

Yah, Dat Be a



Lars de Jonge's Saab Safir

BY BUDD DAVISSON

BONNIE KRATZ

Swedish Ahrplane



Lars de Jounge of Vero Beach, Florida, has always spent a portion of all of those air shows at which he has exhibited his airplanes, both past and present, answering the exact same question: What is it? He has flown two of his own aircraft to EAA Oshkosh ('93 and '07), and both firmly implanted question marks in the eyes of the beholders. Although, when it comes to airplanes, Lars would appear to have a taste for the unusual that's not entirely true. It only appears that way because, when he is searching for airplanes on which to lavish his time, he often reaches back into his own past to find airplanes he has known and liked. And, yes, his past does include some unusual airplanes.

A while back he befuddled the crowd with his Saab Safir

91D (yeah, we know...what's that?). The last time he did that to the Oshkosh crowd was in 1993 when he trundled over the horizon flying a Klemm (yeah, we know... what's that?).

Lars' background couldn't help but be populated with some unusual airplanes because he has lived an unusual life in some unusual locations. He went to school at the Swedish Royal Institute of Technology and began learning to fly in its aero club. As soon as he graduated, however, he almost immediately found himself at an iron mine 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Naturally, the high point for anyone working there was the occasional trip south for much deserved rest and recuperation breaks, and that's when Lars continued his flying.



H.G. FRAUTSCHY

The Safir features a swing-open canopy (complete with curtains!) for easy access to the cockpit and baggage area.

“I had started learning in 1947,” Lars remembers, “and was flying Klemms, which had been part of the Swedish air force and before that had been used by the German Luftwaffe as trainers. During each of my vacations from the mines, I flew the Klemms as much as I could. So, I guess I have a soft spot for the airplane because that’s where I first learned to fly.”

His career took him all over the world, including a sojourn in India, where his wife began taking lessons in Cubs, but the bug didn’t bite her as hard as it had Lars. “She never soloed, but didn’t mind if I spent time and money at it myself.”

A trait that appears constant throughout his career is keeping an eye open for aircraft he would like to own, buying them, then storing them until the day he could actively work on them.

“In 1962 I found a Klemm that actually had a runnable engine, but it had been sitting outside and had a lot of rotting plywood. I finally decided it would be too hard for me to restore, so I put it in storage. Then, in 1972, I bought a Tiger Moth project, which was in better condition,

Right: Maintainability is the watchword for the Saab’s design, particularly for the engine.



H.G. FRAUTSCHY



H.G. FRAUTSCHY

Thanks to the aerobatic capabilities of the Saab Safir, the seats feature full aerobatic harnesses.



ARON LURTH

The cockpit of the Saab has a portable Garmin 296 GPS mounted on the panel. On the far right is an Aresti chart of one of Lars' aerobatic routines flown in the Sportsman category with the Saab.

and stored that in Stockholm.”

It sounds as if he was stocking up on projects for his retirement, doesn't it? He was.

“In 1976, I moved to the U.S., and while I was working on the Moth, a gentleman who was restoring a Stieglitz read about the Klemm and wanted to be a partner. He'd restore it for part ownership. That sounded like a good deal, but 12 years later, when it still wasn't done, I bought

him out and finished it. I flew it to Oshkosh, but then sold it to a gentleman in England, and it is now in the Shuttleworth Collection.”

Throughout all of his traveling and adventurous aircraft projects, one of Sweden's own products, the Saab Model 91 Safir, had been flitting around the edges of his consciousness. It was, as opposed to his other airplanes, an eminently usable airplane and combined cross-country

utility with aerobatic capabilities.

“At one point an old classmate bought the last flying A model Safir in Denmark. The airplane had been damaged when the gear collapsed, and he bought it sight unseen. I had first rights to buy it, if he ever sold it. But that didn't work out, so I kept looking.”

After Lars moved to California he began to hear about a Safir that might be located in the San Francisco area, and after tracking down leads he did, indeed, find a late-model Safir, a 91D disassembled in storage. It was one of the last 20 produced for a Dutch flying school. But it wasn't for sale. Although the airplane had been sitting for several years, it was one of those “I'm going to get it flying one of these days” airplanes that owners just can't bring themselves to part with. Lars, however, is nothing if not persistent, as his restoration of the Klemm indicated. That was 1986, and even though he moved several times, he never gave up, and the owner became accustomed to hearing from him. Finally, in 2002, 16 years after he made his first offer on the airplane, the owner relented and sold it to him. Of course, during those 16 years, the airplane, which was sitting outside, had deteriorated considerably. He dismantled it and had it trucked to his home outside Vero Beach, Florida, in January of 2003.

