

Vivian man builds aircraft in basement shop

VIVIAN — More than one motorist on Hwy. 48 north of Ballantrae has blinked, stared and craned his neck and asked himself, "What was that?"

Somewhere above in the sky they saw, or thought they saw, a man seated in a chair and propelled forward by a chopping rotary blade. That was exactly what the motorists were seeing.

Robert Briggs, who lives on Cherry St. near concession 7, likely was out swooping, gliding and hovering in his gyrocopter, a one-man helicopter with a Volkswagen engine.

Mr. Briggs, a former member of the Canadian Opera Company, today drives a school bus in Stouffville and spends many hours in his spacious basement workshop producing aircraft of various kinds.

He recently sold his last-made gyrocopter and now is "80 percent complete" on a tiny two-

man airplane that is reputed to travel at speeds over 200 miles an hour.

As for gyrocopters, they have been a part of Mr. Briggs' life since 1957 or '58, when he built his first one. The machines are crafted so that they require a runway in order to take off, and will leave the ground at about 25 miles per hour.

The predecessor of gyrocopters were gyrogliders, motorless crafts which first were pulled behind German U-boats as observation devices.

"I've done the same thing, only behind a car," Mr. Briggs said. He built a gyroglider and used to go up in it at the Goodwood airport, towed behind a VW. It consisted of "a framework with a seat and two broom-control mechanisms."

Today, Mr. Briggs is developing his 10th project. Including his current aircraft, he has worked on four gyrocopters, four air-

planes, one "true helicopter" and one gyroglider.

The uncompleted airplane in his basement, Mr. Briggs feels, will be quite different from all previous projects.

"This'll be a change," he said. The plane should be able to reach Florida "in one hop," and Mr. Briggs hopes to have it completed in time to fly it to the international Experimental Aircraft Association convention in Wisconsin next year.

Earlier planes that Mr. Briggs built generally would cruise around 75 m.p.h. as compared with 200 in his current project.

The plane, a KR2 model designed in the United States, is being made by Mr. Briggs basically from scratch. It consists of a wood fuselage and fibreglass and polyethylene wings and tail. The wing span is 21 feet, which Mr. Briggs describes as "pretty small when you see it

lined up even with a Cessna 150."

The kind of engine to be used in his KR2 plane will be "different from the run-of-the-mill VW engine" since it will have 85-90 horsepower as compared with the 58-60 variety used in gyrocopters.

His plane will seat two people comfortably and will have retractable wheels. He estimates its potential worth to be \$10,000.

"I really can't wait to get that thing finished," he said.

Home base for operating his plane will be Markham airport. He used to take off in his gyrocopter from a turf farm located at Vivian Rd. and Concession 6.

As to whether he is afraid of flying his minuscule airship, Mr. Briggs replied, "I build a lot of safety into what I do; safety is foremost, both in the building and flying of it."

Through the years, he

said, "I have never had any close calls" although he did have "the odd scrape or two."

The plane must go through a vigorous round of inspections and approvals before Mr. Briggs will be granted a permanent licence for it.

Regarding the building and flying of gyrocopters, Mr. Briggs is a bit more cautious. "My honest opinion of that type of aircraft is that I wouldn't encourage anyone to build one," he said. "If a person's really bent on it, I would do anything to help them..."

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"My honest opinion of that type of aircraft is that I wouldn't encourage anyone to build one," he said. "If a person's really bent on it, I would do anything to help them..."

but it's not just for anybody."

A person who wants to build and fly a gyrocopter, he said, needs to have both "a knowledge of airmanship" and be a "good craftsman." They have a fairly high accident record."

Mr. Briggs said he has seen various gyrocopters that have been granted a "half-dozen" powered machines and three to five gliders.

are unsafely constructed. People who are interested should join flying clubs to learn the safe construction and operation of the machines, he said.

He himself is a member of a club in Hamilton that has monthly meetings and "occasional" fly-ins.

Members in the club have a "half-dozen" powered machines and three to five gliders.

"I don't consider gyrocopters as serving any practical purpose," said Mr. Briggs. You can travel 65-75 m.p.h. in one. "Any faster than that and your face starts to flatten out."

