

They could have meant the plane, or just visiting the country generally, but, fuelled by the niggling tales of negativity seen on the evening news, there was a high level of concern among the few with whom I'd discussed my impending research trip.

One thing I've worked out along life's journey is that trepidation generated through preconceived ideas can shepherd you away from great opportunity. It's partly why I never told anyone I was heading off to London, let alone the world, in my little Searey; I was worried I'd be told I was a fool and be psyched out of going. (See "Around the World in a Searey. Yes, a Searey." *Water Flying*, July/August 2016, page 16.)

After the circumnavigation in *Southern Sun*, the Searey that proved to be a tough little plane, I realized that if I was being honest to myself, I was lucky to have made it home. As much as I love her and she saved my life, I knew that future missions would need a bigger, more suitable aircraft. Toward the end of my journey I'd made a list of the key attributes required for the next *Southern Sun*. I knew I wanted to stick with a flying boat that also had:

- Two engines
- Diesel power
- 120-knot cruise speed
- Four to six seats
- Long-range built in fuel tanks
- All composite construction
- Capable of salt-water operations

A stirring painting in Samara of the glory days of Mother Russia.



I had already looked all across the world and believed that such an aircraft didn't exist. The closest I came was the fantastic Gweduck, but she was larger than I needed and beyond my budget. I looked into having it built as a one off but, frankly, it would be a scary exercise fraught with danger. My concern wasn't just knowing that it would be an enormous project, but as Donald Rumsfeld had once said, the biggest issue would be the unknown unknowns—the things I didn't even know I didn't know. That certainly was the case for much of the round-the-world flight.

I traveled to Oshkosh to conduct research. There was some hope on the diesel front with Superior working hard on the Gemini engine, but it still seems to be years away. I spoke to some aircraft engineers who pretty much scoffed at the idea. Then I stumbled across a very rugged-looking three-seat amphibian from Russia on display, looking like a more agricultural version of a Searey. Talking to the builder using a mixture of English, Russian, and gesticulation, and looking at a brochure, it seems they also have a twin-engine aircraft. They appear to take salt water seriously, and

Dmitry, creator of the L42, L44, and upcoming L72.



while pretty rugged and simple, maybe it would be a step.

On returning to Australia I searched for any information I could. I learned that they are being built in the city of Samara, east of Moscow on the Volga River. It looks to be a hub for water flying, and specifically flying boats. Following ever-expanding YouTube links, I found three different companies building all-composite amphibious planes in one town in Russia. I was intrigued, and keen to visit to discover them firsthand.

On receiving an invitation from the Royal Aero Club to an awards night in London, I knew I had the perfect opportunity: return home from London via Russia. Emails were exchanged, and Dmitry, from one of the manufacturers, would collect me at the airport. They had arranged for me to stay at the hotel right on the airfield where the planes are built. This was sounding both interesting and pretty serious.

I was met at the airport by Dmitry, the owner of one of the factories. He spoke limited English, but far better than I speak Russian. With him was Valentine, who spoke very good English and was an aeronautical engineer. On the way to the field he explained that Samara is the "home of flying boat design in all of Russia," proudly adding that it "also is home of Russian rocketry; we built rocket that took Yuri Gagarin into space."

As the explanations unfolded, I learned that Samara University has a



L44 cockpit (above) is a modern, spacious environment, as is the passenger cabin (below). The seats fold forward for easy cockpit entry and egress, and for carrying bulky cargo.

