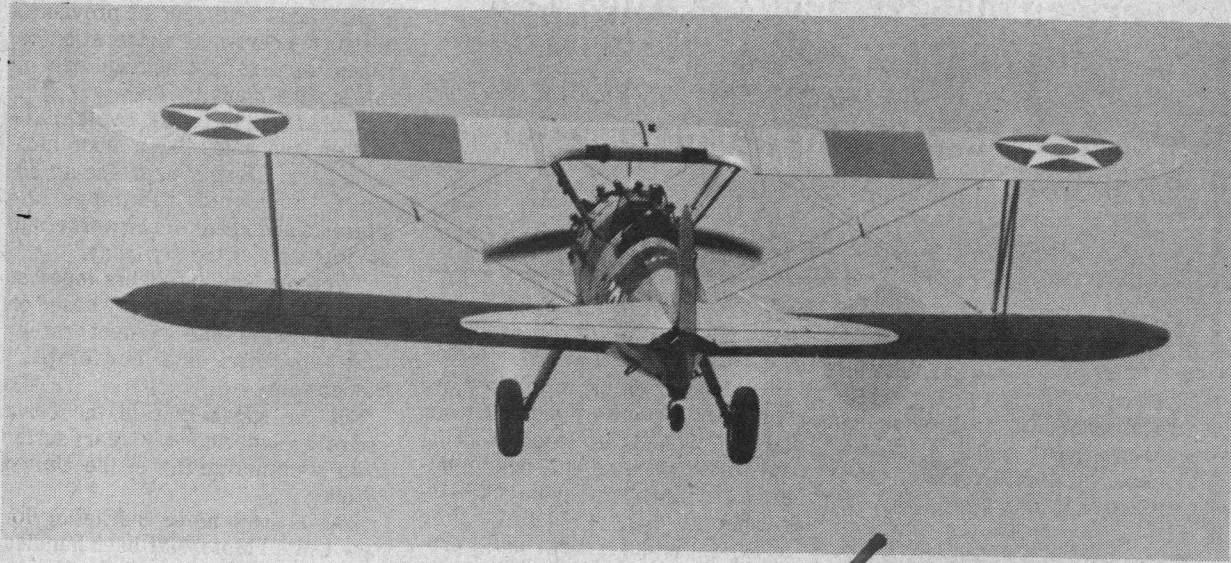


FLY-IN

# Living

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## High flying fascination

### Biplane ride whets appetites for the Watsonville Fly-In

By ROBERTA FRIEDMAN  
Sentinel Staff Writer

**L**ONG BEFORE concern over AIDS and hepatitis made other dentists don surgical protection, Jack Sadler was using latex gloves to work in his patients' mouths.

He wore gloves because he couldn't get the airplane engine grease off his hands.

While practicing dentistry in San Jose, Sadler spent six years of his spare time restoring a World War II Stearman biplane.

The plane had been in pieces when he bought it from a Woodland crop-dusting outfit.

"It was a total basket case," Sadler says.

Now, returned to its original garish orange-yellow, a cocky blue highlighting its tail rudder, the biplane has garnered several awards.

Last year, it won "Best Warbird" at a Hollister show, and took "Best Military Trainer" at the Watsonville Fly-In.

The annual fly-in, which draws "antiquers" like Sadler from all over the country, will take place Friday through Sunday at Watsonville Airport.

Some people are born with a fascination for flying, Sadler says. He was able to indulge his, once his years of education were over, his business was established, and his kids were grown.

For this reporter, the fascination began with a spin in the Stearman

Here, in front, is where Navy instructors once sat. More recently, my compartment had housed cans of crop-dusting compounds. Sprayers were hooked under the wings.

Now original equipment — olive-drab foot pedals and a three-foot-long joystick — moved back and forth on the floor as Sadler started the engine and guided us toward the runway.

Similar to a driver education car, it has dual steering, meaning that an instructor can always grab control. A Navy instructor in front could also watch the face of his student pilot in back by means of a cup-sized mirror mounted to the underside of the upper wing.

