



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist

by Jim Anderson

No job too big, or too small

There is a phenomenon that occurs on this earth that never stops: change. That includes everything in nature and whether we like it or not, our lives as well.

Change has come to one of the more interesting people who has lived in the Sisters Country for many years, Vern Goodsell. Changes are about to take him to another place to live, leaving behind a legacy of aircraft workmanship.

In the time he's lived in the Sisters Country, Goodsell has been in the airplane business. In addition to rebuilding multiple airplanes, he's scratch-built several full-sized aircraft that have gone on to become important parts of the world of aviation.

Take for example the World War II fighter plane the Supermarine Spitfire, which came into its own in the Battle of Britain. In 1994, Goodsell was asked by Arizona commercial airline pilot Bob DeFord, to

build the fighter so he could fly it in air shows around the country.

Goodsell was delighted to take it on. He got hold of a set of plans put together by Marcel Jurca, went out and started hauling the various aluminum and steel materials he needed, and with his eye on the goal of the replica fighter, went to work.

It took him 8-1/2 years to complete the aircraft, and in that time he found a Spitfire seat, rudder pedals, control stick, and cockpit controls, to implement into the aircraft. DeFord found an original engine, an Allison V-12, which Goodsell and DeFord rebuilt. They were not able to find an original wooden propeller, so they used one from an old Douglas DC-3 airliner that worked perfectly.

After Goodsell completed the fuselage he placed it on his trailer and took it to Prescott, Arizona, to put on the wings he and DeFord had built, finished installing the cockpit equipment, built a cowling, installed the engine and one glorious day

flew the Spitfire for the first time.

Since that time the owner has flown it in numerous air shows, flying in formation with many other World War II historical aircraft. One of the more interesting jobs the Spitfire undertook was to be on the promotional set of the movie, "Dunkirk," a 2017 war film that portrays the World War II evacuation from three perspectives: land, sea, and air.

The project Goodsell has going now, rebuilding a Cessna 185, is requiring all his mechanical skill, including knowledge of aircraft plumbing, electrical systems, and especially sheet metal construction of the fuselage. His past experience of owning and operating an automobile body shop came to the fore as he repaired and replaced the aluminum skin of the 185 and various other Cessna aircraft.

When asked how many airplanes he has rebuilt in his career, Goodsell shrugged his shoulders and said, "Oh, maybe a couple dozen."



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Vern's scratch-built Spitfire doing a back home flyby.



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Vern Goodsell, Sisters airplane pilot and rebuilder with the tools of his trade. Behind him is a Cessna 185 he is working on.

Then he looked at the ceiling of his hanger and added, "Let's see... a few Piper J-3s (Cubs), Cessna 140s and 170s, an Arctic Tern — that took three years to do — and, oh yeah, there was that Cessna 180, and others that are dim memories."

He also built a slick, low-wing speedy aircraft, the "X-P Talon," which is powered by a 400 cubic inch Chevy-style racing engine and cruises at 210 MPH.

The 185 he's working on at the moment came to a terrible stop during a landing at Carson, Nevada, for reasons yet to be cleared up. It was ground-looped (left the runway) while still rolling pretty fast, swerved, and dug its nose into the side of the runway. In doing so the engine was crushed into the firewall and the aircraft rolled over

on its side, smashing the left wing and tearing up the fuselage.

Vern has installed a new firewall, rebuilt the wing mountings, and the entire top skins, from the windshield to rear of the cabin, along with new stainless steel control cables and new fuel system. He has also modified the aircraft so floats can be attached, so it can become an amphibian.

Just about the time the 185 fuselage is completely rebuilt, it'll be time for Vern and his wife, Sandy, who has been in the real estate business in the Sister Country for almost 20 years, to pack it all up and move up to Washington where Vern has their new home and airstrip waiting. Sisters Country's loss will be Washington's gain.

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