

# 10 reasons you'll keep the Waco

It's almost time to award the AOPA sweepstakes biplane

BY ALTON K. MARSH

**E**arlier this year AOPA members were asked a simple question that drew a strong response: If you win the AOPA Centennial of Flight Sweepstakes Waco UPF-7 early next year, will you keep it? It's an honest question, since most members are not tailwheel pilots, and a timely one. After all, if our 1940 trainer shows up at your airport in February (it depends on the weather), chances are the AOPA prize patrol is hunting you down. Here are 10 reasons why we think once you fly our beautifully restored aerobatic biplane, you'll keep it.

## **10.** It looks good.

Isn't that the best reason for owning any airplane? There are those that look good and then there are airplanes that we can afford. This one is both—it's free except for the taxes (more about that later), and is restored to show plane quality by Rare Aircraft, of Owatonna, Minnesota. No Waco UPF-7 ever emerged from the factory looking as good as this one. At least that's what the AOPA members who've seen it say. And we agree.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER

## 9. It's a movie star.

OK, this is a little bit of a stretch, but stay with me here. An airplane *similar* to the one AOPA is giving away was featured in the 1939 movie *20,000 Men a Year* about the Civilian Pilot Training program, the same program in which our sweepstakes airplane played a role from 1940 through 1942. The government owned the trainers, but civilians taught other civilians to fly in them. Never mind that the Civilian Pilot Training program didn't actually train 20,000 men in a single year and actually included 10 percent women until females were banned from the program in 1941. The movie's plot was basically student gets lost in Grand Canyon; student found. Not a lot to work with. Movie stunt pilot Paul Mantz put the biplane through its paces, touching down just short of a car and then safely ballooning over it to land on the other side. Maybe *star* isn't the right word; movie stars are made by popular movies and this one wasn't. In fact, it was voted worst movie of 1939, but that was a tough year. The Academy Award went to *Gone With the*

**Looking better than new, the AOPA sweepstakes Waco would charm its 1940s owners. The photo at right was taken two months after the Waco was built in 1940—our Waco flies over the Pennsylvania countryside.**

Island, New York, to train future military pilots and had the words "U.S. Gov't Aircraft" stenciled on its sides, further proof of its historical role. Most students went on to become military pilots and later airline pilots.

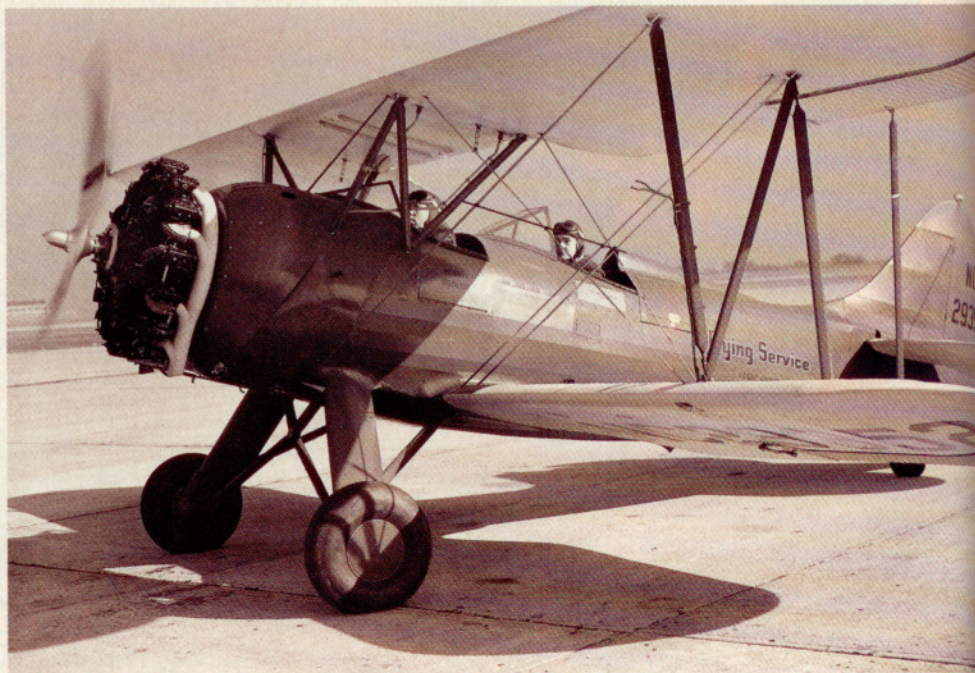
In the early 1940s, AOPA's Waco was kicked off Floyd Bennett field when the military took it over. Unknown to New Yorkers, the airport became a base for submarine-hunting aircraft. Our sweepstakes aircraft then literally landed at Roosevelt Field also on Long Island, where the Safair (*safe air*) Flying School operated it. The aircraft was later transferred to a Safair branch at Sunbury, Pennsylvania, but remained in the Civilian Pilot Training program.

