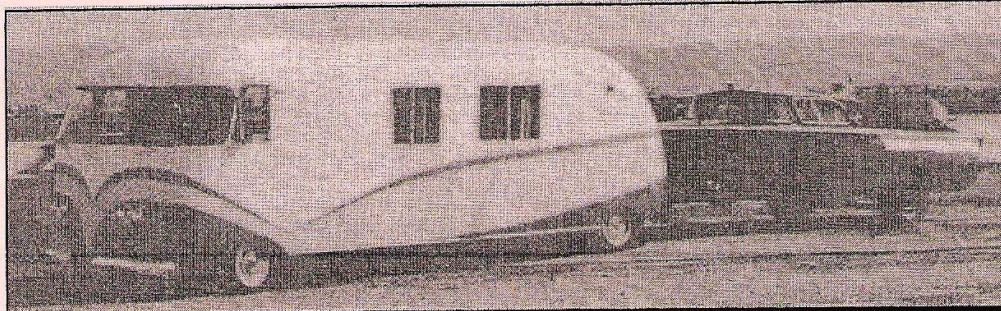


Whales on Wheels

Volume XXI

Number II



This is Ultra Van # 101. The first one built. Giving David what he always wanted, to pull his boat with a trailer

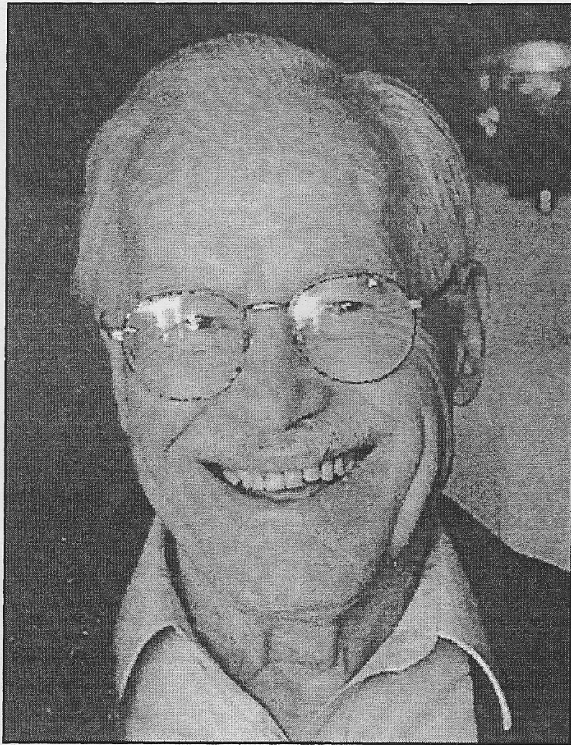
David Gibson Peterson

**July 16
1914**



**June 22
2000**

David G. Peterson at age 20 years.



David G. Peterson July 1999

Ultra Van Creator passes quietly in San Rafael, California

David had a stroke on May 19, 2000 and never recovered. He passed away quietly on June 22, 2000.

We all have had him touch our lives in one way or another. We will always remember him as an enthusiastic, hard driving, ingenious person, who made it through the hardest of times. He always had a way to get something done, make it work, or figure things out. We all respected his notion that gave us the Ultra Van, a unique vehicle that is still way ahead of its time.

Our condolences to his family, and the woman that made a lot of things happen in his life, Lucille. She did so many behind the scene activities, that we will never know just how influential she was. His wife Lucille, son David L. Peterson and daughter Patsy Hussman, 5 grand children and 5 great-grand children survive him.

Lucille said the last year they had together was enjoyable, not only to her, but to David as well. Because he had accepted his condition he was able to enjoy their new life at their new home in San Rafael, California. Lucille misses him greatly; they had just celebrated their 65 wedding anniversary the week before. She was happy they did have this last year

together, taking walks, having dinners and just being together with out a lot of business stuff to get in the way.

Some how the world has changed a bit without having that great David Peterson smile around.

Cards will be welcome: Mrs. Lucille Peterson, 713 Deer Valley Rd., San Rafael, CA 94903. No services will be held honoring David's request.

