

# REPORT TO PILOTS

Midmonth update: News, SafeGuard and Used Aircraft Guide

**After nearly a decade in limbo, Grumman American's sleek and speedy felines, the Tiger and Cheetah, may soon return to production.**

At press time, Gulfstream Aerospace and a brand-new outfit called American General Aircraft Corp. were within a few signatures of concluding an agreement to transfer rights and tooling for the four-seat AA-5s, as well as the two-seat AA-1 "Yankee" line and the GA-7 Cougar twin.

American General Aircraft Corp. was formed by investment banker Leonard Seawell with the express purpose of acquiring the airplanes from Gulfstream and putting at least a few of them back into production. (If the name sounds familiar, you might recall that Seawell's father once owned Southeast Aviation Underwriters. The son owns Seawell Wyand Murray & Stewart in Atlanta.) Seawell said American General has "a significant amount of equity capital in it and no debt."

Seawell told us he plans to begin building new Cheetahs and Tigers by the end of this year. He declined to reveal his plans for the Yankees and the Cougar (other than to assume responsibility for the existing fleet) but mentioned that he is considering acquiring another orphaned line of airplanes. American General already has leased ("at a very attractive rate," Seawell noted) a huge complex of buildings on Mississippi's Greenville Municipal Airport and planned to begin moving tooling and inventory there this month from a warehouse outside Gulfstream's home in Savannah. "We intend eventually to be the highest-quality manufacturer of a



full line of aircraft in the country," he said.

In briefly outlining his plans and philosophy, Seawell tossed a bouquet to Piper Aircraft owner Stuart Millar: "We intend to be as successful as Piper has been, following the same type of format," he told *The Aviation Consumer*. "By that I mean, concentrating on the quality of the aircraft and on the level of service

*Orphan no more? The Tiger and its lower-powered litter mate, the Cheetah, may have found a new home and owners anxious to build them once again.*

that is provided to the existing fleet of aircraft, and not trying to just maximize the number of production units we can put in the air. I think the lessons of the late 1970s are still fresh enough in our minds that the mistakes won't be repeated."

To build his airplanes, Seawell has assembled a 14-member senior management team from veterans of (of all places) Cessna Aircraft. Seawell is chairman of American General, but he clearly intends to delegate responsibility for running the company to James Cox, former district sales manager for Cessna and, more recently, president of Helio Courier. "My role is providing the financing, negotiating the transactions and serving as chairman of the board," Seawell said. "But I'm not going to be building airplanes."

How the Roy Lopresti-refined, honeycomb-reinforced and hot-

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bonded airplanes will fare under control of alumni of the Cessna lap-and-rivet school of production remains to be seen. "A lot will depend on how up-and-locked the mentality of these people is," sniffed a former Grumman American dealer. However, a Gulfstream spokesman said, "It will be in our interest to see American General succeed; and if they need to have individual expertise from Gulfstream in any aspect of production, we're going to make arrangements to get it to them."

"We're going to begin very slowly and carefully," Seawell told us. Though production is supposed to get started by the end of this year, only 20 airplanes are slated to roll off the Greenville assembly line by the end of next year. American General will offer the 150-hp Cheetah as a trainer for around \$50,000 with basic equipment. Seawell said the 180-hp Tiger will have a list price of about \$75,000, including a VFR panel and such niceties as wheel fairings. Sales will be through a dealer network.

Seawell said American General has a threefold plan for meeting one of its biggest challenges: product liability. "First, we will be working very closely with the American Yankee Assn., which has had a very successful pilot-training program, including preventive maintenance." In addition, the company has hired consultants to set up insurance coverage and in-house claims-management procedures.

The company initially plans to hire about 150 people to begin assembling the Tiger and Cheetah. Seawell said he chose Greenville because of its central location, with access to the Mississippi River for foreign deliveries, and because of the availability there of facilities recently vacated by Boeing (which was using them to prepare Grumman A-6s for composite wing retrofit). American General has leased some 23 buildings with over 400,000 square feet of floor space. Seawell said finding people to assemble the unconventional four-seaters should not be a problem, since Boeing left behind a "good deal of trained avia-

tion technicians" when it pulled out of Greenville last month. Telephones hadn't been installed at press time, but the address is: American General Aircraft Corp., P.O. Box 5757, Greenville, Miss. 38701.

**Most pilots know SIDs as aerial road maps out of busy airports. But there's a new type of SID being concocted, one that may put maintenance costs into cosmic overdrive.**

The "new" SID (new to those who own and fly light aircraft, that is) is a Supplemental Inspection Document, basically a detailed list of special inspections that have to be performed at specified intervals to maintain an aircraft's airworthiness certificate. While these documents are old hat for those who build and maintain airliners, some folks think they might be a good idea for lightplanes, too.

One of them is Cessna Aircraft's Russ Meyer, who publicly launched the concept of lightplane SIDs at a recent meeting of the Society of Automotive Engineers. "We have minimal requirements with respect to continued airworthiness," he said. "We have concluded at GAMA that improved airworthiness of older aircraft is perhaps our highest priority." (GAMA is the General Aviation Manufacturers Assn., of which Meyer is an officer.)

Cessna apparently has developed (and is keeping a tight lid on) SIDs for its 200-series singles. "We intend to develop SIDs for all models of aircraft, including the 150 and 170 series," said Meyer. He indicated that GAMA will try to persuade the FAA to make them mandatory.

Why? "With tougher airworthiness requirements, implemented aggressively by the FAA, I believe it is realistic to reduce the level of accidents by at least 50 percent, and do so almost immediately," Meyer told the SAE audience. "A 50 percent reduction in accidents would re-