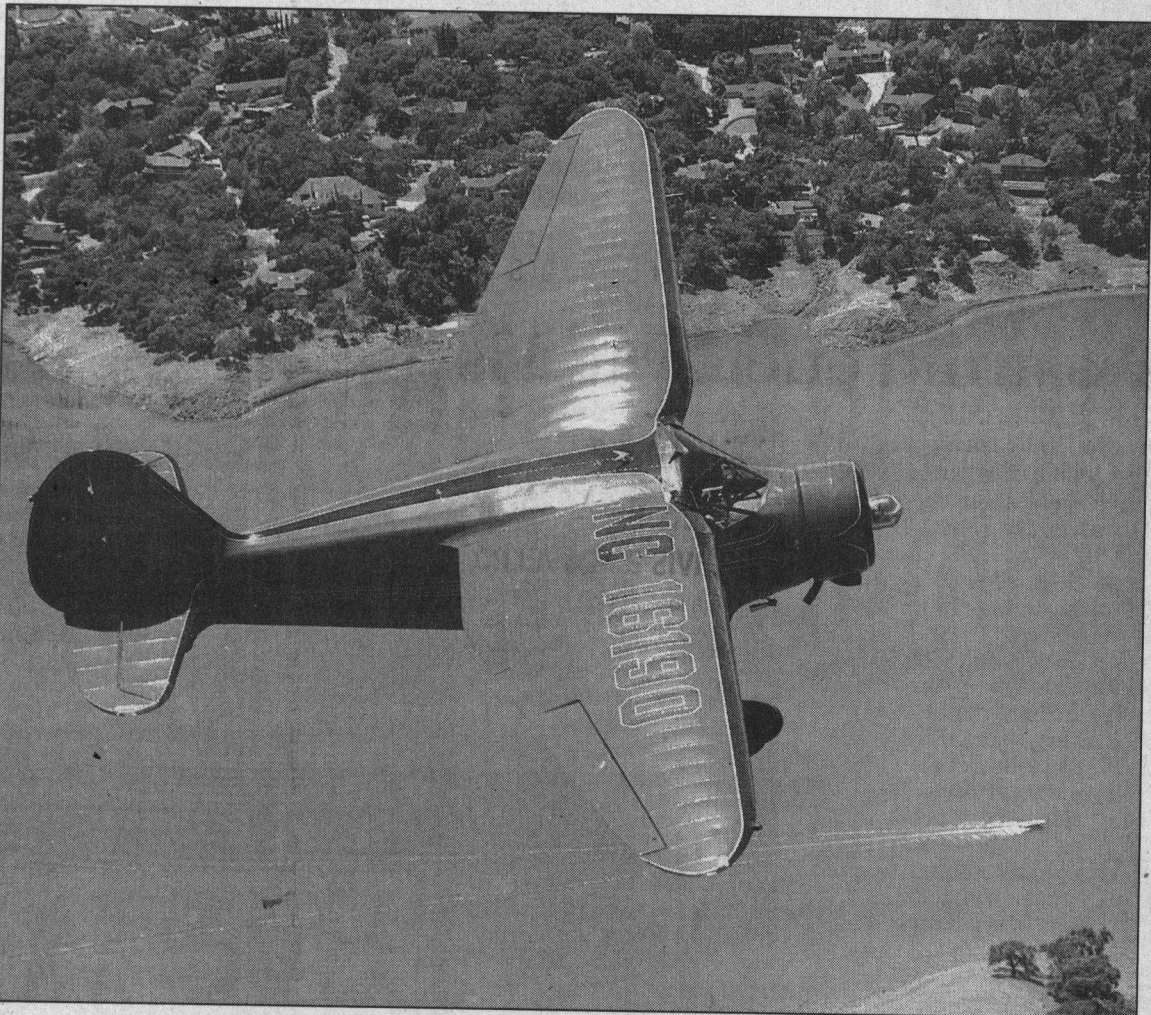


Rare red bird to soar at 37th annual air show



RON BURDA — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

This 1936 gullwing Stinson SR8-B, owned by Len Von Clemm of Union City, sports a 300-horsepower engine, chrome propeller and roll-down windows. Here, it cruises above Anderson Reservoir on Thursday.

500 vintage craft expected at fly-in

By Frank Sweeney
Mercury News

With a twist of the key, the starter motor whirred and the big chromed propeller slowly turned until the fuel and air mixture inside nine cylinders fired up with a loud *chugga, chugga* and a blast of smoke from the exhaust stack.

After a moment or two of hesitant internal combustion, the engine settled into a steady metallic roar.

Len Von Clemm eased the throttle in, after perfunctory checks, and the big red airplane slowly started forward on the ramp at Reid-Hillview Airport. In a few minutes, it would be airborne.

Von Clemm, 67, a commercial pilot from Union City, is known in Santa Clara Valley aviation circles as a guy who can fly anything. For his day job, he pilots corporate jets — he has ratings in nine types. But he has his fun in a big 1936 gullwing Stinson SR8-B, a maroon airplane with broad, high-shouldered wings and a 300-horsepower radial engine.