pellier tip broke off in flight, resulting in a forced landing. The airplane was removed, stripped down to its steel-tube fuselage, and new wings were built for its current incarnation—the fourth tree.

The UPF-7 model marked the end of the biplane era—in fact, it was produced years after the era had passed. It is fitting that AOPA used it to mark the passage of another milestone, 100 years since the Wright brothers' first powered flight.

## 7. It's the newest 1940 airplane since 1940.

There was nothing to show but that steel-tube cage when AOPA's restoration began. Now, it's as close to an all-new 1940 aircraft as one can get: That includes all the



## Now it's as close to an all-new 1940 aircraft as one can get.

*Wind* and the losers included *The Wizard of Oz*, for Pete's sake. So *worst* is a relative term.

## 8. It's historical.

James J. MacVean, AOPA 370496, tells us that not only did he fly our airplane in the 1940s, but also he trained in it as part of the Civilian Pilot Training program, thus verifying that our airplane once played a key role in preparing the United States for World War II. All 600 of the UPF-7s produced went into the program.

Ours went straight from the factory to Floyd Bennett Memorial Field on Long

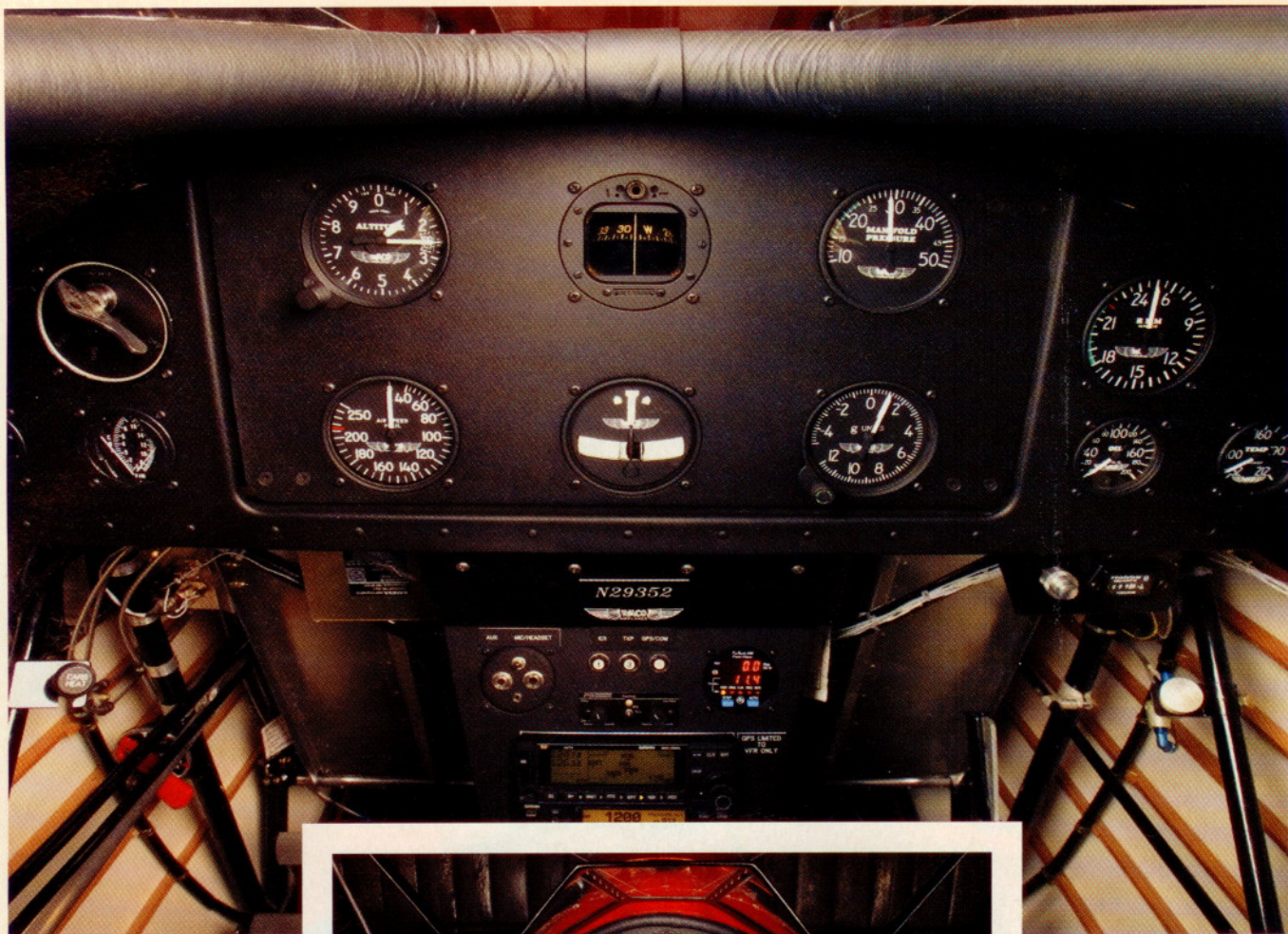
