

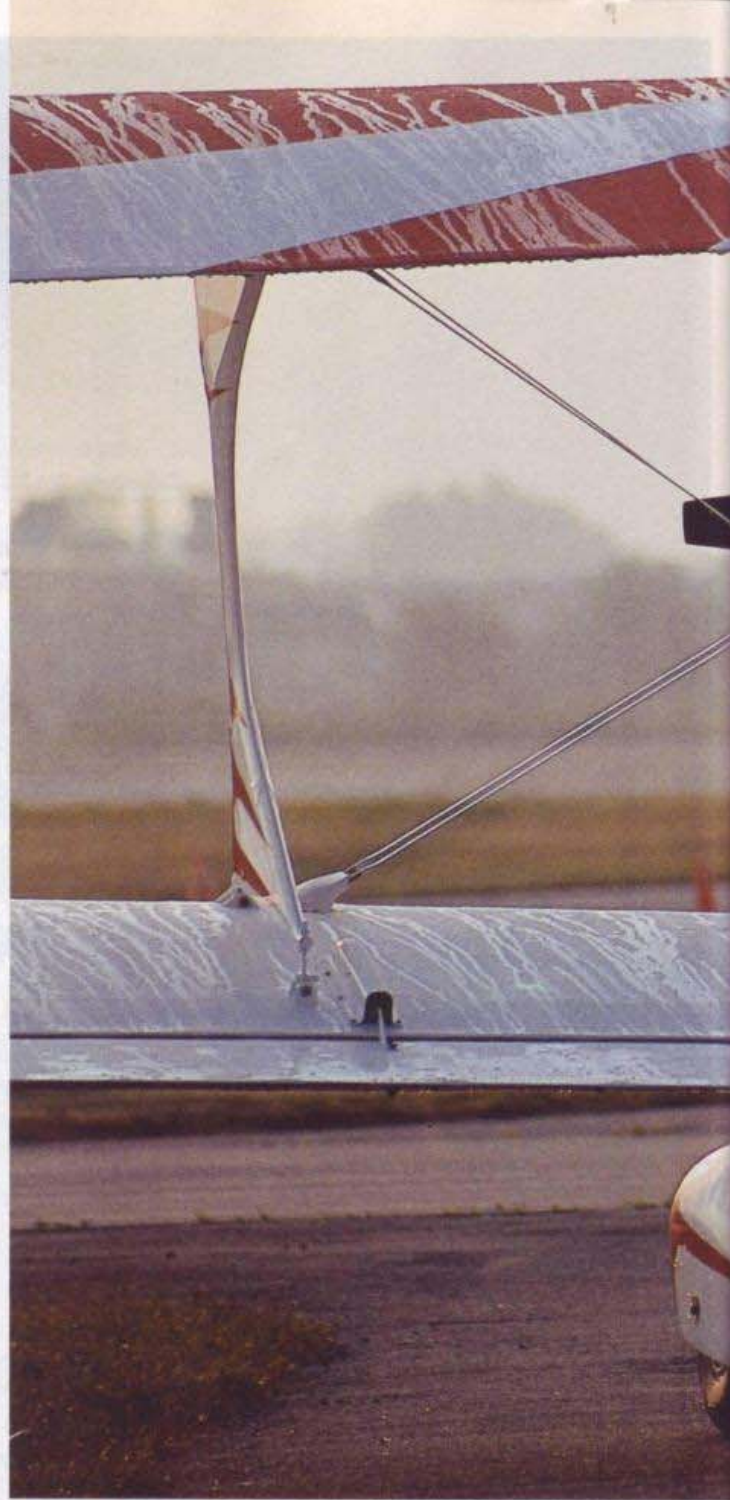
George Meyer AND HIS Little TOOT

1957 was a very good year for lovers of little single-place biplanes. That spring three new designs were featured on the covers of EAA's monthly magazine, *Experimenter*: the Mong Sport, Smith Miniplane, and the Little Toot. All would become icons of EAA's first decade.

George W. Meyer (EAA 64) of Corpus Christi, Texas, was one of the earliest members of EAA and had been sending *Experimenter* progress reports on his Little Toot since 1954, but it was still a thrill for EAAers to see the completed airplane on the cover of the June 1957 issue, resplendent in its white-with-red-trim paint scheme. The majority of EAA members at that time were in their 30s and 40s, which meant their early, impressionable years came during the period when Army and Navy frontline fighters were open-cockpit biplanes. When they saw the Little Toot, images of the Curtiss Hawks they flew in their childhood fantasies flashed back in their memories—and they liked what they saw.

