

Fantastic Folding Plane

Warren Levinson:

This could be the single coolest object ever: a two-seat single-engine amphibious airplane, big enough to fly for three hundred miles at 140 miles an hour but small enough, thanks to wings that fold up, to keep in the garage. The wings of the Icon A5 fold back with the use of a motorized hinge.

Warren Levinson:

It's part of a new category of sport planes, aimed at taking advantage of a new class of pilot's license, one that restricts fliers to daytime hours and altitudes well out of the way of commercial traffic. But this license can be had with just a few weeks of training.

Warren Levinson:

The Icon is the brainchild of this former F-16 pilot, who sees it as a way to appeal to people who want to fly for the sheer joy of it.

Kirk Hawkins:

Flying: what we're used to is kind of like on the airlines. You're in an aluminum tube, you got a little-little tiny window, and you're-you're-you're going from A to B. That's kind of like riding the bus or riding the subway. It's-it's not about the experience of getting from A to B. That's flying as you're used to it.

Kirk Hawkins:

But flying doesn't have to be that way. It didn't begin like that. Think about what you would do on a motorcycle or a convertible: go out in the mountains and ride around or ride with the top down, wind in your hair. That experience, whether you're on a motorcycle or a sports car or any other device, is not isolated to ground vehicles. Airplanes can deliver the exact same experience, even more, if they're designed to do so. And this one is designed to do that in space.

Warren Levinson:

Designers put a glass bubble over the cockpit and moved the propeller to the middle of the aircraft to improve visibility. That, and a car-like interior give the plane a friendly look, though not too friendly.

Steen Strand:

Our designer happened to be watching Shark Week when he did his initial sketches. And you'll see elements of a shark in this.

Warren Levinson:

Naturally, it doesn't come cheap. One of these will set you back 139,000 dollars. But the company already has a two-year waiting list, and Hawkins says a third of the buyers haven't even gotten their pilot's licenses yet.

Warren Levinson:

Warren Levinson, The Associated Press, New York.

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