W. Christy Barden

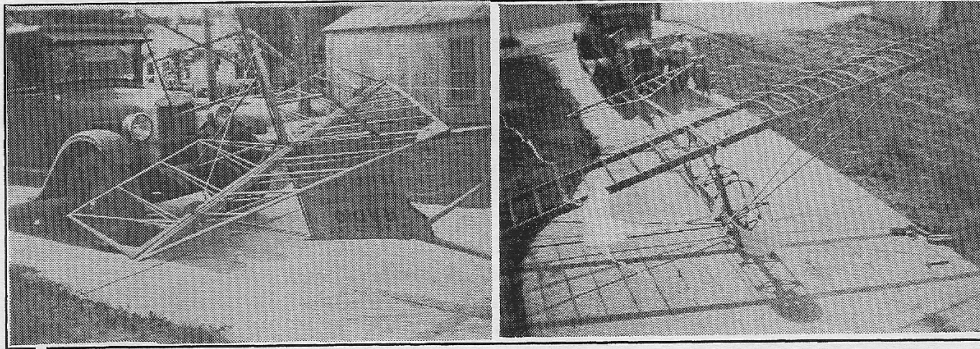
The David Peterson Story by W. Christy Barden

David Peterson was born in 1914 in Minnesota. His father worked for the mill, and was also a preacher. He, his mother, father and sister moved to Blackwell Oklahoma in 1929. David helped his carpenter father build a trailer to tow behind their 1926 Chevrolet for the trip. His father suffered from arthritis and the 50° below zero winters were a discomfort, which prompted the move south to Oklahoma.

David learned the carpenter trade from his father. He relates how he was taught to sharpen the blade of a plane so sharp you could shave with it. He learned that you can do many jobs with a good sharp plane.

His father died when David was 15 years old. He became the sole support for his mother and sister. Being in high school at the time, this was quite a task. He moonlighted projects at the high school wood shop to help pay the rent. In high school, he used his woodworking skills to build a primary glider. This was an inexpensive way to learn how to fly. Using his own design, (sounds like David), based on standards of the day. He wanted to make it easy to assemble and disassemble. This way he could keep it at home and not have to pay tie-down rent at the airport. He was way ahead of his time, for gliders today disassemble for easy transport. The town council liked his glider (and him) so well; they let him keep it at the airport for free. David taught himself how to fly in his glider. While doing this story David showed me a small slip of paper with all the original materials, 1930 costs, totaling \$67.00.

David was a very industrious young man; he did many things well. He was known as the boy who did everything. This has done him well most of his life. Through out his life his yard has always been full of his projects.



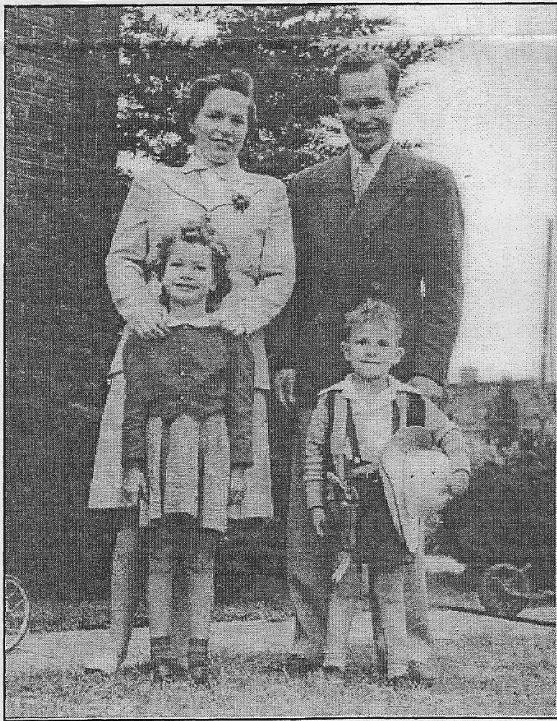
This is the Glider that David built in his driveway in Blackwell Oklahoma Note the 1926 Chevy that brought the family from Minnesota and took David and a friend to the 1933 World fair in Chicago.

David graduated from high school in 1932. In 1933 he and friend went to the Worlds Fair in Chicago. Being resourceful, they made the entire trip in the 1926 Chevrolet for \$25.00 apiece. Gas, food, lodging, gate fees and rebuilding the battery included. This was David's first big trip away

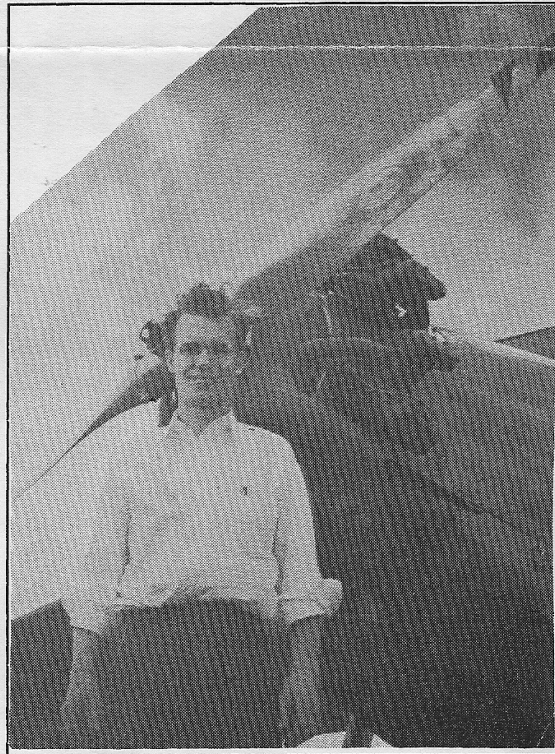
This young kid, using the high school wood shop, became the competition of the vendor in the town. The vendor complained and because of this he could no longer use the high school wood shop. A merchant who was impressed with David's industriousness, lent him the money to buy a new machine. This gave David the opportunity to open his own woodworking shop, "Dave's Woodwork Shop", just off Main Street in Blackwell.