But my borrowed cap would make verbal communication with my pilot impossible — Sadler's radio jacks didn't fit it.

So I would ride, steered from behind, a passenger with a commanding view but with no need to command. My thoughts alone would keep me company.

We took off. As is usual for lifting planes, things suddenly tilted and grew tiny. The photographer aiming his huge lens snapped past my view. Cows munched impassively by the receding runway.

Mine was more than the peephole view from a modern jet. The hazy hot day surrounded me, and a smooth, steady chug at 90 miles an hour brought me over the ocean. The biplane's wings dipped





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For more on the Fly-In, please see Page B-7.

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Sadler's restoration has wrought more than just pretty pictures. It delivers one of the best sightseeing tours in town.

The Stearman is housed at the airport in Hollister, an hour's drive from Sadler's home in Los Gatos. Usually Sadler finds time to take to the air twice a week. Last Saturday, he brought the plane to meet me at Watsonville Airport.

Suiting up for the flight, I pulled on a sweater and one of those "flying ace" leather caps, complete with goggles.

Sadler's outfit was more dapper. He was resplendent in white jumpsuit, white silk scarf, and a faded, brown leather flying jacket.

It turns out I had no need for the sweater. We flew too low to be cold.

Stepping carefully on the lower wing — the Stearman's hull is stiff, coated fabric, not aluminum — gripping handles on the upper wing, I hoisted myself into the front seat.

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Mine was more than the peephole view from a modern jet. The hazy hot day surrounded me, and a smooth, steady chug at 90 miles an hour brought me over the ocean. The biplane's wings dipped in a turn to head me toward Santa Cruz.

Stearmans weren't built for long flights, Sadler had explained. But their simple controls made them easy to master, and despite their light build, none have ever been known to "break up" in the air.

For today's pleasure flyers, the Stearman's outstanding feature is its ability to cruise low.

Sadler tilted the plane in another turn to sweep a slow, wide circle around the white triangle of a sailboat that seemed alone on the endless, blue-green sparkle of the bay. We flew low enough to see the deck, but not the people. In the mirror, I watched Sadler wave anyway.

The biplane resumed its trip north. I watched a blue kayak ride a wave towards the beach. A red one waited to catch another wave.

Farther north, I saw the last remnants of the winter's storms, huge trees trapped in a river's mouth. The beached logs were the size and color of chicken bones picked clean after a fire.

When the plane reached Capitola, I saw streaming colored strips that seemed to flutter on the sand. I realized these were kites — that I was flying high, if you saw them from the beach.



Jack Sadler's World War II Stearman biplane cuts through the skies above Santa Cruz County. Below, the fields are green, kites hover over the beach, and the roller coaster runs but no noise is heard.

Pleasure Point, Black's Point ... then I was over the Boardwalk. In the silence, I could only imagine screams from the clacketing roller coaster. But my belly flipped in unison with the miniature riders below, as the biplane executed a 60-degree bank into a turn that headed me back to Watsonville.

Blue, blue mountains rolled into the light blue haze; blocking out Silicon Valley beyond. The hills descended and changed color to form the olive ridge of Mount Madonna. A strand of ugly, algae-hued haze trailed along the foot of the mountains rising again, south toward Carmel.

Then I saw workers fanned out in a field. On an automobile trip, the limited view from the road fools one to think that the ground grows food on its own. Flying low, I saw people tending one green rectangle, while

irrigation equipment stood ready to water another.

The runway appeared. We landed with a squeak, squeak, thud, thud — the usual bounce of rubber wheels as a plane settles to the ground.

A blackbird on the pavement did a flap and a run as if in imitation. The cows still munched.

"What do you like best about flying," I asked Sadler, knowing my own answer.

"Oh, that's complicated," he said in his quiet voice. After a pause, he admitted it was the solitude, as well as the freedom and exhilaration, that drew him to the skies.

"Flying makes me feel like yodeling," Sadler smiled. "Sometimes I do."

Yet the chance to view Earth from an inner, peaceful place inside your thoughts must be the secret of flying's fascination.

Photos by Bill Lovejoy



Jack Sadler: Sometimes he yodels.