The crafts generally hold 8-10 gallons of gasoline and will use up about three gallons in an hour.

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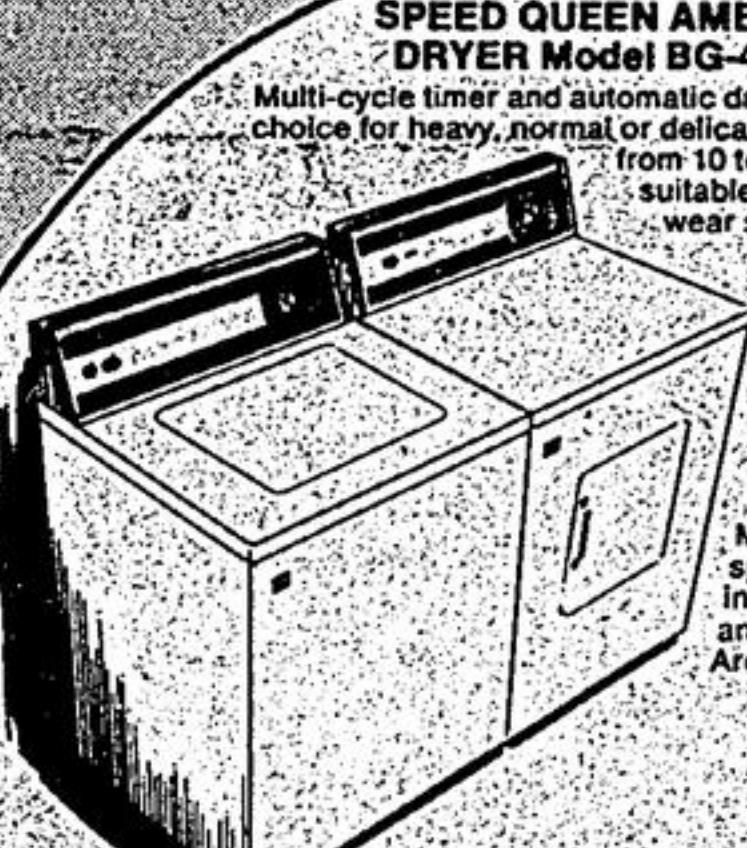
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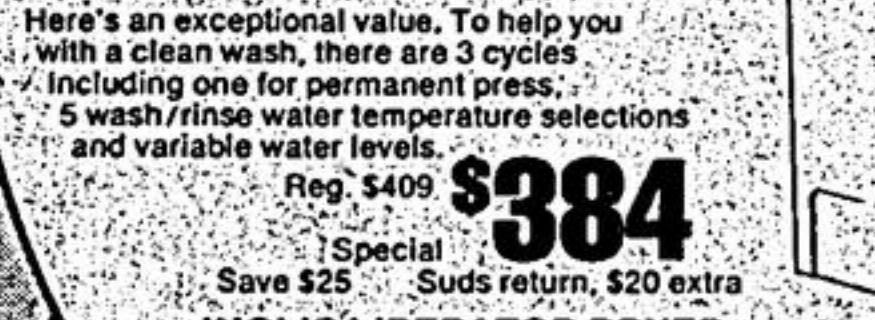
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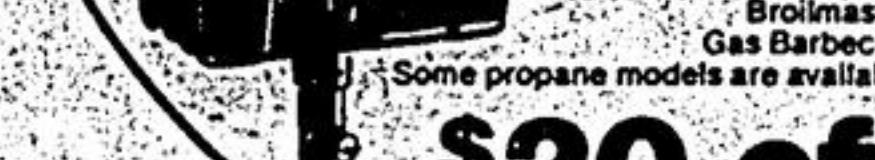
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in effect until September 11, 1976.



Robert Briggs of Cherry Street, north of Ballantrae, puts together part of the tailpiece for the lightweight plane he is building in his

basement workshop. Mr. Briggs has been building small aircraft, including one-man helicopters, for 17 years.

His building of planes and copters he calls "just a hobby."

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