

Burt Rutan's Latest Project: The SkiGull

EAA - The Spirit of Aviation



Although he retired in 2011, Burt Rutan decided he had one more design to create, and he's working on it now in his Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, garage.

Photo credit: antennaFILMS

March, 2015 – Details are beginning to surface regarding the airplane Burt Rutan is creating, an aircraft mentioned in a recent EAA story about a documentary currently being produced about the iconic aircraft designer. It's called the SkiGull and is being described, according to documentary producer antennaFILMS, as a motor glider that can land on a variety of surfaces (water, snow, unimproved land, etc.) allowing access to remote areas like never before.

antennaFILMS quotes Rutan: "Imagine an aircraft able to land in large swells near any ocean shoreline, ride the waves to the beach, from where you could hike in for lunch and gas. Since it uses car/boat gas...it will rarely go to an airport."

"Imagine also going to snow fields anywhere there is around 400 feet of relatively smooth snow, or to a dirt patch right at Puma Punku, or any part of the Amazon, including the tiny rivers that feed it. Imagine doing an eight-month exploration trip around the world without ever going to an airport."

After retiring in 2011, Rutan did not embark on any new designs or builds and even wondered if he had the persistence to develop another aircraft. His highly innovative spirit would not stay still, however, as he then spent two years doing preliminary designs on what would become the SkiGull. Rutan, working out of his garage in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, claims this airplane will be his last project.

"I know it sounds like Walter Mitty, but if it flies well, Tonya (Burt's wife) and I will explore the world with it, visiting the places you cannot easily get to any other way," Rutan said. One of his longstanding policies is to not release any drawings or images of his designs until they fly, and accordingly he's not releasing any for SkiGull before test flight.

The design features a retractable ski system that will allow SkiGull to operate in most beach waves, large ocean crests, and very rough lake/river water. Without the skis it can operate from water, but it would then be severely limited to relatively smooth water, like other seaplanes.

It will be a two-place aircraft completely compatible with seawater so it will be made entirely with composites or titanium, and no aluminum.

Since the aircraft has not flown, Rutan currently estimates it should have the range to fly from California to Hawaii without ferry tanks, and cruise at 170 knots.

Scott B, the co-director of the documentary, "Looking Up, Way Up! The Burt Rutan Story," says more details will be released through the Kickstarter page created to help fund the film. At EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2015, EAA has designated Tuesday, July 21, as Rutan Legacy Day honoring the legendary designer's return to Oshkosh, with all owners of Rutan-design aircraft invited to participate.