George Meyer was one of them. Born in St. Louis in 1916, he was 41 when he completed his Little Toot early in 1957. As a teenager, he had become a highly skilled builder of model airplanes and in the late 1930s had been a successful competitor in national model airplane contests against such legends of the sport as Carl Goldberg. For a time he was employed as a builder of super detailed scale models for museums, then went to work for Curtiss Wright in St. Louis as an aircraft metalsmith.

With the start of World War II, George, who had recently married, moved his family to Pensacola, Florida, to become a civilian employee at the Navy air-



craft overhaul and repair (O&R) facility there. Late in the war, he was advanced to a higher position at the Navy O&R in Seattle, and a few months later, he became chief of fabrication at the Corpus Christi, Texas, O&R.

In the early 1950s—about the same time EAA was being founded in Milwaukee—George began to think seriously about realizing one of his lifelong ambitions: designing and building his own “real” airplane. He knew what he wanted—an open-cockpit biplane—and had already decided on configuration and structural details by choosing the things he liked best from a number of existing aircraft such as the Bücker Jungmeister, Great Lakes, various Waco models and, of course, the military biplane fighters that left an impression from his childhood years. The list also included



PIERRE KOTZE



Son of Toot, Tommy Meyer.

PHIL HIGH

Arlo Schroeder's Little Toot, *Hawk-Pshaw*, was a staple at EAA fly-ins for decades. With its color scheme, replicating an early Army Air Corps P-6E "Hawk" fighter, it even graced a picture postcard in EAA's Hales Corners, Wisconsin, days.

was using clipped Luscombe wings on his Little Audrey and Pober Sport and a J-3 cowling and main gear on the *Mechanix Illustrated* Baby Ace.

Once he completed his drawings, George reverted to his modeling expertise prior to beginning construction of the full-size biplane. He spent several months building a scale model of it, 1/2 inch to the foot and accurate in every detail. The only deviation was in the wings, which were metal and covered with silk rather than the wood he intended to use on the full-size aircraft. He even built a scaled-down Continental C-90 engine out of

metal for the model. In his article in the June 1957 *Experimenter*, George rationalized all this extra effort by saying, "I believe it is a good idea to make a scale model of any ship the homebuilder has in mind—then he will know exactly how the full-size counterpart will look when completed.

Also, many construction details can be worked out on the model."

George began the full-size project by building the fuselage and installing a Continental C-90 with a starter and generator, and a McCauley Cliptip metal propeller. He hand-hammered his own metal racing cowling and fairings, which,



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COURTESY TOMMY MEYER

George Meyer with family friend, Pauline Glasson, who made the first flight in the prototype Little Toot. She would later teach Tommy Meyer how to fly.

of course, was right up his alley as a skilled metalsmith. His wing panels were built up using 1-inch thick spruce spars and 1/8-inch thick plywood ribs with 1/2-inch by 3/18-inch spruce cap strips. The wings and ailerons would be the only fabric-covered surfaces on the prototype. The swept-top wing was rigged flat, and the bottom wings were rigged with 3 degrees of dihedral. The total wing area was 123 square feet. With its Cessna 140 metal wheelpants and custom paint scheme, the prototype Little Toot was a well-dressed homebuilt for its time. George even installed a heavy, early 1950s tube-type aircraft radio, which was mounted behind the seat with flex cables extending into the cockpit for tuning.

"Radio was pretty unusual in a homebuilt biplane, but it never worked worth a darn," Tommy Meyer recalls today.

The name Little Toot came from a fixation George's young son, Tommy, had on a Walt Disney character named Little Toot, the Tugboat. The tale of Little Toot was on a children's record that Tommy played over and over—so when the time came to name his dad's airplane, the choice was obvious to the family. George contacted Disney seeking permission to use the name and a drawing of the tugboat as a logo, but was refused because it was copyrighted material. Instead, the company generously sent a cartoon of a steam whistle and the name Little Toot in a different script—and that became the name and logo for George's little biplane.