from home on his own.

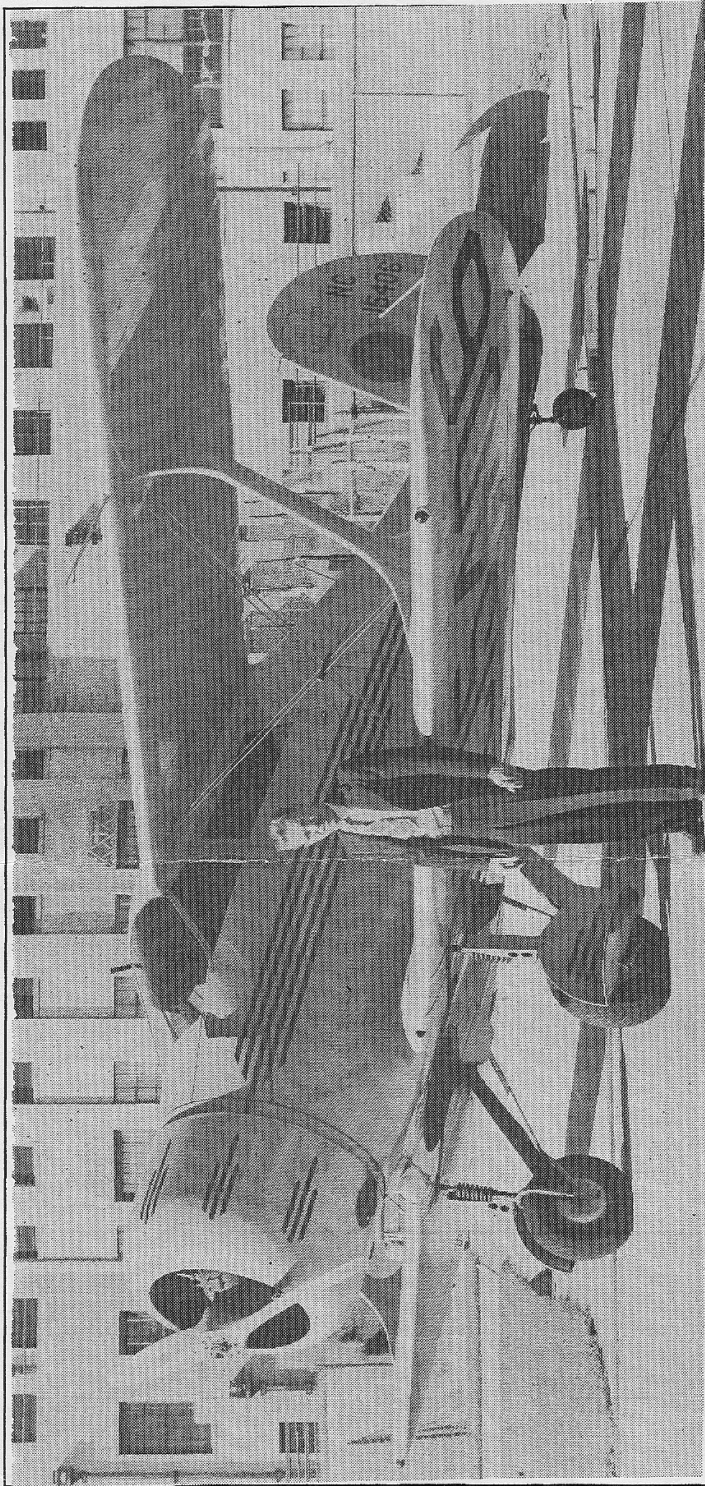
Being familiar with flying and airplanes, David started doing repairs on airplanes. Usually when a wood spar needed repair, it would have to be removed from the aircraft and sent to the factory and then re-installed. David could make repairs in the aircraft without having to remove the spar. This saved the owners time and money. He kept the shop during the early 30's when the depression was at it's worst. He also did work on an airplane owned by the Harris & Hone



Lucille & David Peterson with their Daughter Patsy and son David G. in Wichita about 1940



A young David Peterson standing by the 1930 model Cessna J67 that his step-father had bought for him.



