

SO YOU'RE CONSIDERING BUYING A SECOND HAND RV KIT.

There are a lot of RV kits, in various stages of completion, available in the second hand market. Some of them are very inexpensive. With increasing frequency, prospective buyers of unfinished RV kits are calling Van's Aircraft, Inc. for advice. This puts us in a difficult position. Once the kit leaves our shipping dock, we have no knowledge at all about what happens to it. We can not recommend for or against the purchase of any particular kit, or offer any opinion about previous owners or their craftsmanship.

That said, here's a few suggestions derived from our experience:

COMPLETENESS

When the kit ships, it includes inventory and packing lists that list the parts included. Use these to check the kit you are considering. Original purchasers have thirty days to notify Van's of any shortages. Most partially complete kits are long past these deadlines, so purchasers should expect to pay for parts, even if they find shortages in the kit. A Builder's Manual and construction drawings were also included. If you are buying a kit, insist on receiving these documents.

Older kits did not include all the bits and pieces modern ones do. For instance, most RV-3 and many RV-4 kits shipped without tires and inner tubes...it was expected that builders would find their own sources. In early kits, many plumbing and hardware items were not included.

Be sure you know what you are getting and where you can get what you're missing. When you add up the parts you must source and acquire on your own, the price may surprise you.

COMPATIBILITY

Over the years, we have made many improvements to the kits. New RV kits are much more complete and easier to assemble than older ones. An older kit may be cheaper, but it will probably take longer to build.

Standard Kits took a huge leap forward several years ago when **pre-punching** was introduced. Unfortunately, it was not possible to make the new pre-punched parts "backwards compatible". For example, purchasing pre-punched wing skins for an older non pre-punched RV-4 kit may seem an attractive option, but it will not work.

Van's Aircraft stocks a limited supply of parts for older kits but it is imperative that you order the correct part for your kit. Also, simply saying "I need all the wing ribs for an old RV-4 kit" just doesn't work. The best source of correct part numbers for an older kit is the original **packing list** that was delivered for inventorying purposes to the original purchaser. The next best source of information is the original blueprints for the kit in question. Using the EXACT part numbers as listed for components on the blueprints will help to get you the correct part.

CONDITION

Kits are packed for shipping, not indefinite storage. Check for any corrosion caused by long or poor storage. The plastic that coats the aluminum may be (extremely) hard to remove if the parts have been stored for many years, especially in hot climates. Worse yet, moisture may have crept underneath the plastic or paper packing material, remained for long periods and promoted extensive corrosion. "Still in the original crate" isn't always a good thing.

Partially completed kits run the whole gamut of craftsmanship. Construction quality can be a real issue. Some people are in a hurry and cut corners, others are distracted or careless. Some never quite get the “knack” and others simply try to beat the kit into submission. When they finally realize that the quality of their work is not acceptable, they abandon the project.

Partially completed components may be so poorly built that you will be forced to repair, rebuild or replace them. Besides being expensive, repair work is usually more difficult and frustrating than new construction. Inspect the workmanship on the kit carefully and if you don't feel qualified to judge, take along someone who is.

PAPERWORK

Every kit shipped from Van's is issued a serial number, variously known as the “builder's number” or “customer number.” The FAA requires an official Bill of Sale from the kit manufacturer before issuing an Airworthiness Certificate. Van's Aircraft supplies this to the person buying the kit directly from Van's, but of course, cannot supply it to someone buying the kit from a private party. When you buy a second hand kit, get a bill of sale from the seller that lists the serial number of the kit and his/her address. Van's Aircraft must receive a copy of this document in order to maintain the required paper trail for the FAA. Also, include the necessary data about you, the new owner: name, address, email and phone numbers, etc.

If the kit has passed through several owners, be sure you can establish a clear chain of ownership, or you will have difficulties registering the airplane. Before you buy a used kit, contact Van's with the serial number. We can then advise if there are any issues with the kit provenance that may preclude us from issuing a Bill of Sale to you in the future.

Also, because of the FAA's 51% rule be sure to contact a local FSDO office of the FAA to discuss problems associated with your acquiring a repairman's certificate.

VAN'S POLICIES

Van's will gladly provide builder's assistance and access to OEM pricing to buyers of secondhand kits. However, Van's cannot be responsible for completely educating a new owner of a previously sold kit and new RV builders should expect to spend some time and effort learning the basics of RV construction on their own.

IS IT A GOOD DEAL?

Prospective buyers of second-hand RV kits should consider the alternatives carefully. Do ALL the homework *before* you put the money on the table. We have seen many cases where the buyer would have been better off with a new kit at full price. We have seen other cases where the buyer purchased a well-built kit and saved considerable time and money.