

Tim Goose!


tive feeling you had behind the controls of a Ford.

As I say, the Tim Goose sported none of the fancy, highly scientific devices our modern airliners carry. But, as an airplane, she did more commonplace and heroic hard work than any aircraft known before. Today, in keeping with her valiant reputation, she is doing even tougher work than she did while pioneering the nation's airlines. It seems to me (and many of my friends who used to fly Fords) that the old girl transmitted many of her fine and rugged qualities to those who flew her. I always looked forward to those pleasant but noisy interludes high in the sky behind a Ford's controls. She was the most sociable airplane I've ever known. Her three racketing engines seemed to discuss the world in general with pilots who flew her. Oh, there was plenty of noise, all right; I don't know whether I'd have loved her as much if she hadn't kept up her ear-splitting conversation. Literally, I loved the old Tim Goose for the same reason so many people will always look back longingly on the rattle-trap, ear-splitting Model T "tin-lizzie."

Those pilots who had never flown a Ford had never experienced flying in its finest, most intimate form. She acted like a dignified dowager on the controls; smooth, graceful, and as sure-footed as a Seeing-Eye dog. Her stability was something to marvel at. The man who flew her was like a king enthroned. Though she had few of the blind-flying instruments we have today, the Tim Goose tackled some tough weather in her time. The method was simple; the pilot merely set her controls in neutral, trimmed her stabilizer, then let her fly herself. That's all you had to do—give her her head and she'd take you there.

Most remarkable quality of the Tim Goose was its ability to take its tremendous loads in and out of fields we'd never look at twice nowadays. And, in its palmy days, the Tim Goose could get off faster than anything in the air. The reason was simple. You merely placed the palm of your hand on her three throttles, shoved hard, then sat there amid the turmoil till her altimeter said 1,000 feet. Then you'd ease the throttles back to cruising and she'd calm her calamitous yowling to ordinary conversation voice. All the movements were very positive and conclusive.

Once aloft, you had little to do but sit and wait while the ship streaked (for those days) to her destination. In the air, the Ford was majesty itself. Her nearness to being alive was uncanny; even the passengers could feel



The author is shown with Colonel Lindbergh (right) while they were laying out what now is TWA's route from New York to Los Angeles. Mr. Collins is a TWA superintendent today.

The Tim Goose below carried Byrd over the South Pole. The explorers left the ship buried in the ice, dug it up on their second expedition, started the engines easily.



The Ford below served as a "flying truck" and was flown thousands of miles all over the country by the author. This was one of the earliest models powered with J-6's.



Many a veteran airman has gasped at the use to which Pilot Harold Johnson puts his Ford today. Below is one hair-raiser; Johnson also does loops, spins and even rolls.





One addition to the old Tin Goose was this type of retractable mail compartment.

it. If nothing else, the Tin Goose surely sounded alive. The heyday of the trimotored Ford was, of course, some time before much thought—if any at all—had been given to sound-proofing. In the cockpit the pilot and co-pilot cupped their hands and shouted into each other's ears. In the cabin, it was only slightly better. To talk with your neighbor—even across the aisle—was a mighty effort. After a five or six hour flight, passengers were apt to walk away from the plane sounding like cheer leaders at a football game. From the passengers' standpoint, the smartest idea was to write notes.

But for all the racket, the Tin Goose was a remarkable airplane. It was as modern as the advent of its single corrugated cantilever wing could make it. With an engine tucked snugly under each arm and another in her nose, the Tin Goose out-engined anything in existence. Originally, all its engines could do was to zip its 12 passengers, two pilots, and a few hundred pounds of cargo through space at around 90 m.p.h. Then Ford engineers discover that, by simply raising the two wing engines and adding N.A.C.A. cowlings, the cruising speed was phenomenally increased—to 125 m.p.h. At best, her range was 500 miles, her ceiling 22,000 ft.

With all these more modern arrangements, though, the first Tin Geese were comparatively primitive. Their pilots never had difficulty in finding out how much gas was left in the tanks. The method was simple: the aeronaut climbed up through the top of the cockpit, unscrewed the caps of the tanks and thrust a long stick into the cavern. Like a doctor sticking a thermometer in a patient's mouth. There was no mistaking the information gathered in this manner. Usually, there was one or two of these sounding sticks secreted somewhere in the cockpit. Refueling a Ford was sure to take the high-hattedness out of the

most dignified pilot because he had to unbend, whether he wanted to or not.

But, with all her practicality, the Tin Goose had an utter disregard for true streamlining. Her big, blunt engines just yanked her through the atmosphere, with almost complete unconcern in relation to the physical law of head resistance.