This is the Beech Craft, Stagger Wing aircraft that David bought from Walter Beech in 1938. This was the 35th one built. Today this classic aircraft sells in the \$270 - \$500 range. The photo was taken at the Beech factory in Wichita.

Oil Company. In return they let him fly it to gain flying experience. During this time, David was dating his future wife, Lucille, and they were married in 1935.

In early 1936, he and Lucille moved to Tulsa Oklahoma. He worked at about five different jobs. Remember this is still the depression and jobs were hard to find, but David found them. His best experience was working for Spartan Aircraft. He built maple wood forms blocks for the tail structure and doorframes of the new Spartan Executive airplane. These were compound curves he was working on.

In late 1936, David and Lucille moved to Wichita Kansas. Lucille was originally from this area so it was like coming home for her. Dave got a job at the Stearman Airplane Company. He worked in the experimental department using his woodworking talents.

During the time from 1930 to 1937 David was still pursuing this love for flying. In 1937 he had accumulated about 150 hours of flying. In my last visit with them in the summer of 1999, we went through his flying logbooks. It was a long time from the beginning to the time he got his pilot's license in 1937. Raising a family during the depression was a job in itself, but he managed to have enough money to fly and get his license. Lucille was also a big help here as well. David got his pilot license number 38268. He used a 1930 J67 Cessna, which his stepfather had purchased. Only a few of these aircraft were built and were outdated by 1937. With his commercial pilots license he started giving rides for hire out at the Wichita airport. He was moonlighting for he still had the job at Stearman.

In 1938, he acquired a Stagger-wing Beech Craft. This happened because a friend introduced him to Walter Beech. It seems that a customer did not take delivery of this aircraft (this was the 35th one produced). Beech asked David what made him think he could fly a Stagger-wing Beech Craft. "What makes you think I can't" was David's reply. With not much money down and a good payment schedule, David went into the Charter business full time. It took a lot of gumption to get into a shaky aviation business at this time. Lucille had her doubts, but David made it by working long hours and using lots of energy. He had only one engine failure using this airplane; he landed in a field with no injury to him or



From left to right. Daughter Patsy, Lucille, Son David L., David G. Peterson, Davids mother Nellie at 68 years of age. Taken about 1947 in one of the Beech Craft Bonanza's that David had in his Rent-A-Plane business in Tulsa.

aircraft. Lucille said the children (Patsy born in 1936 and David L. in 1938), learned to walk by holding onto the fence at the airport.

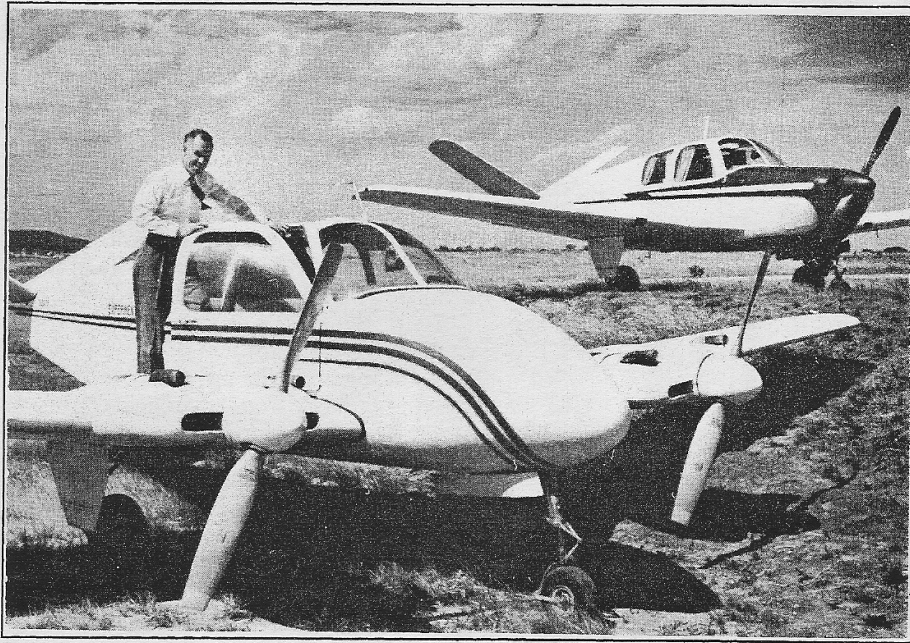
“David Peterson Charter Service” was started in June 1938. He did a lot flying during these years. His logbook showed he hardly had a day off from flying. Walter Beech was very good to him, sending lots of business his way. Later David acquired a Cessna Air Master to his fleet. In 1939 he got his instrument rating in a Culver Cadet aircraft. Not to many pilots had their instrument rating in 1939, usually only airline pilots.



