

The world's record for continuous airline service with a single model belongs to an airplane that is an American classic — the Ford Tri-motor, affectionately known as "The Tin Goose." Its airline service started in 1926 with a small-scale operation between Detroit and Cleveland while today, 34 years later, a scheduled "milk run" with Fords still brings the mail and papers and takes the kids to school on the mainland from the Lake Erie islands near Put-In Bay, O.

The origin of the Ford Tri-motor was unique. Bill Stout, president of the Stout Metal Airplane Company, had produced a single-engine eight-passenger transport called the *Air Pullman* in 1924. The structure was all metal, with tubular aluminum framework and distinctively corrugated sheet aluminum for covering. This caught the fancy of Henry Ford of "tin Lizzie" fame, who absorbed the Stout Company and made it a division of the Ford Motor Company. In 1925, Ford sponsored the 1,900-mile Ford Reliability Tour with the intention of proving to a skeptical public that the airplane was a dependable medium of transportation. While the tour had no over-all winner as such, the outstanding airplane was the first Fokker tri-motor, which, in the interest of reliability, had been converted from a 400 h.p. single-engine design to a tri-motor with three 200 h.p. Wright "Whirlwind" air-cooled radial engines. Since the Ford *Air Pullman* was of the same size and general configuration as the Fokker, it was a relatively simple matter to convert a single-engine *Pullman* airframe to a tri-motor as Fokker had done. The prototype was destroyed in a hangar fire shortly after testing began, but a second improved model was quickly designed and built following the *Pullman* layout, open pilot's cockpit and all. Later production models were considerably larger to fully exploit the economic potential of the design, streamlining was improved, and the pilot and copilot were moved "inside."

The Fords and Fokkers were the backbone of the U.S. airlines for the next five years but the Fords, because of their all-metal construction and durability, outlasted the Fokkers by several years and surrendered their position on the trunk lines only under the economic pressure of completely new designs like the Boeing 247 and the Douglas DC-2. Tri-motor production ended in 1932 after 199 had been built for the Army, Navy, and the airlines.

Ordinarily, most airplanes of that vintage surviving today would be in the hands of the antique airplane fans, but a Tri-motor is too much airplane for one man to maintain as a hobby. The fact that there are nearly a dozen of these noisy antiques flying in the world today is due to a serious gap in the ranks of available "new production" airplanes. No one has yet come up with anything that can do certain jobs for which the old Ford is still admirably suited. In addition to the Lake Erie island-hopping, the Fords are used for smoke jumping, forest spraying, and general

heavy-duty mountain operations in the Northwest. Airspeed is not important on these short hauls, where in some cases the only competing surface transportation is a pack mule. So suitable is the Ford to this specialized work that a new company, Hayden Aviation, has been formed to modernize the design slightly and put it back into production — a 115 m.p.h. throwback in the age of the 600 m.p.h. jet transport.

In spite of occasional crashes, the Ford population of the country has remained remarkably stable over the last 10 years. When one is damaged beyond repair, the owners seem to be able to find a replacement in Central or South America, another stronghold of the venerable "Tin Goose." Used Fords could be had 10 or 12 years ago for around \$15,000, but prices are almost back up to that of the original now.

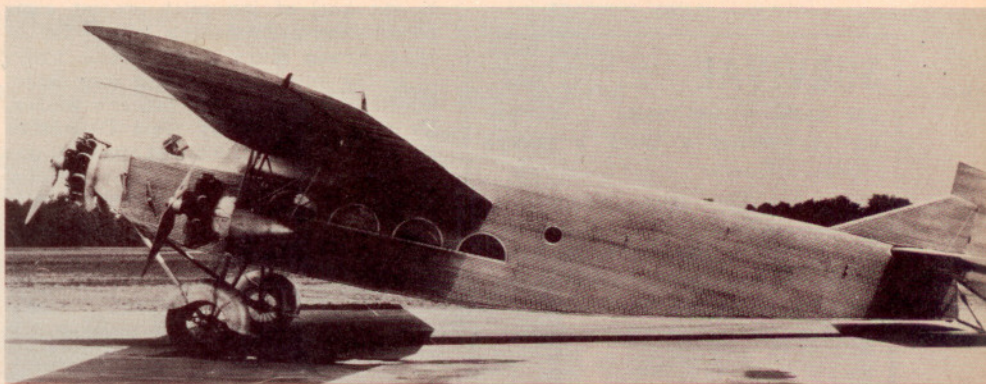
An indication of the Tri-motor's status today is the fact that the U. S. Air Force Museum would like to get one but none of the owners are willing to retire one to make it available. With only 34 years of service behind them, those few Fords will do a lot of flying 'round the mountain before they are ready to retire to a museum.

Specifications	4-AT-B	5-AT-D
Span	74 ft.	77 ft. 10 in.
Length	49 ft. 10 in.	50 ft. 3 in.
Empty Weight	6,000 lbs.	7,840 lbs.
Gross Weight	10,000 lbs.	13,500 lbs.
High Speed	128 m.p.h.	150 m.p.h.
Engine	220 h.p. Wright Whirlwind J-5	450 h.p. P & W Wasp C
Passengers	10	14
Price	\$42,000	\$55,000

## YESTERDAY'S WINGS:

# The Ford Tri-motors

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Ford's single-engine "Air Pullman" became the Tri-motor in mid-1920's. Photo shows one of the first production Tri-motors with open pilot's cockpit, half-moon windows and 200 h.p. Wright J-4 Whirlwind engines

Ford models 4-AT-E (foreground) and 5-AT-B. Conventional engines for 5-AT series were Pratt & Whitney's, but this model mounts Wright engines like those on the 4-AT-E