The day an airline invested in a trimotored Ford was a glorious one. The buyer knew he was getting an airplane with which he could fly any and everything from hogs to hammocks. That was one thing about the Tin Goose; she was never snooty. She did her work and did it well. Today the few remaining Tin Geese are much in demand in the remote corners of the world for such jobs as hauling mining machinery over mountains deep in Central America. The Tin Goose is in demand for this work, principally because she is one of the few old-timers that still are capable of such heavy-duty, modern-day hard work.

Yet, the Tin Goose has had her share of "white collar" work, too. In her day, the Ford was the American aviation scene. Tin Geese flew every major

airline in the land. Even Henry Ford himself used a few to operate an airline between Chicago and Detroit. A Tin Goose went to the South Pole. The Army, Navy, and Marines used them as transports for years. They did everything but fly the Atlantic—and the only reason a Tin Goose didn't was because there was too much work at home for her to do. In 1931, for instance, Tin Geese flew 10,467,167 miles.

Thinking back, I guess the only thing about the Ford that gave us cause for unpleasantness was the difficulty involved in starting her engines in cold weather. Lordy, we used to twist and wind those inertia starter cranks until we literally were blue in the face. At times we even had to drain her congealed oil and heat it over a bonfire. I don't suppose you could blame the Tin Goose for that; she was just born before the days of electric starters. But once we got all three engines running, she was again more vibrantly alive.

We didn't have to worry about retractable landing gears. We didn't have to bother with "inches of manifold pressure" and whatnot—simply because



The Ford was the backbone of all the major airlines of the nation. Shown at right, from top to bottom, are Fords of United and American Airlines and TWA.

there was no such thing. The engines weren't supercharged. No Tin Goose ever saw a controllable pitch or constant-speed propeller. In other words, whatever took place was strictly an agreement between the pilot and the airplane. She'd snarl and whine until the pilot worked the three throttles to the point where the engines were synchronized—more or less. This, of course, only added to the clatter and bedlam of the Ford in general. Today we have scientific synchronoscopes.

We got to love that noise. In fact, I think I'd have felt there was something radically wrong if her familiar racket hadn't been there. There was something comforting about the constant rattling and rippling of her corrugated skin, the clatter of the engines and the other contemporary noises like the slapping of the control cables (they were hung on the outside!) on the fuselage.

But as the years went by, the Tin Goose began to "go Hollywood." Somebody decided to install those new-fangled "pants" on the landing gear. Then they prettied up her face with

sleek cowlings around the outboard engines. Then someone went to work on her insides—and before they got through I saw anti-splash flower vases on the cabin walls, fancy seats (replacing wicker chairs) for the passengers; in fact, all sorts of fancy gadgets that smacked mightily of the era of "buy the latest hootnanny for your Model T." One typewriter manufacturer turned his Ford into a "flying showroom." So did a canned-foods company.

Then, too, Ford engineers added bigger engines—*Wasp*s—which made the old Tin Goose zip through the air with even more disregard for time or space. I guess she got a little too snooty in her later days. In the pre-elegant era we used to taxi up to any old gas pump and shove the first available nozzle into her tanks. If we happened to land in a convenient stubble patch (which we did, with no compunctions, when we felt like it) there was always a farmer or gas station somewhere near who would sell us a barrel or two of gasoline. Getting the gas into her tanks under those circumstances was a picnic. Usually, we'd siphon it into five-gallon



Toughest job on a Ford was starting her engines by hand in cold weather.

cans, carry them up through the cabin to the cockpit, lift them up through the hatch to the wing, then carefully and laboriously pour the gas into the tanks. In all cases, a chamois was a vital necessity. It would go inside the funnel to keep out the ever-present stray bits of dirt and water.

But this nature-in-the-raw procedure faded with the advent of the ultra-conservative operations of the scheduled airlines. If the Tin Goose hadn't been the lady she was, she surely would have been spoiled by her later-life treatment. . .

As I recall it, the tri-motored Fords were pretty complete when they came off the production line. There were a few thingamabobs that were added from time to time—like the splash-proof flower vases. Then, a few changes were made in the basic design of the ship. For instance, the first Tin Geese were built with J4 engines. That was in 1925 when Major R. W. "Shorty" Schroeder did the flight testing. These first ships had open cockpits; the drag they caused was not considered important. Later, it was decided they looked kind of naked that way. So the cockpit was glassed in. Soon, the J5 replaced the J4's. Then, when *Wasp*s were installed, it was my privilege to put the old gal through her test flights. Then came J6's. Then someone devised a retractable baggage compartment which went into the underside of the wing, one on each side.