My favorite photo of David Taken in the eatly 50's in front of the Twin engine Beech Craft Model 18 he flew for Sinclair Oil Co. It shows a confident young man in charge of his life.

When World War II came, the government took his aircraft for the war effort. David went to work for Boeing Aircraft in Wichita. He went to Seattle for a short time and worked on test flying the B-17 Flying Fortress. This gave him the 4 engine flying experience that he needed. In looking in his flying logs, they flew at least 2 aircraft a day. Then he came back to Wichita and worked on the B-29 project. There he was given charge over final assembly of the B-29 Super-fortress. The independent Peterson insisted on test flying the B-29's as they came off the line. But when the time came for test flights, he tangled with new managers of the program. In today's terms, David might not have been “team player”, he had abilities to see what needed to be done, and maybe was not “politically correct” in stating his position. In 1944 he left Boeing and went to work for Beech Craft improving the company's propeller design, incorporating a feathering feature.

Then the story picks up with him getting a job as the first pilot to fly for Sinclair Oil Company (the forerunner of the Atlantic Richfield Oil Company). I quote from the book “Power to fly”, by Devon Francis, published by the Richfield Co. in 1986. “Finding a qualified pilot during wartime was no easy

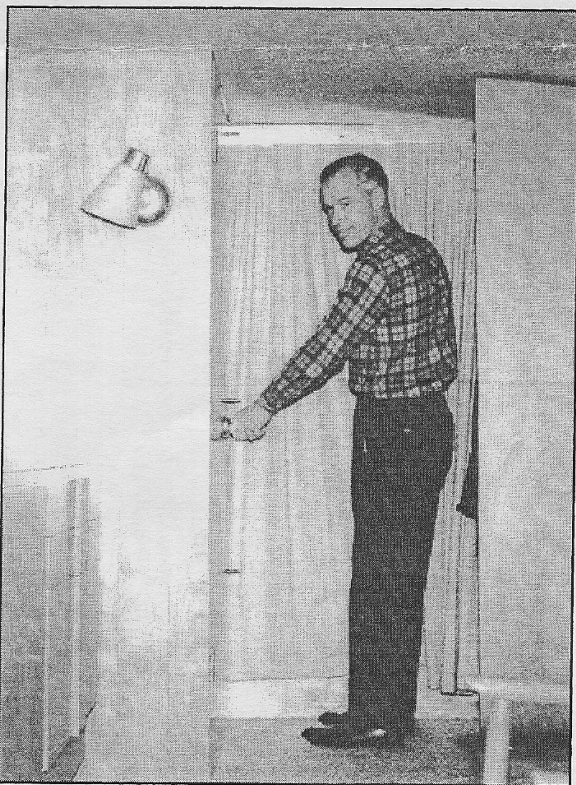


David standing on the wing of his creation the "Super V" behind is a Beech Craft Bonanza that was used to make this twin-engine aircraft. Photo taken in Tulsa in 1956.

task. Buy Connelley (Sinclair President), remembered flying with an expert Wichita charter pilot who was available. His name was David Peterson. Peterson had an unusual history. When the government commandeered these air taxi-service planes at the beginning of the war, he went to work for Boeing's Wichita division. There he oversaw the construction of the B-29 Super-fortress. When Connelley called Peterson, all he asked about was his drinking habits. Connelley had a pathological fear of pilots whom mixed drinking and flying. When Peterson confessed he was a teetotaler, Connelley hired him on the spot."

After the war, while still flying with the Sinclair Oil Co., David started another Air Charter Service in Tulsa, Rent-A-Plane. He had several people helping him with this business at the time. At one time he had 10 Beech Craft Bonanzas (a single engine 4 person aircraft) flying in charter service. This business was doing quite well, but he was spending so much time there that in 1955 Sinclair asked him to do one or the other. He sold the business.

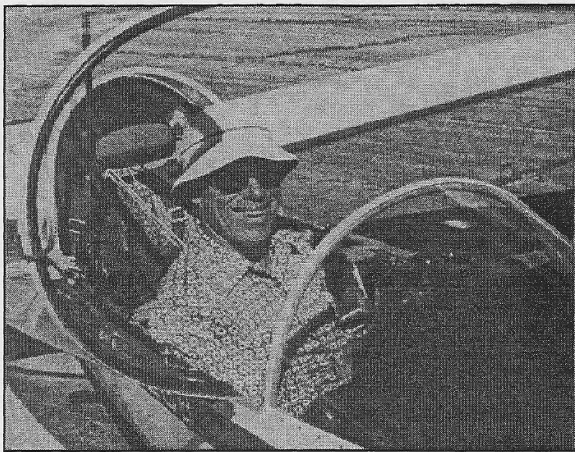
It was the experience with the Beech Craft Bonanzas that gave him the idea for the "Super V". This was a Bonanza airplane, but with two engines instead of just one. He went to Beech Craft with his idea and they



