



A Curtiss OX-5 powered this Travel Air 2000. Note overhanging counter-balanced ailerons

YESTERDAY'S WINGS:

The Travel Air Biplanes

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The Travel Air biplane, built in Wichita, Kans., was one of several that entered the general aviation market in 1925, when World War I surplus types were beginning to wear out and the performance advantages of new design were finally able to hold their own against the cheap surplus prices of the older ships.

The ruggedness of the new model is evident today in that there are over 100 Travel Airs still in operation—more than any other model of the 1925-1930 period.

The Travel Air took a great step ahead of the wartime Jennies with the use of steel tubing for the fuselage and tail. It had the advantage of permitting two passengers to sit side-by-side in the front cockpit, but most significant was the provision made for powerplant interchangeability. The customer could choose his engine to fit his power requirement or his pocket-book, from the cheap surplus Curtiss OX-5 to the 200 h.p. Wright J-4 radial on the early models or the 330 h.p. Wright J-6-9 on the 1929 model.

The engine determined the model designation of the airplane, since practically all differences were ahead of the firewall. OX-5 models were called 2000 after being redesignated from Model B; those with Wright-Hispanos, or "Hissos," were 3000's and those with the Wright J-4 or 5 were 4000's.

After Models 8000 and 9000 with the Fairchild Camenz and the Siemens-Halske radials appeared, all of the biplanes with "modern" radial engines were lumped into the 4000 category with a prefix to designate the powerplant: A-4000 for Axelson, C-4000 for Curtiss Challenger, E-4000 for Wright J-6-5, etc. The 2000 and 3000 desig-

nations were retained for models with wartime and early postwar powerplants.

This designation by the engine does not carry into the present day, however. A 2000 and 4000, each fitted with an identical modern engine, are still 2000 and 4000 in the eyes of the FAA.

In its original form, the Travel Air greatly resembled the famous German Fokker D-V11 fighter of World War I in general proportions and especially in its use of "Elephant Ear" overhanging ailerons. In 1928, a revised wing, with

rounded tips and Frise ailerons, could be had as alternate equipment. Later, a further wing revision resulted in the shorter-span "Speedwing." The marked resemblance to the Fokker brought about a brisk demand for Travel Airs at a time when they were beginning to fade from the general airport scene, putting them to work as German fighters in the popular air-war movies of the middle 1930's, where they picked up the nickname of "Wichita Fokker."

While the venerable biplanes were replaced as first-line airmail, business, and school equipment by the later and more economical models of the 1930's, they remained almost supreme in the agricultural field where they served as dusters. It is a high compliment to the fundamental soundness of this 1925 design that it is still able to do full-time work in direct competition with later models with little major revision other than installation of a dust hopper and a World War II surplus engine.

In 1929, the Travel Air firm became part of the great Curtiss-Wright organization and both the earlier and late products of the Wichita factory have confused the public ever since by being listed sometimes as Travel Air and sometimes as Curtiss-Wright in various official and unofficial publications. While the classic 2000's and early 4000's are officially Curtiss in FAA records today, they will never be anything but Travel Airs to those associated with them or to the devoted aero-enthusiasts and students of aviation history.

Specifications	2000	E-4000
Powerplant	Curtiss OX-5, 90 h.p.	Wright J-6-5, 165 h.p.
Span	34 ft. 8 in.	33 ft. (Frise ailerons)
Length	24 ft. 2 in.	23 ft. 2½ in.
Wing area	297 sq. ft.	289 sq. ft.
Gross weight	2,180 lbs.	2,700 lbs.
High speed	96.5 m.p.h.	122 m.p.h.
Price	\$2,950 (1928)	\$5,850 (1930)

The prefix "E" in this E-4000 Travel Air designates the Wright J-6-5 radial engine

