



Head Start

Mississippi Sonex

AT 15 YEARS OLD I am working on my own homebuilt Sonex. Let's rewind a bit. It was the last week of July 2016, and I was at McDonald's in Oshkosh eating breakfast and using the free Wi-Fi to check e-mail. I noticed on the SonexBuilders forum a kit was posted for sale. I figured, "Hey, what could go wrong. I'll make an offer." I responded to the seller saying I had \$200 cash and could get up to \$300 within a month. The seller laughed but didn't dismiss me. That started the wheels turning in my head. I drew out a fundraising plan of job ideas and ways to make money using any free time. I launched a GoFundMe campaign to accept donations from anyone interested in helping and a blog to keep everyone informed of both my aviation activities and fundraising status. I was ready.

Nearly five months later I was at the peak of my doubt. Was I crazy to think I could really buy an airplane kit? Would anyone care? How could I, a kid, buy and build a plane? But I doubled down on my cause and due to generous donations from the GoFundMe campaign and lots of hard work mowing lawns and vacuuming cars, I succeeded. I had remained in contact with that first seller, occasionally updating the seller on my progress, but I kept my options open and made it known that I was looking for a Sonex kit. In the spring of 2017 I received an amazing deal on a Sonex kit. The asking price was only \$40 more than I had saved, and I pounced on it. The 10-hour drive felt infinitely long yet

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extremely short. When my dad and I arrived we loaded the kit up, my eyes wide in wonder seeing the engine mount, cowling, wheelpants, and horizontal stab. I shook on the deal and began the long journey home, lengthened by the excitement of having a very light wallet and a trailer full of aluminum and fiberglass.

As soon as my dad and I got home we began setting up the garage as a workshop, and blew the dust off all my dad's tools. I learned tons about the band saw, drill press, Scotch-Brite wheel, and more. I stayed up late reading the plans and woke up early to finish my schoolwork and still have time to build. There was so much to learn. The plans have their own lingo, and there are so many best practices I just didn't know. Luckily for me my dad was an experienced builder and helped me every step of the way, not doing it for me, but teaching me how to do it on my own. I continued to document my work on my website, posting pictures and detailed descriptions of what I had built. My dad helped me, teaching me about center punching holes, cutting piano hinge, and chamfering edges. All the while I was still working my tail off to earn enough money for any parts I would have to buy, avionics, and the engine.

I am learning to fly with my dad and love flying. I fell in love with Sonex largely because of how much I flew with him in the Sonex. I grew up surrounded by aviation.

Going to the airport was a regular occurrence; we even had an Easter egg hunt one year at the hangar. I recognize that my situation is unique. I want to use my advantages to spread my passion for aviation. As such I plan to make heavy use of the second seat in my Sonex once it is completed by flying Young Eagles. My EAA chapter has taught me that giving rides is an excuse to fly multiple times in a day.

Building my airplane has taught me many things, and I'm not done yet. In so many places the people higher up in experience or knowledge push those below them further down, but the aviation community is one of the examples of what happens when they pull those below them up instead. I am extremely grateful and thankful to all those who helped me.

If you'd like to follow my progress as I begin work on the forward fuselage, and catch up on everything I have built so far, you can find a link to my blog at www.EAA.org/extras.

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