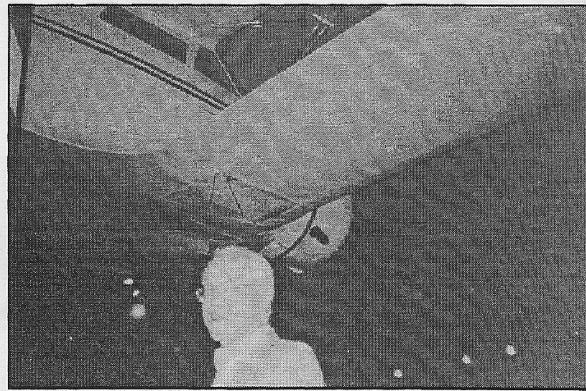
David showing off the prototype Ultra Van #101 in 1961.



David and Lucille at a premier showing of Ultra Van #201 which was the second unit built. Photo taken in 1962.



David Flew gliders like this one at Fremont California as well as Hang gliders off the coast of Marin County. Circa 1975.



David standing in front of a Beech Craft Stagger Wing like the one he flew in 1938 at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.



David behind the wheel of Ultra Van # 601 that has a side mounted V-8 mid engine. Photo taken August 1999



The Peterson family in the early 90's. L. to R. Lucille, David G., Son David L. and daughter Patsy.

said it couldn't be done. That was music to Peterson's ears. So in 1956 he took a leave of absence from Sinclair Oil Co. to start work on the "Super V" project. With the help of his son, David L. he went to work on the conversion of making a single-engine Bonanza into a twin-engine Bonanza. He upped the gross weight by 600 pounds. By reworking the engines he achieved an engine nacelle that was only 14 inches thick. This was the most compact engine installation in the industry at the time. After the Beech Craft company saw what David had done, they went ahead and developed the Beech Baron; a twin-engine aircraft based on the single-engine Bonanza. This entire project got him into working (hands-on) with aluminum. Learning how stresses and structures worked, (and didn't work). He finally got the project certified by the C.A.A. (today the F.A.A.) He did a few conversions

and sold them to buyers. It was this project that brought him and his family to the Oakland Airport in California. In 1957 he formally left Sinclair after serving as their chief pilot.

While he was doing the "Super V" project, he got the idea for the Ultra Van. Pulling his Spartan trailer into Mexico in 1959, he thought it would be a great idea to leave the car at home. If he had an engine in the Spartan trailer he could pull his boat with him and have all the conveniences of a trailer. Had the

Oldsmobile Toronado been around in 1960, I'm sure he would have done this with the front wheel drive. He was fascinated with the Corvaire power plant, so he built a complete new structure around this concept. Using his unique ability to work thing out on his own. The project was completed in 1961. For a more complete story on this, see the CORSA Communiqué, April 1980 (Vol. 2, Num. 8). He will always be remembered in my mind for developing that wonderful (soon to be a cult vehicle) Ultra Van.

David's long experience in working with his hands has done him well. He felt that anyone could do what he did if they are willing to work. He says his secret is energy. Just keep using it and keep going. I might add that he had a lot of ability to go along with it. He never got caught in conventional thinking and approaches. This has gotten him into trouble at times. It also has given him the insight to do such projects as the "Super V" and the Ultra Van. He had personal integrity and he stayed with projects to see them through. Good old fashion values! I remember him working with Lucille on remodeling an apartment complex in Sacramento when they were both in there 70's. That the kind of energy the Peterson family had. He got things done!

From the Editor

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of David Gibson Peterson, July 16, 1914 to June 22, 2000, 6 weeks short of his 85 birthday. He was close to us and has effected all of our lives. If you own or have owned an Ultra Van, there is no way out of it. Because he has effected our lives so, we honor the position he holds in our community. He was our chief, our head guru, and the guy who knew what it was all about. We lived in, loved and drove his creation, the Ultra Van. The world has changed a bit now that he is not here, but has left us a lasting legacy, the Ultra Van. These vehicles are now between 30 to 38 years old. Only about 365 units were ever built between 1961 to 1970. The Winnebago built over



