

MAIDEN LOCK HAVEN

WITH ITS SEVEN DIFFERENT GEAR CONFIGURATIONS
ERIC PRESTEN'S CLASSIC PIPER PA-16 CLIPPER CAN BE
SUMMED UP WITH ONE WORD — UNIQUE!

BY ROGER CAIN

When Eric Presten takes his 1949 Piper PA-16 Clipper out for a leisurely flight, the craft is guaranteed to attract attention at any airport. Named *Maiden Lock Haven* after its birthplace at the Piper factory in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, Presten currently has the Clipper on a set of Murphy amphibious floats. This is just one of seven (!) configurations for takeoff and landing that Presten has for this unique Clipper. This year also celebrates the PA-16's 75th birthday. A very maneuverable airplane with its short wings and long ailerons, the Clipper is perfect for going in and out of short fields. Good visibility over the nose and toe brakes helps with this kind of activity. Different from most classic aircraft, the Clipper is also one of the few four-place airplanes that has a stick control system.

With the end of the war, Piper found itself in a difficult financial position. Military contracts were stopped and the few new designs the company had were simply not working out (see this month's "Down Memory's Runway"). The post-war market wanted new planes and the company's "bread and butter" J-3 was certainly anything but new. Plus, there were plenty of surplus L-4s (the military variant of the J-3) and other ex-military surplus light aircraft available at cheap prices.

So, how could the company get itself out of the financial hole? A decision was made to use much of the material on hand in the factory to create a

"new" aircraft — the PA-15 Vagabond. The Vagabond got rid of the Cub's tandem seating in favor of a side-by-side configuration, something that had become more popular. This meant a new steel tube fuselage but this was easily constructed by Piper's skilled workforce. Cub components that could be utilized included the tail, landing gear, and most of the wing panels. Piper designers decided to eliminate one wing bay to create a shorter wing — 30 feet for the Vagabond compared to 36 feet for the Cub. This also gave the plane a racier look and led to the term "Short Wing Piper" that would describe a new generation of light aircraft.

Making its first flight on 3 November 1947, production Vagabonds began delivery in January



Imperious Juan Trippe did not like the fact Piper used the name Clipper — thus making the aircraft a limited production machine that was built for just one year. The "Clipper globe" is on display in the Smithsonian.

Eric Presten rolls the Piper Clipper in on a heading prior to touchdown on a northern California lake. The large amphibious floats decrease top speed of the classic a bit.