

Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP)

**Region:
Ontario
Parry Sound**

Found Aircraft Development Inc.



"IRAP kept things moving along quickly."
**Bill McKinney, Chief Engineer, Found Aircraft Development
Inc.**

A Canadian legend gets a new lease on life

Few products could embody Canadian engineering excellence better than the bush plane. Throughout most of the 20th century, these hardy aircraft became an emblem of this country's enduring frontier. As the canoe had done in an earlier era, this form of transportation built our national identity by opening up remote regions to exploration and commerce.

Yet while bush airplanes have won the admiration of pilots and passengers alike, manufacturers are few and far between. Sport plane builders find the market too limited to produce aircraft that can cope with the demands of operating year-round in wilderness conditions. In fact, there is only one Canadian company building such aircraft, and it is a revived version of a firm that had previously closed.

That firm is Found Aircraft Development Inc., based in Parry Sound, Ontario. During the 1960s, it introduced a popular model called the FBA-2C. Though only 27 were ever built, they proved to be versatile and rugged enough for service in any part of northern Canada or Alaska. About a third of those planes are still flying, some having logged more than 13,000 hours in the air.

"Operating on wheels, floats or skis, the airplane can go anywhere," says Nathan Found, one of its original designers. In the mid 1990s he came out of

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retirement to bring the plane, now called the Bush Hawk, back onto the market. He also wanted to take advantage of materials and design techniques that had emerged over the past few decades. The result is the Bush Hawk-XP, which combines the best features of its forerunner with more recent innovations that improve its performance.

For example, with the help of cutting-edge computer aided design technology at the University of Toronto, Found developed a slotted wing flap that dramatically increases the amount of weight the aircraft can carry. In the same way, the Bush Hawk's landing gear were streamlined and the size of its rear doors increased. With a single high cantilever wing, there are no support struts to get in the way of doors, which can be opened a full 180 degrees to load people or cargo.

Bill McKinney, Found's Chief Engineer, credits the timely success of this underlying research to support from the Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP). An initiative of the National Research Council, Canada's foremost research and development agency, IRAP works closely with small and medium-sized enterprises, helping them grow their businesses, increase their competitiveness, and enhance their impact in the marketplace.

Found marked the end of its first full year of production in 2002, having shipped planes to one Canadian customer and two more in the United States. Now, with more than 75 employees in its Parry Sound and Toronto facilities, the company plans to produce a plane a month to meet a steady demand for the Bush Hawk.

"IRAP kept things moving along quickly," says McKinney, adding that the company is adjusting its output to keep this progress on track. "Quality is very important and we've chosen to grow at a manageable pace." ■

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