Your editor left with David Peterson in front of Ultra Van #601

250,000 motothomes, which was more than any other manufacturer. The difference between the two is noticeable, uniqueness! The Ultra Van is still way ahead of its time, a body that weights just over 2,000 pounds, without the interior installed. A shape that the air flows around, a full body pan (the early ones) that reduces the coefficient of drag. Recycling of gray water through the macerating toilet uses a garden hose to empty the holding tank. Uses the front compartment efficiently as a driving area, eating area and sleeping area. The lowest profile of any Recreational Vehicle built. AND the best mileage you can get with a vehicle this size. An interior the size of a space ship, with the biggest KING size bed in the industry. This is the legacy of David G. Peterson. He built a vehicle, which will last well into this century. When the internal combustion engine is no longer available we will use electricity to run motors at the wheels, using a hydrogen engine, with solar panels covering the large top to the vehicle. He created a cult vehicle. Ordinary people will not be driving this machine in 50 years, only people that have the appreciation and ability to operate this machine will have them. Our job is to take care of them, so in the year 2050 a young man with a dream and lots of energy will have one to restore and modify and use and he travels the country to find out where he fits in this society. So that is our challenge, to keep as many of them running and alive so that others will be able to remember David Peterson with a fond smile of thanks.

This is also the last newsletter I will be doing as your editor. Our new editor will be Richard Finch. Richard is well qualified for the position. He has written many books, "How to keep your Corvaire Alive"(now in its eighth edition); "How to Protect Your Airplane From Destruction by Fire, and Your Passengers From Death by Fuel Explosion and Fire"; "Converting Auto Engines for Experimental Aircraft"; "Welder's Handbook"; "Performance Welding" in book and video. I have known him for about 25 years and found him knowledgeable in many areas. He bought his first Corvaire in Abilene, Texas in 1960. With his background as an author, teacher and mechanic I feel he is the best qualified to be our new editor of "Whales on Wheels". He and his wife Gayle have bought Ultra Van #443 last year and travel in attending conventions to sell his books. Welcome aboard Richard Finch!

Because of other commitments I will not be attending the National conventions this year. Both the CORSA convention in Florida and the Ultra National convention in Amana, Iowa. I hope to see you all next year.

Christy Barden



Meet your new Editor Richard Finch

Back in the mid-1960s, Jim Pittman (current newsletter editor for Corvairs of New Mexico newsletter) and I were young, "handsome" Space Program guys who were in the same sports car club together while we worked at Holloman AFB in New Mexico. Jim was an Air Force Captain and a Veterinary Doctor at the Base and I was a Staff Member of New Mexico State University, collecting data at the High Speed Sled Test Track. Jim owned a new 1966 Corsa 180 HP coup and I owned a Used 1965 Corsa 140 HP 4 door.

I also owned a sport-racing car that was powered by a 3-cylinder Saab engine and transaxle. Stan Laskin was also a SCCA (Sports Car Club of America) race car driver, racing Saab sedans. Stan found me a low mileage; 3-carburetor Saab Monte Carlo engine and Jim Pittman and I decided to drive out to the 1968 SCCA Nationals in Riverside, California to pick the engine up from Stan. Our trip back home was uneventful, but our drive out there was quite memorable because of some bad things and good things that happened on the way.

We decided to drive Jim's 1966 Corsa to Riverside with the 180 HP turbo engine so we could get some data on it's performance on the way out there. Jim was planning to replace the turbo engine with a brand-new 140 HP engine as soon as we returned from California. I began the trip as driver and then Jim took over after the first couple of hours of driving. The bad part of the trip was seeing two separate 18-wheeler truck accidents. By the time we got to Deming, NM, I was feeling really sick because of seeing the two truck accidents, so I asked Jim to take the wheel and drive for awhile.

In our younger days, it seems like we usually drove at 70 mph to 75 mph on open highways and if my 30 + year old memory serves me right, I think that Jim was doing about 75 mph just getting into Mesa, Arizona on that outbound trip to Riverside, California. I was riding in the right seat figuring average mph on the "slide rule" when a big streamlined looking RV passed us, obviously going faster than our 75 mph. In those days, motorhomes were very boxy and slab-sided, like the Clark Cortez and the first Winnabago models. This one was very rounded and very slick looking, unlike any motorhome either of us had ever seen before.

We were both trying to figure out what made it was when we noticed the rear axles were IRS (independent rear suspension) with u-joints at the inboard and outboard ends of each axle. We could easily see the axles spinning as the new motorhome led the way ahead of us. To better see the obvious rear-engine, Jim pulled up as close behind the fast moving rig as he could safely be, and I continued to look for clues as to the powertrain that was pushing this wonderful looking new style motorhome along at such a brisk rate of speed.

Then we saw the very distinctive Corvair 140 HP dual muffler set-up and the one-of-a-kind rear Corvair engine and transaxle under the motorhome! Our first comments to each other were about how fast the Corvair engine and transaxle were pushing that very big motorhome along. The fact that Jim and I were both Corvair enthusiasts made it even more impressive to us that the same basic engine that was propelling our small car along could also push a very large motorhome along so fast too.