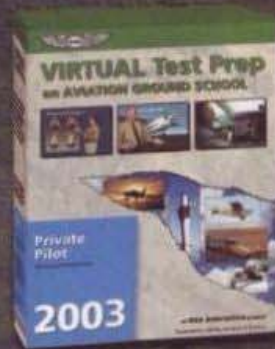
Flying Little Toot

By the time the Little Toot prototype, N61G, was completed early in February 1957, George had learned to fly in a Cessna 140 and had

logged additional time in Aeronca Champs, but was still a low-time pilot. Throughout the construction period, a family friend, Pauline Glasson, had insisted upon being the initial test pilot. She and her husband, Claude, were experienced taildragger pilots and wanted to be sure the airplane was suitable for George to fly before he got in it. Pauline did indeed make the initial flights, and Claude would thoroughly wring it out, putting it through every aerobatic maneuver it was capable of with 90 hp. His comment upon landing was, "Don't



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change a thing!"

Knowing George's high standards of craftsmanship, it was no surprise to the Glassons to find that Little Toot was nearly perfectly rigged. Only a minor tweaking of the fixed rudder tab was needed to make the airplane fly hands off. When it was his turn to fly, George had no trouble mastering his creation. It had docile stall and ground handling characteristics and was simply a joy to fly. Top speed with 90 hp was 127 mph, and it cruised easily at 110 mph at 2200 rpm. At more than 900 pounds, the empty weight was higher than originally anticipated, but the airplane still stalled at just 55 mph. Takeoff and landing rolls averaged about 200 feet, but with George's 200 pounds in the seat, the rate of climb was about 800 fpm—which immediately set him to thinking about installing a 135- or 150-hp Lycoming.

That summer, at Paul Poberezny's insistence, George flew the Little Toot to Milwaukee's Curtiss-Wright Airport (today's Timmerman Field) to participate in the fifth annual EAA fly-in convention—and it won EAA's top award, the *Mechanix Illustrated* Trophy for Outstanding Achievement. George also won the second place EAA trophy for Outstanding Design (after Dewey Bryan and his roadable Autoplane) and second place for Greatest Distance (after Jerry Quarton, who had flown his new Baby Ace from Carmichael, California).

The flight from Corpus Christi to Milwaukee and back was really hard on George. He battled bad weather in both directions—which got him crossways with the CAA on one occasion—and when he finally made it back home, he vowed to never again make that long a flight in the Little Toot. True to his word, he never did, although he continued to attend local and area fly-ins for many years.

With the exposure the Little Toot gained at Milwaukee and in the *Experimenter* article, George soon

EAA AeroCrafter Data Placard



Back in the 1950s George Meyer founded Meyer Aircraft to market plans and components for the Little Toot. Today, Tommy Meyer, his partner, Phil Witt, and Tommy's sister, Joy Meyer Kelly, maintain the company. The plans have been updated and include quite a few full-size drawings. Fiberglass cowls, wheelpants, wing fairings, and headrests are available, and builder support is provided. Joy Meyer Kelly has created and maintains an elaborate website on the Little Toot, which can be accessed at www.littletootbiplane.com. The company address is: Meyer Aircraft, 170 Park Lane, Double Oak, TX 75077. Phone: 817/430-3507.

Span (feet)	19	Stall Speed Clean (mph)	60
Area (square feet)	119.7	Rate of Climb (fpm)	1,500
		Service Ceiling (feet)	13,000
Aircraft Height (feet)	7	Plans Cost	\$300.00
Aircraft Length (feet)	16.6	Info Packet Cost	\$5.00
Gross Weight (pounds)	1,350	Number Sold	500
Empty Weight (pounds)	914	Horsepower	135
Payload Weight (pounds)	322	Horsepower Range	90-250
Fuel (gallons)	19	Build Time (hours)	3,000
Number of Seats	1		
Cabin Width (inches)	24		
		For more information about EAA's AeroCrafter, the complete guide to building and flying your own aircraft, visit www.aerocrafter.org and learn how you can save 50 percent off the EAA Member price.	
Range (sm)	200		
Takeoff Distance (feet)	750		
Landing Distance (feet)	1,200		
Max Speed (mph)	200		
V _{CR} (mph)	125		

began receiving requests for plans. He had designed and built the airplane just for himself, but when his friend Arlo Schroeder of Newton, Kansas, pressed him for plans, George decided to produce a set that even nonprofessionals could follow. Realizing that the mono-

coque aft fuselage and cut-down Luscombe tail feathers might be too difficult for the average person, he drew up alternate plans for a welded steel tube aft fuselage and tail surfaces.

