

Microlight plane-maker's sales soar

In skies throughout the world, a new type of aircraft has appeared over the past five years. Partly traditional airplane, partly glider, partly powered hang-glider (the design's progenitor), the planes are known as microlights or ultralights and have become a popular way to experience the joy of simple, inexpensive and unencumbered recreational flight.

One of the most popular designs, the *Lazair*, is manufactured in Port Colborne, Ontario by Ultraflight Manufacturing Ltd.

"We've been manufacturing and selling the *Lazair* for just over three years now," says Linda Kramer, general manager of Ultraflight's sales and marketing arm, "and the popularity of the design just keeps growing."

The entrepreneur behind the *Lazair* success story is Linda's husband Dale Kramer, a 24-year-old aerospace engineering student who left the University of Toronto in his third year to devote his efforts to perfecting the aircraft.

The microlight airplanes, which usually weigh under 102 kilograms, have evolved from the hang-gliders of the 1960s and early 1970s. By the mid-Seventies, various efforts had been made to add small chainsaw-type engines and propellers to hang-gliders to eliminate the need for cliff-side launching as well as to allow much longer flight endurance.

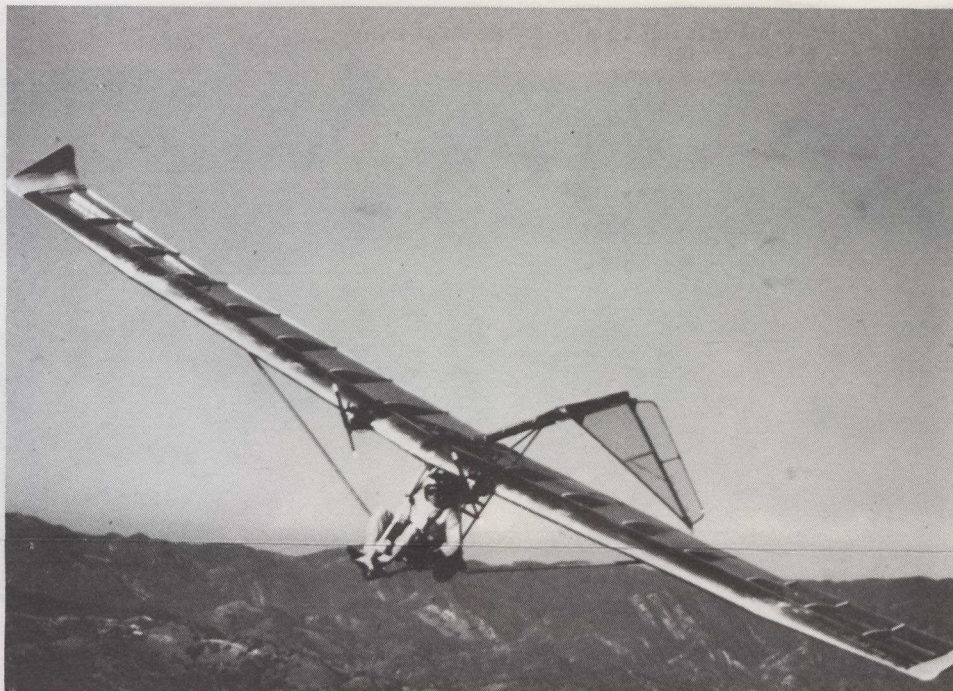
Dale Kramer, a glider and airplane pilot, saw some of these early models at the annual fly-in of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, US, in 1977 and concluded that he could come up with something better.

EAA award

The final result — presented to the marketplace at Oshkosh two years later — won an EAA award as best microlight and launched Ultraflight Manufacturing Ltd. The companion sales/marketing firm followed shortly after. The firm employs 21 people today.

The *Lazair* — the name is derived from lazy air — is sold as a kit, all 400 parts fitting into a 6 metre by 0.5 metre shipping crate. Assembly by the purchaser is estimated to take between 150 and 200 hours. The price is \$5 500.

It is a rather unusual-looking craft, having an open metal-tube structure with no enclosed cockpit and fabric or plastic-covered wings and tail. Powered by a pair of 9.5 horsepower two-stroke engines, the single-seat *Lazair* requires little more than



In terms of the number of units sold per year, Canada's most successful aircraft is the Ultraflight Lazair, a twin-engine machine in the new microlight sector of aerospace.

30 metres for the take-off run or landing roll and becomes airborne at just 29 kilometres an hour.

Top cruise speed is 88 kilometres an hour and flight endurance is about two hours. A special boon of the *Lazair* is its ability to function as a glider, with the engines shut down, once the pilot has climbed to an adequate altitude.

Although there were virtually no government regulations concerning microlight flying in Canada until recently, standards for a microlight pilot's licence have now been formulated. Red tape is still kept to a minimum, however, and the requirements are much simpler than for a conventional private pilot's licence.

One of the most gratifying aspects of the *Lazair's* success as a commercial venture has been the volume of business from outside Canada.

Sales abroad

"Of the 660 aircraft we've delivered so far (another 40 are currently on order), nearly half have been exported," says Mrs. Kramer. "There are about 280 *Lazairs* in the United States, 21 in Australia, six each in England and Sweden, two in the United Arab Emirates, and one apiece in New Zealand, Switzerland and the Netherlands."

Future plans for Ultraflight include marketing a two-seater instructional version of the *Lazair* (a prototype is already flying). This new model should be

available in the summer of 1983. Research is also being done on a more efficient propeller which would go on the dual version first and ultimately be incorporated into the basic model.

"Our distributor/sales rep network outside of Canada will continue to grow," Mrs. Kramer says. "The US can be developed much more, and we want to fill the gaps in Western Europe too. We've had dealer applications from Israel, and then there's all of Latin America..."

It seems safe to suggest that the success of this Ontario-designed microlight has only just begun to take off.

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