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## In this issue:

## Antique Attic

### Columns

[Air to Ground](#)  
[Antique Attic](#)  
[The Big Sky](#)  
[Book Review](#)  
[By Dan Johnson](#)  
[Close Calls](#)  
[Common Cause](#)  
[Evan Flies](#)  
[From the Logbook](#)  
[Sal's Law](#)  
[This Aviation Lifestyle](#)

### Crown Jewels



There are good reasons why Laird airplanes enjoy such a high status in the Antique Airplane world. Qualified as "Thoroughbreds of the Air" in company advertisements, these always were in limited production and pretty much custom made for discriminating pilots who could afford the high price tag associated with such a level of perfection.

### Feature Stories:

[1911 Females in the Air](#)  
[Aluminum Fighter](#)  
[Bahamas Bound](#)  
[Cessna Review](#)  
[Common Cause Comments](#)  
[Early Morning Departure](#)  
[My Flying Lessons](#)  
[The New Pilot](#)  
[Penny A Pound](#)

Consequently, Lairds are extreme rarities in today's skies, and the return of one example to flying status an event of grand proportions. 2008 saw such an occurrence with the first flight of the Laird LC-1B-300 N10402 (c/n 188), owned by Larry Howard of Greenacres, Washington State.

The LC -for Laird "Commercial"- was a conservative three-seat, open cockpit biplane, powered by the new Wright J-5 engine. The type certificate (ATC#353) for the model LC-B300 -powered by the Wright J-6 engine- was issued on August 20, 1930.

Rolling out of the E.M. Laird Airplane Co., shop, at 4500 West 83rd Street, in Chicago, Illinois, in early June 1930, the Laird LC-1B-300 NC10402 was delivered on August 20 to A.D. Knapp of Jackson, Michigan.

- [Pilgrimage to Oshkosh](#)
- [A Pilot's Story](#)
- [Rocketman](#)
- [Weather Analysis](#)
- [What They Remember](#)

## Fun Stuff:

- [Smilin' Jack](#)
- [Chicken Wings](#)
- [Tailwind Traveller](#)
- [Fly & Dine](#)
- [Ballooning](#)
- [Gliders](#)

## Flight Line:

- [Accomplishments](#)
- [Learning to Fly](#)



Thomas Berry Colby, of Berry Brothers fame, acquired it on May 18, 1931. NC10402 accompanied the 1931 Ford Air Tour as the "Berryloid Official Tour Airplane." In the hands of Thomas Colby, the Laird transported Tour Manager Ray Collins for the duration of the event.



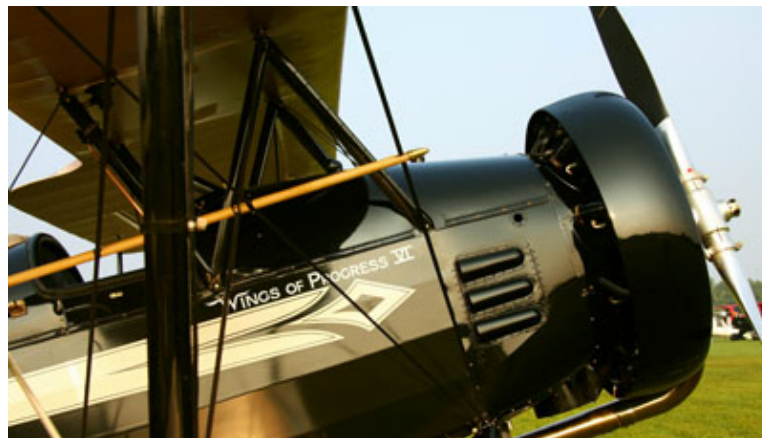
With the advent of WWII, it filled the functions of coastal patrol of the coast of California and target tug ship for the Civil Air Patrol.

In May 1946, it was converted to a duster configuration by installation of a hopper, and later abandoned.

In the late 70's, Dick Edminston re-discovered N10402 derelict behind a hangar. Planning to restore it to flying status, Edminston did not accomplish much, however, in a twenty year span, finally agreeing to sell the project to Larry Howard in 2001.

Larry was an aviation late bloomer, as he points out:

"I am a retired dentist. I always wanted to fly, but I had to establish my business first. I learned to fly in Spokane, Washington, well in my 40's. I got the antique bug from our good friend Addison Pemberton, who gave me some basic aerobatic instruction in his 450 Super Stearman.



Before I knew it, I was trying to explain to my wife why I had to buy a Great Lakes that had been wrecked and bring it back from Guatemala. That was my first restoration project, starting in 1987, with a lot of help from the guys at Felts Field." He continues:



"I heard about the Laird for the first time from one of my friends and patient. He told me he knew somebody who had a Laird. I started researching the matter and contacted the owner. We went back and forth for several years.

The airplane was beyond the basket case stage. I got the fuselage in a cardboard box. One of the previous owners had cut out all the aluminum tubing to get to the steel junctions to take it apart.

The restoration took eight years to complete. I was way over my head, so I had to learn new trades on the way. I did some of the welding -leaving the structural welding to a certified welder- and some of the woodwork -Art Swenson helped me with the wings- and built all the tail feathers, the instrument panel and the interior.

Living in the mountains, I did not want to rely on a greaser engine so, I had Al Holloway build a Wright R-975 for me."

Addison Pemberton was "entrusted with ride one", as he writes, on August 23, 2008, in the test flight report outlining the high qualities of the airplane and its restoration:

"The spirited beast was airborne in four seconds and outclimbed my son Jay in our Cessna 185 flying chase. The airplane is a joy with wonderful control harmony and light effective controls, a true thoroughbred of the skies. It is well mannered on the runway with good visibility for a radial biplane."

After a year of flying his jewel and a few hard learned lessons that delayed its first public showing well into 2009, Larry Howard complements this brief report with his own evaluation of the Laird:

"It is a wonderful flying airplane, very powerful. It has a cruising speed of 125 to 140 mph depending on how much fuel you want to burn. It is very stable and very comfortable.

The only issue we had found with the airplane is the gear geometry. If you try to do a wheels landing, the gear splits, and, when it does, the airplane tends to go in any direction, making it a handful to control. So this airplane has to be three pointed to get some measure of stability upon landing.

It also is a handful to land in crosswind. If you are perfectly straight, in a three point attitude, it lands pretty nice. If you get it sideways, it will weave and skip, and you will get very busy."

Painted in the colors it carried during the 1931 Ford Air Tour, the Laird is a welcome addition the very short list of airworthy survivors of the breed, as well as a shiny example of corporate aviation before the advent of Learjets.





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