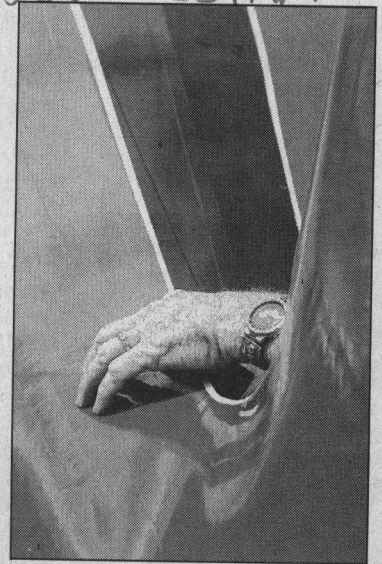
In the air, with its fixed landing gear hanging below the fabric-covered fuselage and arching wings, the Stinson resembles a huge bird of prey about to pounce.

It's the kind of airplane that grabs attention wherever it flies. And this weekend, it will be flying — and parked on display — at the 37th annual Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show at Watsonville Municipal Airport.

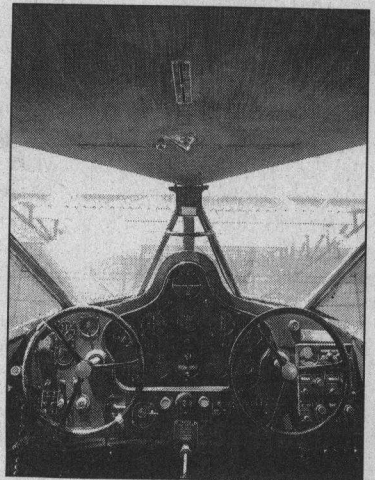
Cruising at 100 mph above the oak-studded hills south of San Jose and over the green waters of Anderson Reservoir, the old plane handled the bumpy rising air of early afternoon with ease. But it was getting hot inside the cabin. Von Clemm suggested rolling down the window a bit.

Roll-down windows in an airplane? Yep. Just like in the 1936 Plymouth automobile, from where the window and door handles came.

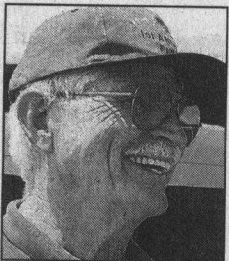
There are quite a few automobile parts



Bright maroon fabric and delicate striping accentuate the graceful contours of the Stinson's fuselage.



The five-seat cabin features red leather seats, dual controls and an art deco instrument panel.



Von Clemm
For his day job, he pilots corporate jets.

AIR SHOW INFO

WHAT: 37th Annual Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show

WHERE: Watsonville Municipal Airport, just off Highway 1 at the north end of Watsonville between Santa Cruz and Monterey.

WHEN: Gates will be open from noon to 10 p.m. today, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The air show runs from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

ADMISSION: Daily admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages 6-12. Admission is free for children under 6 with a paid adult.

PARKING: At the airport, \$2. Follow the signs.

MORE INFORMATION: Visit www.watsonvilleflyin.org

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FLY-IN | Rare red Stinson to star at air show

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in this luxury aircraft of its day. "The manufacturers used a lot of automobile hardware," Von Clemm said. "They'd just go buy the stuff that was there."

Von Clemm doesn't know how many of these gullwing Stinsons were built. He says there are only five left.*

Its wings, 41 feet from tip to tip, are shaped like those of a gull, hence its nickname. It can carry 70 gallons of fuel and five people, as long as one of those in the back seat "is a little kid — or you've got to be very friendly," Von Clemm said.

"This was the first executive transport plane," Von Clemm explained. In the 1930s, movie actor Wallace Beery owned this plane. Wealthy movie stars bought these types of aircraft and hired pilots to fly them.

The Stinson Aircraft Co. was founded by Eddie Stinson and his two sisters, and built a long line of light aircraft during the 1930s and 1940s, Von Clemm said. After Stinson died, his sisters carried on the business in-

to the late 1940s.

Von Clemm's gullwing Stinson has been in service since it was new, except for two restoration projects, he said. It has flown about 3,700 hours, not that many for such an old aircraft.

In 1978, when it was owned by local pilot Eddie Fillmore, the Stinson won the grand champion award at the Watsonville show. Four years later, Fillmore retired and sold the Stinson to Von Clemm, who actually had been flying the plane since 1973.

"I checked it out for him, flew it with him and without him, and he sold it to me," Von Clemm said. "When he retired, he said, 'Lennart, you're going to buy my airplane.' I said I couldn't afford it. He said he'd make it affordable."

Von Clemm, who has been a pilot 39 years and has logged time in 125 types of aircraft, was the chairman and organizer of the first Watsonville air show in 1965. This weekend, he and his Stinson will be participants again.

The event, today through Sunday, will feature aerobatic performances, World War II bombers, a Friday night fireworks air show and more than 500 vintage and home-built aircraft on display or flying.

Air show performers will include Eddie Andreini, flying his Super Stearman and Russian-made Yak-9; Delmar Benjamin, in his replica red and white 1932 Gee Bee R-2; John Collver, flying an AT-6 Texan; Steve Stavarakakis in his Zlin 50 LS, known as the "Wild Thing"; Greg Poe, flying his Edge 540; the Showcopters, a trio of precision flying helicopters; jet dragster

Smoke 'n' Thunder; and hang-glider pilot Dan Buchanan.

The Confederate Air Force will bring in three World War II aircraft — a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber, a C-46 transport and a German HE-111 blitz bomber.

The air show, the longest-running aviation event on the central coast, opens at noon today with the arrival of antique, classic, neoclassic, military and home-built airplanes from throughout the West.

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