

# Kiwi Aircraft Builders

By Alf Crowe

*Everyone has heard of the well-known Bantam 2-seat side-by-side high wing microlights, they are all over the world and perform well with the Rotax and a few other engines as well.*

*We made a visit to a Kiwi rotary wing factory to see if they lived up to our expectations; it was the UFO plant just south of Auckland. I have had the pleasure of flying 23 hours on the prototype at the time of writing, but had never been to the factory.*

The UFO gyrocopter is a 2-seat side-by-side fully enclosed and cruises around 90 when powered by the 2.5 Subaru. Before I took on flying this machine I had flown 700 hours on a Vancraft Lightning powered by the 503 Rotax, and you can guess it - although cruising at 60 I had to watch where I flew because of such limited horsepower.

Well here comes the UFO and I have hoots of power - in fact I have never had it to full power, there was no need to, as I encountered stick shake at 100 knots, so that is the Vne for me. She purrs along at 90 at only 4,200 rpm, and at those revs the engine should last forever.

There is no trim (like the Vancraft), and when flying on my own you hold the stick slightly to the right, but when you have a passenger, that balanced it, and it can fly no hands.

I could go on forever telling you about what fun it is to fly, but I started out about the factory, so had better keep to that story.

Did you ever see the TV series "Blokes and Their Sheds"? Well it is like that! Just south of the city of Auckland, are some very pretty areas - rolling hills, patches of bush and lifestyle farms all around. The roads go in all directions, so we phoned Geoff Price, the owner of the UFO plant



Sorry we could not get them all into the photo, but this will give you some idea of the production line.



**Left: Geoff Price standing at the door of his factory, admiring his herd of deer. What a wonderful location! He can even call the deer to come to him.**

from a small village called Whitford, he came and met us and we followed him through tree-lined roads to the plant. What a hideaway! You turn in this farm gate and at the top of the hill is a very large shed. Inside is a site you want to see to believe. Have a look at the photos and you can see how many gyros are on the production line. Already they have exported to South Africa and the United States. However for some of the pilots in South Africa, they have a problem that thank goodness we don't have! Some of their airfields are 5,000 feet above sea level and experience very hot temperatures, so these guys are talking about fitting turbine engines to their machines.

There has been a lot of testing going on at the plant. In one area we saw a well grilled off prop testing machine, using the same Subaru engine they test different types of propellers, and from all the sensors they can get the thrust and other figures; they go on testing all sorts of



**Below: Looking towards the door with the almost finished machines getting ready for delivery.**

props and rotors from around the world as new products come on line.

The designer of the gyro is Mac Glespie and he has designed a cabin that even with the doors off there is no wind inside, and you don't have to shout when talking to the passenger. It is a masterpiece in fibreglass. There is a waiting list for what comes off the production line and although they have

a small staff number, they work in shifts. Geoff is mighty fussy about what goes into the machines and is always looking at new ideas. For example, they could not find the radiators they wanted because they are curved so they do not interfere with very much of the streamlining, so Geoff built his own. He is like that on everything; nothing seems to beat him. They even built their own factory, which has plenty of height and lighting. It is the sort of place I would like to work in, even for next to nothing - if it were closer to my home!

As you can see there are machines at all stages of completion. There are some just about ready to go out the door and at the other end, are just starting with the bare canopy. They are even planning to extend the factory in the near future.

What a paradise! A new well lit factory in rural surroundings, no noisy traffic and if you were lucky, few visitors who want to talk and hold up the busy men. →



**Ready for delivery.**