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Harrison has the right stuff

BY TIM MORGETROYD
The Acton Tanner

Those magnificent men in their flying machines never flew anything that looked like this, and even the Red Baron's Flying Circus wasn't as colourful.

With five pop or beer cans and just under four hours Murray Harrison can make strikingly colourful biplanes that look as identical as if they came off a tiny assembly line. "I'm a good one for repetition," says the Acton man. "You can look at all of them and not see any difference. They're exactly alike because I stick to what I know."

The retired 63-year-old estimates he's built close to 500 since he started his hobby four years ago.

The poor economy has hurt the airline industry and Harrison's part of the business hasn't been spared either. "People used to give me the cans free, and I'd go golfing and come home with a golf bag full of cans, but my golf bag smelled like beer. Now I have to buy them at the beer store for 10 cents." Inflation has pushed the price from \$10 to \$12.

"They make an unusual gift, and it's a good bar gift. The trouble is, I'll have 15 different brands made and sure as shootin' someone wants a 16th brand made into a plane. That is a difficult problem: trying to make a lot of what should be a popular seller, and it turns out to be something else."

"They have to be eye-catching. Classic Coke is a very popular seller but Diet Coke isn't because it has no eye appeal when turned into a plane."

His three best-sellers now are Molson Canadian, Labatts Blue and Classic Coke, but some customers are very eager to have a little-known brand turned into a plane for their bar. Not surprisingly, airshows are the main places he sells them, and the wife or girlfriend of a pilot usually think they're cute gifts to surprise their men with.

Harrison tried to be a pilot just after the Second World War, taking flying lessons at 17 but getting "as far as landings and takeoffs." Last year he traded one of his airplanes for a few minutes flying a real one, the same type of piper cub he took those first and last

lessons in.

Harrison was Acton's customs officer for most of his 35 years in customs. When he retired on his 59th birthday in 1989 he and wife Joan used to camp a lot. One day he was watching a wheelchair-bound fellow camper making the planes to earn a living. "I said 'If you show me how to make them I'll donate half the profits to Muscular Dystrophy.' I watched him two or three times then got the hang of it myself. I've been making them ever since."

He admits he can't sit still watching TV and likes to use his hands. "And I got a kick out of being able to donate to M.D." He kept his promise and donated \$550 the first year he sold planes, and \$600 the second year.

Today he makes them on a card table in front of his TV set with a hot glue gun. "That's where I spend my time. The wife always knows where I am."

Both he and wife Joan have chronic fatigue syndrome: joint aches, hot flashes and complete exhaustion. He has had it two years, Joan has had it eight. "You feel like you've been run over by a truck," and someday something that helps will be invented, but right now "my hobby helps a lot because you're too busy to think of your own troubles."

Married 28 years, Joan doesn't share his interest in crafts, "but she always knows where I am when I'm making planes. I'm not getting into mischief."



TEETER-TOTTERING: Talented Tom Farr returned to the Acton Fall Fair with his popular motorcycle stunt show last weekend. Farr delighted children of all ages with his skill and daring. (Tony Rouse photo)



FLEET OF CANS: Murray Harrison poses with his colourful pop and beer can air force. (Tim Morgetroyd photo)

Cinema Listings

41 Quebec St.
Downtown Guelph
821-9271

Wednesday, Sept. 22
7:30: Manufacturing Consent — Noam Chomsky and the Media (PG)

Thursday, Sept. 23
7pm: Zeffirelli's Brother Sun, Sister Moon (PG)
9:30: Wide Sargasso Sea (R)

Friday, Sept. 24
1:30: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (F)
7pm: Wide Sargasso Sea (R)
9:15: Sleepless in Seattle (PG)

Saturday, Sept. 25
1:30: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (F)
7pm: Stepping Razor Red X (AA)
9:15: Sleepless in Seattle (PG)

Sunday, Sept. 26
1:30: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (F)
7pm: Sleepless in Seattle (PG)
9:15: Stepping Razor Red X

Monday, Sept. 27
7pm: Sleepless in Seattle (PG)
9:15: Stepping Razor Red X
Tuesday, Sept. 28
7pm: Stepping Razor Red X
9:15: Sleepless in Seattle (PG)

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WHAT'S HAPPENING!

A Weekly Round-Up of Coming Events in Acton & Area

Sept. 23, Thursday — 6:45 to 8 pm: Girl Guide registration at M.Z. Bennett. Volunteers are always welcome!

Sept. 24, Friday — 10:30 am to 2:30 pm: Acton Parent-Child Centre is holding an open house at the Acton Band Hall, 85 Wallace St. Call 853-2574 between 10:30 am and 2:30 pm for more information.

Sept. 24, Sunday — 7 pm: First meeting for the Royal Canadian Air Cadets at St. Joseph's School, Acton. Interested young men and women ages 12-19 please attend. For info call Captain Ed Rulton, 853-4284.

Sept. 27, 28, 29, 30, Monday to Thursday — 6:30 to 9:30 pm: C.P.R. Course. For more information please call Yvon Essiembre at 853-4889.

Oct. 2, 3, Saturday, Sunday — 9 am to 4 pm: C.P.R. Course. For more information please call Yvon Essiembre at 853-4889.

Oct. 18, 20, 25, 27, Mondays and Wednesdays — 6:30 to 9:30 pm: First Aid Course. For more information call Yvon Essiembre at 853-4889.

Oct. 21, Thursday — 7:30 pm: Acton Social Services and Information Centre presents "Bea, Moo and Mumsie" at Acton High School, the first in a series of three musicals by the Smile Theatre Company. Tickets are available at ASSIC, 19 Willow St. Call 853-3310 for more information.

Nov. 6, Saturday — 9 am to 2 pm: Christmas Craft Show and Sale sponsored by the Acton Parent-Child Resource Centre at the Acton Band Hall, 85 Wallace St. Featuring over 25 craftspeople. Admission is free.

Nov. 6, Saturday — 2 to 4 pm: Feeling blue because summer is almost over? Cheer up and look forward to St. Alban's Christmas Bazaar and Tea! There will be a bake table, crafts, a silent auction, draws and much more.

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