By best count it has taken four strong Sitka, Alaska, spruce trees to keep our Waco flying. One provided the lumber when the airplane was first built. (While the fuselage has a steel-tube frame, the wings are made of wood as are stringers placed on the side of the aircraft fuselage to give it the proper shape.) A newspaper photo shows our aircraft heavily damaged by a ground loop somewhere on Long Island, and repairs must have cost a second spruce its life. There was a complete restoration during the years after military service: tree three. Then the airplane had a second mishap over the forests of Pennsylvania when a pro-

wood, the epoxy, the hardware, and every bolt and nut. Only the original metal fittings for the wing and the fuselage cage remain. The tail has new surfaces. The electrical system and wiring are fresh and meet modern standards. Aircraft instruments are either new or overhauled. A supplemental type certificate allows the use of a modern tire-and-tube tailwheel. Cleveland brakes replace the original, less reliable ones. The paint is the PPG Industries Delta polyurethane process.

## 6. It's AOPA's airplane.

How many AOPA biplanes are out there? Just one, and everybody in AOPA knows,

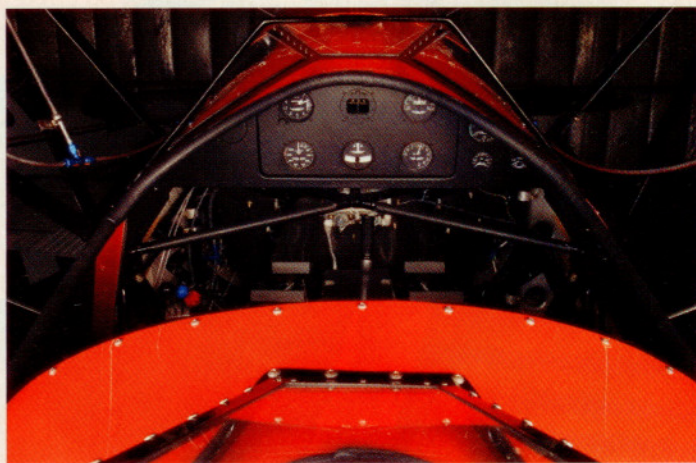




if not your name, your airplane. So it's a prestige factor to win it. Your airplane is going to be a hit wherever it lands even without the AOPA connection, but that connection is worth an additional "ooh" and "ah" from at least 400,000 people who wish they were the lucky ones.

