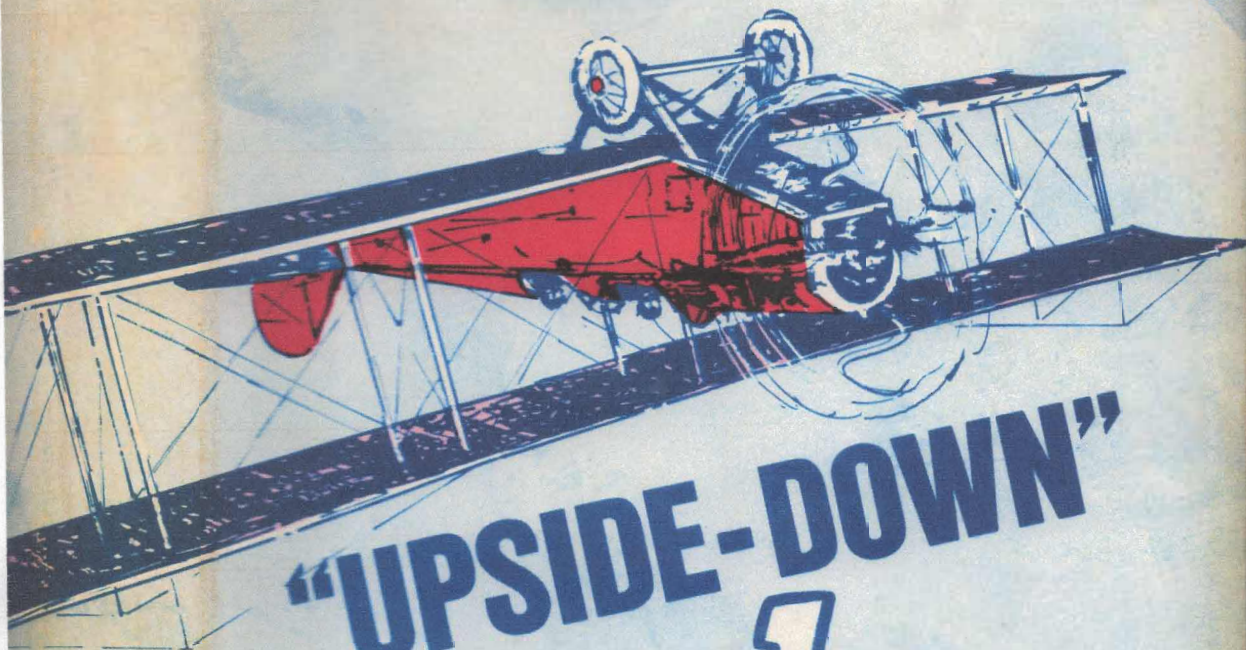


CLEVELAND



**"UPSIDE-DOWN"**

# Pangborn

**KING OF THE BARNSTORMERS . . .  
first to fly the Pacific non-stop!**

**"UPSIDE-DOWN" PANGBORN**

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Pan

by *Carl M. Cleveland*

Foreword by Lowell Thomas



## —and Then They Took Away the Sky

FOLLOWING THE OUSTING of Gates, the name of the Gates-Day company was changed to "The New Standard Aircraft Corporation." The plane was redesignated the D-24. Though it had excellent performance qualities, it had one major fault. It was hopelessly out of date. It was designed for two primary purposes; to carry passengers around an airport and as an air mail transport with pilot and passengers in open cockpits exposed to the weather. A dozen manufacturers were producing cabin planes with both pilot and passengers enclosed for comfort. The adverse factors of the D-24 were obvious to any prospective buyer.

The tired circus continued to pour money into the manufacturing end of the corporation. Pangborn argued futilely that since they had to demonstrate the New Standards, the circus should be equipped with them, killing two birds with one stone. His associates disagreed and the Gates Flying Circus (the Gates name was still retained because of the publicity build-up over the years) died quietly in Florida in the late spring of 1929.

A major distributor of the New Standards was Empire Air Transport of Syracuse, headed by Garland Latta and Emil Roth, with Hugh Brewster as manager. Still convinced that barnstorming and demonstrating could be combined, Pangborn urged Roth to put a circus on the road.

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Ostensibly ties in to Empire  
→ State Standard enclosure  
record. See previously provided  
newspaper articles

As a result four New Standards flew out of Syracuse on August 3, 1929. Ed Churchill, the aviation writer from the *Graphic*, was advance man, while Bill Brooks, from the old Gates circus set-up, was one of the pilots.

