

Senior First Officer Hank Cheng is seeing a childhood wish come true as a two-seater plane takes shape

# A dream becomes reality

A small workshop tucked away in the back of a Causeway Bay school is home to a partially constructed Van's RV8 two-seater tandem aircraft. The task of putting together the first aircraft to be fully assembled and registered in Hong Kong is the dream project of Senior First Officer Hank Cheng.

"I was too young to remember when I built my first model aircraft. But I thought how cool it would be if I could build and actually fly it. That idea has been floating in my mind ever since," he says.

Finding space to store a 6.46-metre-long plane with a wingspan of 7.38 metres proved a concern and Hank originally thought of working with universities with an engineering discipline, but in the end chose to work with secondary schools.

"The reason being that an early introduction to aviation would present more options for the students," says Hank. "Aviation was not something being promoted enough in secondary schools, and I thought I would get the most out of the project if I could bring aviation into their lives," he says.

The plane ended up at the all-girl St Paul's Convent School and now, every Wednesday afternoon, a group of students spends a few hours working on the plane they've nicknamed Moody Rosie.

"Rosie is a tribute to the iconic World War II image of Rosie the Riveter because the group is all female," Hank explains.

"And Moody because sometimes it will all go perfectly and other days nothing goes well. I've learned never to fight her!"

To date, around 150 students have worked on the aircraft. Where possible, CX pilots come along to give lectures on the parts of the aircraft they are about to work on.



"For example, we will give them a brief lecture on flight controls, aileron pushrod, flaps – anything related to the day's work. Before the students are allowed to work on the actual aircraft, they first learn sheet metal work," Hank says.

"Most of them have never handled tools before, so we spend the first half of the year teaching tool-handling and practice on a section of the aileron. Once they are proficient in a certain skill set, they get to work on the aircraft," he adds.

Other CX staff have also been volunteering their time and effort. "The build team consists of a group of CX pilots – they spend their days off between work helping with anything from riveting to painting the aircraft.

"Some colleagues from Engineering helped prepare all the documents to negotiate with the Hong Kong's Civil Aviation Department (HKCAD) and other staff have helped write proposals and promote the project," Hank says.

The students say it's not just the practical learning but the discipline

and attitude required to complete the task that make them excited about the project.

Fifteen-year-old Kathy Wong, who has been working on the plane for three years, says: "It's been a great experience because it's quite hard to be involved in a project like this in Hong Kong. We can also convince others that girls can build an aircraft!"

Lois Choy has also been working on the plane for a number of years and says learning how to be perfectly accurate in every task is the most important thing.

"We have to ensure every part of the aircraft fits together. I think this experience will help us no matter what we end up doing – it teaches us to be determined and persist in getting the job done," she says.

The ultimate goal is for the aircraft to take to the skies but HKCAD approval is needed first.

"A more immediate problem is that the plane is getting too large for the workshop space and plans are underway to move it next year, hopefully to the airport," Hank says.

**BUILDING DISCIPLINE:** Hank Cheng and a team of willing assistants from St Paul's Convent School spend every Wednesday afternoon working on the first aircraft to be fully assembled in Hong Kong.

