and-pinion assembly. The Volks engine up front is made of select factory parts, each of which is X-rayed and weighed on scales in

fine balanced sets of four.

The engine started with a healthy roar, and I tried not to think of VW engines I have blown up by using the cars too hard. I also put folding wings out of my mind. The Sperber folds in 10 feet on each side to reduce its 55.8-foot span to a more hangar-sociable 35.8. Had I not inserted the thick locking pins myself? Kerchunk. Did not the Navy and the Marines win wars with folding wings? Forget folding wings. Concentrate on taxiing on one wheel and those two little whisker-pole casters way out there on the wings, and try not to embarrass your hosts by mooring this belly sweeper to a runway light.

The VW came to a raving 3,200 rpm and we used a lot of runway, lifted and climbed very flat. But the climb rate of the Sperber can be deceptive. The Sperber is fat with lift. For our photo mission, I told them I would take the 172 up to 6,500 feet and wait for the Sperber among the cloud castles of the sky. The Sperber was waiting for me when I got there, making long, graceful passes.

On my dual check out, I levered the main wheel smoothly up into its ankle well, leveled at 2,500 and learned the tricky business of shifting the prop into its fixed cruise-pitch position. Too much pull on the cable control handle will flatten the blades out to knife edge. Halfway pull puts the pitch into high gear, and the engine at once quiets down to 2,200 rpm. The airspeed shot up to an indicated 96 knots and stayed there. And here the grinning began.