

YESTERDAY'S WINGS

THE KITTY HAWK

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■ ■ Although "Kitty Hawk" is one of the most famous names in aviation, it has been applied only twice to airplanes. The best known of these, of course, was one of the many variants of the Curtiss P-40 fighter, of World War II. That aircraft used the name as a single word—"Kittyhawk"—and was the last of a long line of Curtiss "Hawks" that originated in 1925.

The other "Kitty Hawk" (two words) was a three-seat general aviation biplane introduced in 1928. Since this plane was under two different firm names and three model numbers, it is best remembered by its popular name.

The first version of the Kitty Hawk carried the model number B-2 and was produced by the Bourdon Aircraft Corp.,

of Hills Grove, R.I. The "B" stood for Allen P. Bourdon, president of the tiny firm, but the designer was John E. Simmons.

The airplane itself, which drew heavily on design details of the wooden Kinner Airster and the Crown B-3, was an interesting example of the "transition" biplane designs of the 1928-29 period. It stayed close to the layout of the big three-seater that had been the industry's standard since shortly after World War I, but incorporated a later

and thicker airfoil, the USA-27, along with improved landing gear and accessories. Since the B-2 was designed to take the new lightweight radial engines that were then replacing the heavy old WW-I surplus models, it was somewhat smaller and considerably lighter than the equivalent Travel Airs, Eaglerocks, and Wacos.

Construction matched the prevailing standards, with welded-steel tubing for fuselage and tail, and wood-frame wings. Two passengers sat side-by-side in the

SPECIFICATIONS AND PERFORMANCE

	Kitty Hawk B-4	Kitty Hawk B-8
Span	28 ft 0 in	28 ft 4 in
Length	23 ft 0 in	22 ft 11 in
Wing area	233 sq ft	233 sq ft
Powerplant	Kinner K-5, 90 hp	Kinner B-5, 125 hp
Empty weight	1,107 lb	1,178 lb
Gross weight	1,875 lb	1,950 lb
High speed	110 mph	112 mph
Cruising speed	92 mph	95 mph
Initial climb	660 fpm	730 fpm
Service ceiling	14,500 ft	14,500 ft
Range (on 35 gallons)	475 mi	425 mi
Price	\$4,800	\$4,250



A Bourdon Kitty Hawk B-2 with a 90-hp Kinner K-5 engine. The photo shows the high-pressure wheels also used on the earlier Siemens-powered B-2. Note the rubber-disc shock absorbers.



When the 125-hp B-8 was produced, Bourdon had merged with Viking, so the new model was a Viking Kitty Hawk. In 1936, a B-8 set two U.S. national women's seaplane records that remained unchallenged until the women's category was abolished in 1954.

THE KITTY HAWK continued

front cockpit while the pilot sat alone behind them. Access to the front pit was simplified by a cutout in the left top longeron that allowed installation of a small door. Shock absorbers for the tripod landing gear were rubber discs in compression, and the tailskid was the leaf-spring type. A tailwheel was a later addition.

The powerplant of the B-2 was an odd mix of imports. The first and third B-2s used the 97-hp Ryan-Siemens, which was the German Siemens-Halske SH-14, imported and distributed by T. Claude Ryan. The last four of the seven B-2s built used the 105-hp Yankee-Siemens, an improved version of the same engine, imported by a different firm. The short-lived (10 hours) second B-2 used an experimental Hallett engine.

The B-2 was originally issued Memo Approval No. 2-56 in April 1929. This

meant that the airplane wasn't up to full Approved Type Certificate (ATC) standards but could still be used commercially. After a little detail refinement and standardization on Yankee-Siemens engines, the B-2 received ATC No. 134 in November 1929.

Because of the limited availability of the German engine—plus other problems with it—the Kitty Hawk was fitted with a domestic product, the 90-hp Kinner K-5. This resulted in the B-4 model, which received ATC No. 166 in June 1929. Some 17 B-4s were built before the final B-8 model was produced. The fact that the B-4 was certificated six months ahead of the B-2 indicates that ATC No. 134 was pending for a long time prior to issuance.

Needless to say, the little Bourdon firm was hit hard by the depression, but Allen Bourdon did not give up. His firm merged with the Viking Flying Boat Co., of New Haven, Conn., and production of the improved B-8 Kitty Hawk was undertaken in the Viking plant on Causeway Island.

The B-8 received ATC No. 392 in January 1931 and was marketed as a Viking rather than a Bourdon. It incorporated many improvements in equipment and crew comfort, then went to a more powerful engine—the 125-hp Kinner B-5—to recover the performance lost because of weight increase. Only five or six B-8s were built before the merged firms gave up airplane manufacturing in 1933.

The fact that a B-8 Kitty Hawk set two national records that stood for 18 years does not indicate that it was a really superior airplane—far from it. Actually, it is a sad commentary on the lack of competition in the lesser-weight categories.

In December 1936, three years after the Kitty Hawk went out of production, Miss Crystal Mowry set two U.S. women's records for Class C-2 seaplanes (empty weight under 1,499 pounds) in a B-8 Kitty Hawk at Miami, Fla. The first record, set on December 9 with Miss Edith McCann as passenger, was for speed over a distance of 100 kilometers (62 miles), at a blazing 79.138 mph. The second, set on December 12 with Miss Alice Borden as passenger, was for an altitude of 1,850 meters, or 6,069 feet. Both these records stood until 1954, when the categories were reshuffled and the feminine category was abolished.

Since the records still stood at the time the category was done away with, it can be truthfully said that the otherwise undistinguished Kitty Hawk retired as an undisputed champion. □