Arlo Schroeder was among the first to complete a customer-built

Little Toot, and his N116E would become the best-known example of the design. Finished in the famed Snow Owl paint scheme of the U.S. Army Curtiss P-6E Hawks and cleverly named *Hawk-Pshaw*, it fed the fantasies of everyone who had grown up in the 1930s. Arlo flew it to Rockford in the summer of 1961 and came home with an armload of trophies—and his airplane would be a fixture at EAA fly-in conventions for years to come.

In 1960 the Meyers returned to Pensacola, where George was chief of maintenance for the Blue Angels for a time. The Little Toot was taken along and was flown locally for the

“I can’t tell you how much it meant to me, my sister, Joy, and our family to be presented the award by Paul Poberezny—the same man who had presented my dad with the *Mechanix Illustrated* Trophy 43 years earlier, for the same airplane.”

next couple of years. In 1962 the Navy moved George back to Corpus Christi—with dire results for the Little Toot. The ferry pilot flying it to Texas ground looped and wiped out the landing gear. It took George about two years to make the repairs and get the airplane flying again, but in the process a number of upgrades and improvements were made. A canopy was added, a new fiberglass cowling was made and

installed, and longer, sleeker wheel-pants were fitted.

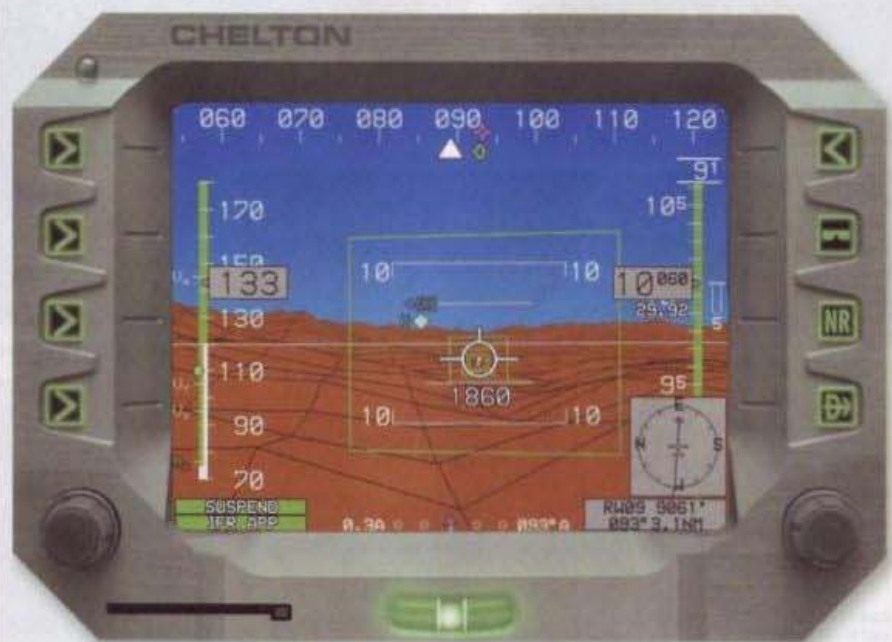
In 1970 George finally decided it was time to install a 150 Lycoming, so he removed the wings and left them hanging in saddles in his hangar and towed the fuselage home. Then late that year, Hurricane Celia swept through Corpus Christi, blew in the hangar door, and severely damaged the wings. This totally dismayed George—so much that he would never get around to rebuilding the airplane. After being diagnosed

with brain cancer in 1982, he sold the Little Toot to a friend, still with the damaged wings, and would never see it again. George would die later that year at age 66...but the Little Toot did not die with him.

Tommy Meyer

George’s son, Tommy, was born in 1944 during the family’s brief stopover in Seattle, but grew up in Corpus Christi. He was about 10 when his dad began building the Little Toot and bucked all the rivets in the monocoque portion of the

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fuselage. He was 13 the year the airplane first flew. All the while, he and his dad built model airplanes together, and Tommy became a highly skilled craftsman in his own right. One of his earliest claims to fame was a big diesel-powered free-flight scale model of a Loening Amphibian, with which he won 10 first place trophies out of 12 contests he entered. At the 1960 Nationals in Dallas, he edged out a fellow named Burt Rutan by seven-tenths of a point. Superbly detailed, the model even attracted the attention of the original designer, Grover Loening, who tried to purchase it on numerous occasions. Tommy resisted, however, and, eventually, the model was donated to the National Museum of Naval Aviation.