The Empire Air Circus played 30 cities and was enjoying amazing success until one pilot got his low wing into the slipstream of another while making a turn after take-off at Hamilton, Ohio. Two passengers were killed in the crash. Brewster ordered the planes to return to Syracuse.

Between August 3 and November 4, the four airplanes had grossed just under \$50,000. However, there was no net. A \$10,000 plane was lost in the crash, another pilot had taxied into a plane while his attention was distracted, another had smashed a landing gear, and for some unfathomable reason, Brooks had spent \$1,000 for a steam caliope!

Business at Canton was less than half the normal for a city of that size, a foreboding of what was to come. The date there followed immediately the first serious drop in the stock market. Full significance of the impact was slow in coming.

Even in the face of tour results, Brooks demanded that Churchill



John W. Underwood photo collection.

*New Standard D-24.*

go to the Franklin automobile factory in Syracuse and get him a new model for free.

"Why?" Churchill asked.

"Well, they gave one to Lindbergh, didn't they?"

After seeing the Empire Circus start on its brief career, Pangborn took three of the New Standards west on a demonstration tour. Pilots of the other two planes were Carl Dixon, ex-RFC, and Hugh Herndon, Jr., scion of a wealthy family, who was just learning to fly. Herndon had bought a Standard, cracked it up at Princeton, New Jersey, purchased another and asked to go along on the western trip. Happy Johnson, the ace mechanic, completed the crew.

At Amarillo, Pangborn ran into Lowell Yerex. He had a fantastic tale to tell of his experiences after he, Lil, and Ace, the police dog, had left the Gates outfit. The first years were prosaic; he had run a garage for several years and had taught school for a year. Moving back toward flying he became the manager of a small airline which was operating between Fort Worth and Amarillo. The crash of a new cabin monoplane, killing all on board, marked the end of the little airline.

Yerex, without a job, drifted through Mexico and on to Honduras, where he became involved in one of the innumerable revolutions characteristic of the Central American countries. Fortunately he had chosen the side which was eventually to take over the government. While flying for them he was shot in the forehead, the bullet destroying the sight of his left eye. He went to New Orleans, had the eye removed and a glass one substituted.

"After the revolution was over and the party I had signed up with had won," Yerex related, "I started my own airline. Whenever I wanted a concession of any kind I'd go to a certain official. If he refused, I'd take out my glass eye and put it on the desk in front of him. 'I have given my most valuable possession for your country,' I would say, 'and you refuse me this small thing!' The eye seemed to horrify him. He'd scream to me that if I would take it away I could have anything I wanted."

From the small beginning in Honduras, Yerex built up an airline network known as TACA. He and Lil were divorced, and in a short time he married the daughter of a high Central American government official. Later he sold TACA for several million dollars.



Pangborn's Western demonstration tour had started at Riverside, California. Expenses were met by carrying passengers, rather than calling on the parent corporation in New Jersey. The trip up the coast was revealing of aviation's growth. Where Pang had flown from grain fields and pastures there were now airports. Every small town seemed to have a plane or two. In Portland, Vance Breese was building airplanes designed by Jack Northrop. Tex Rankin was running one of the largest flying schools in the United States and buying planes by the carload. Boeing was expanding in Seattle. Los Angeles was the site of scores of airframe manufacturers. Airlines now had a network along the coast.

Back in San Diego, Pangborn received a wire.

COME EAST. MAKE IT FAST.

The New Standard Corporation had never made a profit. The collapse of the market had sent its stock to zero. With no prospect for the future, the officers closed the doors. Once again Pangborn had lost money on a project which at first had looked so promising.

He ordered one of the demonstration planes to Los Angeles, where it was turned over to the corporation's agents, Jack Frye and Paul Richter. The two later became officers of Transcontinental-Western Air better known by its initials "TWA" and still later to become Trans-World Airlines. Herndon flew the second demonstrator east.

The trip up and down the Pacific Coast had convinced Pangborn that people would still pay to fly around a field; that the old and tried advertising gimmicks would still work. Back in the east he said to Herndon:

"I think we can buy the old Empire Air Circus equipment pretty cheap. Empire has gone broke, along with us and about two hundred other aviation firms. How'd you like to go barnstorming?"

"I think it would be swell," Herndon replied.

Mrs. Alice Boardman, Herndon's mother, had often said to

This is the trip entered in DM Reg for 9194