“The engine only had 50 hours on it,” Lars says, “but the overhaul had been done in 1983, just before it was ferried to San Jose and put in storage. So, I was still going to have to at least have it opened up and gone through. We did a complete overhaul on it, just to be sure.”

The airframe had the problems you'd expect for an airplane that had sat around in the weather for that long. It wasn't pretty.

“The airframe is all aluminum, but the wings are covered with fabric from the main spar back, and the control surfaces are all fabric. All of the fabric, naturally, was in tatters, and we were almost afraid to look inside for fear of how much corro-

The Saab Safire 91

In 1944, when it appeared the war was going to end favorably, Saab decided it was time to think past the conflict to its future in the postwar aviation world. It concentrated its efforts on a three-seat aircraft to be used for training, touring, and liaison work.

If the outlines of the airplane remind you of something, think back to the German Bücker Bestmann. It looks similar because it was designed by A.J. Andersson, who was chief designer for Bücker and was responsible for the design of the Bestmann.

The prototype flew in November of 1945 with a 147-hp Gypsy Major in the nose (Model 91A). Several years later, Saab introduced the 91B and 91C (four-place with the fuselage tank relocated into the wings) powered by the six-cylinder 190-hp O-435 Lycoming. Production was also undertaken in the Netherlands because Saab was overloaded with military contracts. Then the final variant was the 91D with a tried and true 180 Lycoming dragging it around. The last one rolled off the line in 1962 with a total of 323 built and sold to 23 countries. Approximately 75 are known to still be flying, with Lars' airplane being the only airworthy version in the United States.

sion we'd find. However, it was all good news, as we found no corrosion of any significance.

"When it came to the fabric, I was really fortunate in having William Kaser as a next-door neighbor. Before I even bought my house I talked to him about helping me because he had restored a number of Stearmans and really knew how to do fabric. He was a lifesaver on this project. The same thing goes for Pattie Davis, who did the upholstery in the same black leather as the original."

It doesn't take much imagination to picture what nearly two decades sitting out in the California sun would do to those parts of the airframe that are bound to take a beating in that kind of situation.

Throughout all of his traveling and adventurous aircraft projects, one of Sweden's own products, the Saab Model 91 Safir, had been flitting around the edges of his consciousness.

Right: The curtains aren't just for decoration; they serve a practical purpose in blocking out the sun so one doesn't bake in the bubble canopy. Many homebuilders have adopted similar arrangements for the RV series of airplanes.



The cowling for the 180-hp Lycoming has its outlets for the cooling air on the side. The amount of deflection for the side vents can be adjusted on the ground.





BONNIE KRATZ



Lars de Jounge and a few of the tools needed for his Klemm 35, which he flew to EAA Oshkosh 1993.

“The Plexiglas, especially the side windows, was bad, so we had to replace those. Surprisingly, some of the formed pieces up front were usable, but the interior, especially the back seats, was seriously sun-damaged.

“We went through every one of the systems, making certain everything was in perfect shape, which for the most part it was. The con-

trol system, which uses ball bearings and roller bearings exclusively, only required several bearings be replaced, and even those were standard bearings. The same thing was true of the landing gear, which is mechanical and spring-loaded like an old Mooney: It took only cleaning up and painting. We did, however, replace the Goodyear brakes with more modern Cleveland units, which made them much more reliable and easier to maintain.”

The original bladder tanks did the normal thing that happens when they sit empty for a decade or two and died.

“We removed the bladders and sent them out to be duplicated, and they fit and work perfectly. However, even though they are supposed to hold 22 gallons, I’ve never been able to get more than 20 gallons in each.

“The paint was still doing a good job of protecting the metal, but that was about it. We stripped every bit of it off and put it back into the scheme it had when first delivered to the flying school. Since I have a Dutch name, I put that on as pilot. I felt as if it fit.”

He got the airplane flying in April of 2007, just in time to convince himself that he’d made the right de-

cision and to take it to Oshkosh.

“It’s a great flying airplane. All of the controls are in ball bearings, so they are smooth and wonderfully effective. It’s comfortable on cross-countries, and I flight plan 107 knots, which is slower than it should be. It should do 110 knots. It has ground-adjustable cooling flaps in the cowling, and I have them set to the wide-open, high-drag position. I think, if I were to adjust those, I’d pick up some speed.

“I love doing aerobatics in it. It’s approved for everything except snap rolls and inverted spins. I fly the Sportsman sequence in it all the time, and it does it as well as any other aerobatic airplane.”

Think of the concept of a four-place touring airplane mixed in with Extras and Pitts flying in a contest. You just have to love it!

So, now that all of the airplane projects that have followed him home are finished, what’s next for Lars de Jounge?

“What’s next?” Lars says. “I’m planning on flying both the Safir and the Tiger Moth as much as I possibly can and enjoy my retirement.”

The sounds like a worthwhile project to us.

