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Glasair Aviation's Sportsman 2+2 over Puget Sound

## **A better way to build**

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## ► Customer Assembly Center speeds Glasair Sportsman assembly

By MEG GODLEWSKI

General Aviation News

When some people buy a kit plane, they grossly underestimate how long it will take to build their dream machine. They spend hours building jigs and doing prep work for a few precious minutes of assembly. Then there's the cleanup process, which takes even more time.

"And you feel like you are not getting anywhere," says Harry Delong, a salesman for New Glasair.

One way to shorten the process is to have someone else provide the jigs and tools and do the setup and cleanup so you can focus on building. That's the philosophy behind the New Glasair Customer Assembly Center (CAC). The CAC is located a few blocks from the main New Glasair facility at the Arlington Municipal Airport (AWO) in Arlington, Wash. The center was created to get customers who have chosen the Sportsman 2+2 into the air faster while simultaneously educating them about their aircraft through hands-on construction.

"Instead of taking two or three years to build an airplane, we can compress that into two or three weeks," Delong says. "The factory mechanics do the setup and cleanup involved in the construction process. That allows the owner of the aircraft to concentrate on the actual building, saving lots of time."

The CAC is gaining in popularity with customers who want to expedite the building process. Customers work on their aircraft from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday

through Friday. Their kits are identical to the kits sold to builders who want to do everything on their own.

"This is not so much a marathon, but a sprint, and the customer is like a Ping-Pong ball," says Delong. "They work on one thing and when that is finished they move on to another. That way they comply with the FAA's 51% rule and can check off all those boxes for the FAA that allows you to get the repairman's certificate for your aircraft."

The Sportsman has a steel tube cage, metal control surfaces and a composite fuselage. The two-week program results in a mostly completed airframe. The three-week course finishes the aircraft firewall forward.

"The only things we don't do with the firewall forward is the wiring from the engine to the cockpit instruments, such as the cylinder head temperature gauge and the exhaust gas temperature gauge," says



Photos courtesy Glasair

**GET WHERE YOU'RE GOING, FASTER:** With its new Customer Assembly Center, Glasair customers can get into the air faster. One of the key selling points of the Sportsman 2+2 is the amount of gear it can haul. If you like to camp in comfort, this may be the aircraft for you.



Photo courtesy Glasair

**HAVE PLANE, WILL TRAVEL:** *The sturdy construction and STOL capabilities make the Sportsman 2+2 attractive to fishermen who like to visit remote lakes and rivers.*

Delong. “What remains to be done at the end of the programs is cosmetic items, like wheel pants, wing tips, window installation, as well as upholstery and avionics, but for the most part it is an airplane. The wings are closed and everything is plumbed inside, such as the pitot static and fuel system. The wings are on the airplane and the control surfaces are completely rigged.”

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK**

Customers are expected to do their homework before they come to the center. Assembly manuals are sent out weeks before customers arrive.

“The manual explains the whole airplane assembly, assuming you are building from a standard kit,” says Delong. “We also send supplements, which explain what will be done to the aircraft before they get here, and what they will do when they arrive.”

Since the CAC clients work alongside Glasair mechanics, it can cut down on builder mistakes.

“They still happen, but much less often and we catch them a lot quicker,” says Delong.

Customers and mechanics work off a checklist that explicitly details who does what.

Some of the customers, says Ted Setzer, vice president of sales for New Glasair, are a little timid at first.

“There are some clients who are afraid to do work on their aircraft, like doing the riveting, because they don’t have much experience in it,” Setzer says. “They say things like ‘but what if I put a dimple in it?’ and we say ‘then you put a dimple in it, it is your airplane.’”

On the day GAN visited the center, Jim Hill from Huntsville, Ala., was on day nine of the assembly of his Sportsman. Hill, who makes his living as a rocket scientist, says he was a little nervous when the factory mechanics handed him a rivet gun.

“I didn’t know anything about riveting before, but there I was riveting the top skins on the wings,” he says. “It is definitely a skill. After you do it a few thousand times, you begin to catch on.”

Hill estimates the center is saving him at least a year’s worth of work.

The Sportsman is Hill’s second homebuilt aircraft. “I have a KR-2 I built years ago,” he says. “It is basically a poor man’s Glasair. It is really responsive like a sports car, but not every functional. There is room for you and a little bit of luggage, but no passengers, even though it is a two-seater. When Glasair came out with the Sportsman, I knew it was right for me. I was looking for an airplane that goes together quickly, is safe and reliable and can carry all my wife’s luggage – all 300 pounds of it!”

Company officials say the Sportsman compares favorably to the Cessna 182 in terms of speed, but bests it in terms of payload and STOL capabilities at a fraction of the cost.

The Sportsman is also designed for convertible gear so an owner could have a tailwheel aircraft, then later put it on floats or tricycle gear without making major structural changes. The Sportsman also has foldable wings. This makes it popular with pilots who share



Photo by Meg Godlewski

hangar space.

“You don’t have to unhook anything to fold the wings, you just pull a few pins,” Delong says.

At the end of the CAC course, aircraft are taken off their landing gear and loaded into crates for shipping. Other times customers show up with trailers, fold back the wings and tow the aircraft away. Some bring semitrucks to load it into.

For more information:  
NewGlasair.com.



Photo by Meg Godlewski

**PUTTING IT TOGETHER:** *The company mounts parts on cardboard and shrinkwraps them (above, center), similar to the way parts come in pre-fabricated model aircraft kits. This eliminates having to hunt for components. Jim Hill, from Huntsville, Ala., (above) holds the assembly manuals that were sent to him before he arrived at the build center. Builders are expected to be familiar with the material before they arrive on site.*

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