Few spare parts were available—nor were they needed. A complete set of tools came with each ship, which just about assured a Tin Goose of a long and rugged life. About the only thing we might have asked for in those days would have been a set of anti-rattles or anti-vibrators. The Ford could develop more vibration noises and rattles than anyone could ever stop. But that never worried us; she got along

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Little-knows Fords were the first model (top), a trim single-engine freighter and the experimental bomber (bottom) which crashed during Air Corps tests.

large body of water is Albemarle Sound and the duck camp is Jack Dempsey's, on Mattamuskeet Lake). Though I didn't know it, I was in North Carolina. The gas is running dangerously low. I call my gunner on the interphone.

"Recognize any of this country?"

"No, sir", he replies.

I fly over a small island (later proved to be famous Roanoke island) and "buzz" a small fishing village, but can see no names in view on the buildings. And then—out of a thin haze—the blue ocean and sandy coastline ahead. Well, here I am. North or south? I curse myself for being so careless about a map. I decide to fly north on the one premise that I have never seen country like this north of Langley before. The slowly declining gas gauge reminds me somehow of an hour-glass counting out the minutes until I shall have a forced landing. The sandy beach looks better than any of this torn-up country to put it down, I think. Or how about the water?

I continue northward. Is that a hotel in the distance? It is—as I draw closer I recognize the familiar details of Virginia Beach and now I know that everything is all right. I am located, and head for Langley. But is it all right? Is my gasoline sufficient? I have been flying on reserve for some time now. I nurse it along slowly. A feeling of relief passes over me as I come across Hampton Roads at a good height and I know that if my gas gives out I can now glide to the field. It is not necessary. I lower my landing gear.

"UL2 from 5016. My wheels are down", I call in.

"5016 from UL2.O.K."

"Langley Control from 5016"

"5016 from Langley Control. Go ahead"

"Request landing instructions for one PB2"

"Land on runway No. 5. Wind south-west 20"

"Received O.K. 5016 off"

"Langley Control off"

I change propeller pitch, open my canopy, roll down my flaps, come in and land. I taxi up to the line and tell my crew chief what happened. He nods a few times, inspects my oxygen equipment and finds that the aperture through which the oxygen flows is too large and therefore I had used it up too fast, although the gauge registered it correctly.

I look around. There isn't a single ship on the line, and it yet lacks an hour until lunch.

"Where are all the planes, Sergeant", I ask.

"The entire group of 18 ships is out searching for you, Lieutenant". I winced.

My gunner climbs out of the back seat and I tell him what had happened—expecting him to blanch.

"That was tough luck, sir. We might have gotten us a bomber or two for lunch." He smiles. "Will the Lieutenant take me with him to Washington this Friday?"

Thinking of his confidence in me and

all the trouble of the searchers, I all at once feel very small and insignificant. I go into the hangar, change my uniforms and wait. One by one my fellow pilots return and wisecrack about it. I really take a riding. My crew chief comes in. My map is in his hand.

"On the floor under your seat, sir. Wind must have blown it".

I thank him. Never again will I try to combat the laws of nature and fly without oxygen into thin air.

My flight commander, the last to return from the search, walks in, with his 'cote hung from his shoulder. I tell him what happens.

He listens, smiles quizzically, and scratches an ear.

"Yes", he says. "Sometimes when the 'men' get lost we send the 'boys' out to find them."

END

Farewell, Tin Goose!

(Continued from page 23)

famously despite little things like that. Why, I remember one Tin Goose that had been flying all around the country with two one-dollar bills in one gas tank, unbeknownst to its crew. As a matter of fact, the ship had flown so well that they were all for leaving the money there.

I also recall the controversy some aeronautical "authorities" had had over the ability of a Tin Goose to climb over the Rockies in California. They'd never had a Ford out there and Maddux Airlines (part of the airline that now is TWA) wanted to buy some—provided the ship was capable of clearing the mountains safely. So Larry Fritz, a good friend who now is with TWA, answered that question by flying two Tin Gooses from the factory, over the mountains, to Maddux.

American aviation owes Henry Ford, William B. Mayo (chief engineer of the Ford Motor Company), and William B. Stout (the Tin Goose's designer) a great deal. Mr. Ford footed the bill for each Tin Goose—they were turned out at a rate of four a week—although he lost money on every one. And, while the tri-motored Ford was flying the airlines in its heyday, Mr. Ford also developed a group of men—both pilots and operations men—who today still play an important role in the commercial aviation scene. They all got invaluable training on the clattering Tin Goose. Offhand, I think of Hi Little, "Shorty" Schroeder, Larry Fritz, Pat Gallup, Eddie Hamilton, Earl Fleet, Foster Tompkins, Perry Hutton, Steve Welsh—the list could go on and on. . .

But out of sight is not out of mind. Every time I—or any of the other old-timers who knew the Tin Goose well—see one of the lumbering Fords, the whole picture of aviation 13 years ago comes back. She was and is a thoroughbred, but her days are almost up. I suppose it's time we wipe our eyes and say goodbye. . .

Farewell, my lovely Tin Goose!

END



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