

The man who made it 'Very Easy'

The "little airplane" mounted outside of the 20th Century Technology Museum is much more than just "cool" looking. It represents the stuff that made us a world leader in aviation and the same stuff that will continue to explore space well beyond our own moon.

First, there's the man who designed it, Burt Rutan, who pioneered the use of composite construction materials in the 1970s that you now benefit from each time you board a Boeing or Air-Bus jetliner.

Rutan also designed the Voyager, which received worldwide notoriety for flying non-stop around the globe, and Space Ship One, the first private venture to launch a rocket into space.

Rutan is truly a pioneer of modern aviation. It's a matter of pride that one of his aircraft is here in Wharton and that the students of Wharton High School restored it.

The "little airplane" is called a VariEze (pronounced very easy). It is what is called a homebuilt; in other words it comes in pieces and you can put it together at home.

The prototype had a Volkswagen engine.

Rutan created the plane to be a simple, reliable aircraft to fly in good weather and visibility. It did not take incredible skill to assemble, and it was affordable to not just the rich. About 3,000 kits were sold.

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**Around
The Bend**

What's interesting is nothing was conventional about this plane, both then in the 1970s and today.

It's called a "pusher," or a canard, meaning everything is in reverse. The propeller is in the back of the plane.

A propeller is like a little spinning "wing." While a wing creates a vacuum (lower air pressure) on top of it, the propeller cre-

ates a vacuum in front of it. On a conventional propeller plane, the spinning propeller literally sucks the plane forward. In the VariEze, since the propeller is in the rear, it "pushes" the plane forward.

Rutan's VariEze also is different because the flight control surfaces are at front of the plane, rather than in the middle or rear of the plane. Rutan felt the plane would be harder to stall that way.

In other words, the VariEze is not just another airplane.

Hats off to the high school students who restored the VariEze. Hats off to Art Schulze and all his helpers for making the display of this plane possible.

Art should be commended not just for this, but for bringing the entire museum as a gift to Wharton.

The official ribbon cutting for the VariEze will be at 10 a.m. Friday, Aug. 11, with a reception following, at the museum.

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