When he was 16, Tommy was taught to fly by the Little Toot's test pilot, Pauline Glasson, but, as events transpired, it would be another 32 years before he



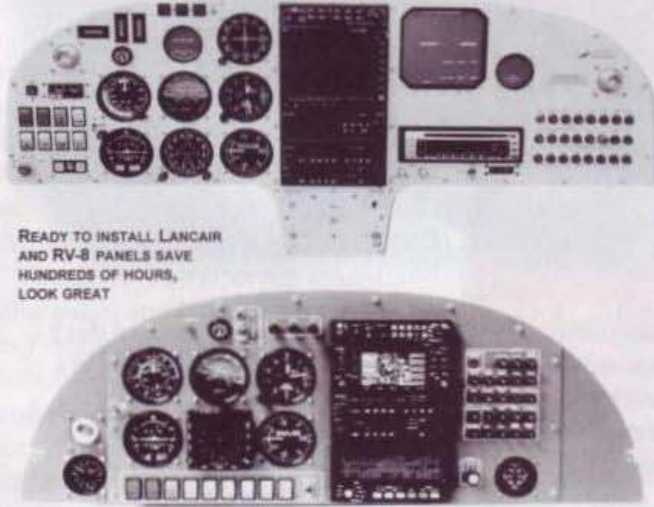
George Meyer wouldn't recognize some of the gadgets that have invaded the original Toot's panel space.

would get around to obtaining his private ticket. In between, he would finish high school, attend college, serve a tour in the Air Force as a crew chief on C-54s, C-124s, and C-130s, get married and start a family, and eventually get back into building model airplanes. After his father's death in 1982 and with the sponsorship of his employer at the time, Mobil Oil, he conducted a series of George Meyer Memorial model airplane contests, initially in Denver and, later, in Dallas.

As the years went by, the magnitude of his father's accomplishments became more and more impressive and important to Tommy. In the early 1990s he decided he wanted to begin flying again, get his private certificate and, most important of all, have a Little Toot of his own. He had been trying, without success, to buy his father's prototype, N61G, for nearly 10 years, so had resigned himself to building one. Before he could get started, however, Leo Janssens, who lived in Dayton, Ohio, at the time and owned two Little Toos, made him a proposition that changed his plans and his life. "Rebuild my 180-hp N925BT," Leo proposed, "and I'll

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Too sweet: the prototype Little Toot, foreground, is flown by Tommy Meyer and Tommy's Toot is flown by Gary Platner.



LESLIAN AUSTIN



Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose

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give you the other one." With friend and master metal-smith Phil Witt that project was completed in just six months—then work began on Tommy's newly acquired Lycoming O-290-powered N62TR. Finished in the same paint scheme as his father's prototype, he had Little Toot, the Tugboat, painted on his airplane, closing the circle on one of his childhood passions. In 1997 Tommy would win a Silver Lindy at Oshkosh for N62TR, and in 1999 he would be the proud recipient of the Paul Poberezny Founder's Award for Classic Homebuilts.

Another even more meaningful adventure was already in progress, however. After all his years of effort, Tommy was finally able to purchase his father's Little Toot, and its restoration was well underway. The switch to a 150 Lycoming engine his father had planned was made, and the hurricane-damaged wings were rebuilt, retaining as much of the original wood as possible. To the amazement of both Tommy and Phil Witt, the



COURTESY TOMMY MEYER

"Toot Row" at EAA AirVenture 2002. Six Toots made the show—five shown here in prototype-mimicking livery.

wings fit perfectly when completed.

"When Dad built those wings, he had only strings, plumb bobs, and spirit levels to work with—not the lasers and all the high tech stuff we have today. It just proves what a tremendous craftsman he was."

In 2000 Tommy flew his dad's pristine Little Toot to Oshkosh and, for the second year in a row, was the winner of the Paul Poberezny Classic Homebuilt award.

"I can't tell you how much it meant to me, my sister, Joy, and our family to be presented the award by Paul Poberezny—the same man who had presented my dad with the *Mechanix Illustrated* Trophy 43 years earlier, for the same airplane."

Last summer at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, six Little Toots were on display, including two of the oldest examples: the prototype and Arlo Schroeder's *Hawk-Pshaw*. Two of them—the prototype flown by Tommy Meyer and Tommy's N62TR flown by Gary Platner—were sent out for air-to-air photography by EAA's photo staff. Their beautiful work is featured with this article.