That November 1968 sighting of our very first Ultra Van was a very memorable event for us. If memory serves me right, the Ultra Van driver left us in the dust that night.

The next time I saw an Ultra Van was in 1976, 8 years later when your editor Christy Barden had his yellow, orange and brown Ultra Van towed to my house in Santa Maria, California because his differential had spun a pinion shaft. At the time Christy spent three days in front of my house working on his differential unique size and shape of the Ultra Van motorhome. Gayle and I really enjoy ours and we have spent some wonderful miles over the western USA in our number 443.

Little did I know when I saw my first Ultra Van in 1968 that I would someday own and drive and camp in my very own unit!

Richard Finch

Rallies

July 18th - 22nd, 2000, CORSA International Convention, Daytona, FL Plaza Resort & Spa, 600 N. Atlantic Ave, Daytona Beach, FL. (800) 767-4471. SeaSide Trailer Part (800) 441-1831 Full hookups at \$30 a night. This is 6 miles north of the host hotel. There will be a FREE secured parking lot about 1 mile west of the hotel with plenty room for the trailers & Ultra Vans to park. The hotel will provide free shuttle service from this lot to the hotel. There are no hookups or facilities. Group Ultra Van meeting is Friday, July 21st at 8 PM.

Sept 20 - 24, 2000, Ultra National Rally, Amana Colonies RV Park, Amana, Iowa Hosts Ron & Martha Zoutendam, 206 N. 7th St., Sheldon, IA 51201. (712) 324-4660

Oct. 21 - Nov 1, 2000, Ultra 101, Restoration Class. Joshua Tree, CA. Work will be done on the restoration of Ultra Van #101. Contact: Jim & Marlene Craig, Desert Rendezvous Ranch, 7011 Sunny Vista Rd., Joshua Tree, CA 92252 (760) 366-9104 or jcrigel@juno.com

Nov 3 - Nov 5, 2000, G.W.F.B.T. & S.M. Palm Springs, Ca. Great Western Fan Belt Toss & Swap Meet, at Angeles Field in Palm Springs. Ultra Vans are a special attraction for this show. Ultra Van Parking is available on the swap meet grounds. More Information later.

Jan 17 - 20, 2001, Western Winter Rally, Phoenix, AZ. Hope Church, 4842 North 51 Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85031 (623) 846-7785. Hosts: Dan & Betty Reinhardt, 5201 West Camelback Rd, #A255, Phoenix, AZ 85031 (623) 846-6920.

WHALES ON WHEELS is a quarterly publication of GROUP ULTRA VAN, a CORSA chapter. It is dedicated to the preservation and use of the ULTRA VAN. This 22 foot unique motor home was designed by David Peterson and built in Kansas until 1970. About 365 units were built. Dues are \$6.00 annually, please remit to the Secretary-Treasurer. Submit all technical information to the Editor

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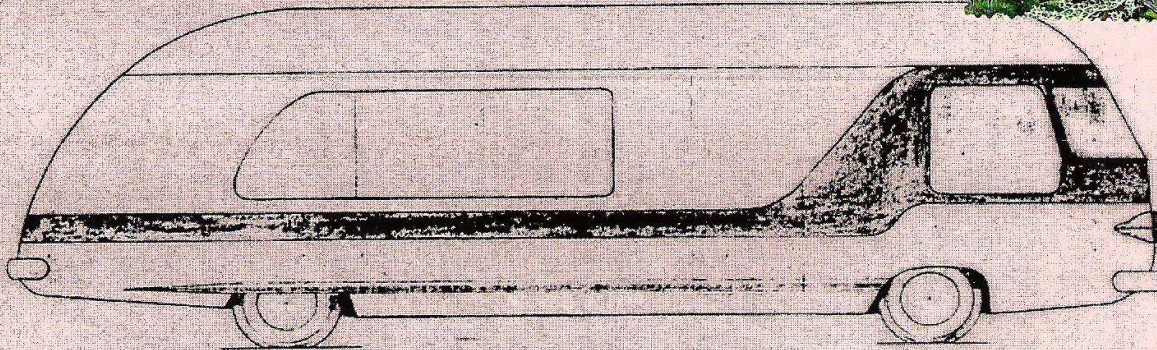
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Group Ultra Van

5537 PIONEER ROAD
BOULDER, COLORADO 80301-3048



This is an original drawing done by David Peterson in 1962. It was to be Ultra Van # 201 the second Ultra Van built. Number 201 was destroyed in an accident several years ago.

Norm & Marion HelmKay
73 Sargent Street

Haines City

FL 33844



FIRST CLASS MAIL

Whales on Wheels

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Spring 2000

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