### 5. It's well equipped.

Just because the airplane was built in 1940 doesn't mean you have to navigate like it's 1940. That's why Garmin donated a VFR Garmin 250XL GPS/com. No one likes deafening noise, so the aircraft comes with a PS Engineering PM 1200 intercom and Sennheiser HMEC 300 active noise reduction headsets to protect your little ears. Fuel is limited, thanks to the Jacobs' thirst, which can reach 22 gph at high power settings, so a J.P. Instruments FS450 was donated to keep tabs on the fuel supply. You need to look the part of the dashing aviator, and that is achieved with Perrone leather helmets and Butler Parachute Systems



The cockpit is a blend of the old and the very new. The top photo shows original restored instruments, supplemented with blinking lights of computerized displays.

parachutes. Airovation in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, a firm that makes luxury jet interiors, made the upholstery. (A list of contributors to the AOPA biplane project is available on AOPA Online and in the May issue of *Pilot*.)

### 4. It's souped up.

Normally a 220-horsepower Continental motor powers a Waco UPF-7, but Roy Redman of Rare Aircraft suggested ours be equipped with a 275-hp Jacobs

R755-B2 engine. It was once a military engine in the 1940s and had been overhauled during its service. Radial Engines near Oklahoma City overhauled it again, but painted it in spiffy black to wow the crowds. Some refer to all Jacobs engines as *Shaky Jakes*, but having ridden in the aircraft I can testify there is nothing

shaky about it. The ride is smooth, although the throttle knob vibrates so rapidly during flight that it becomes a blur. The engine accelerates with a satisfying Harley-Davidson sound that lets airport observers know something special is coming by.

### 3. It's free, if not tax-free.

Do you prefer to worry about the taxes you'll pay? Some of our members have e-mailed those negative vibes to us, but here is some positive energy in return: If you can raise the approximately \$70,000 in taxes (hop rides?) the airplane is yours for its operating costs,

## The Waco Community

The Waco community, like any family of 1,000 people or so, has an interesting history—one that has seen disagreements. In the beginning there was the National Waco Club, formed in 1958, that members say is the oldest type club in the country.

During the National Waco Club's reign other Waco clubs came and went. Then in the early 1990s many of its members began to chafe from the leadership style of its management and decided to secede from the group, forming the American Waco Club that today is headed by Phil Coulson.

Also in the 1990s a Western Waco Association was formed for pilots living west of the Rocky Mountains and unable to attend the fly-ins of the American Waco Club in Creve Coeur, Missouri, (near St. Louis) and that of the National Waco Club in Mount Vernon, Ohio. The informal group has 75 members and is based in California.

There was an attempt about six years ago to form an alliance between the National Waco Club, headed by Andy Heins and Doug Parsons, and the American Waco Club. As Heins describes it bluntly, there was a meeting to bring the two clubs together and "they did not come together." Each of the clubs claims more than 400 members, although many of those may be dual memberships. If that implies that all is well, that is universally true only at the leadership level. The top officials from both clubs attend one another's social functions and fly-ins, but at the member level, Heins says, there can still be disagreements between the two groups.

There is more to the Waco community than just the type groups. Despite the contributions of clubs and individual Waco owners to the preservation of Waco history, no group does it better than the Waco Historical Society in Troy, Ohio, where the original Waco factory buildings still stand. Most are used for nonaviation businesses, but one of the largest buildings houses an aircraft brake company. The group maintains a Web site ([www.wacoairmuseum.org](http://www.wacoairmuseum.org)), operates a museum in downtown Troy, and owns the historic Waco Field and museum where aircraft land on a 2,200-foot grass runway (1,800 feet usable).

Completing the Waco community are two companies, one based in Minnesota doing restorations including AOPA's sweepstakes Waco UPF-7, and another building new Super Waco YMF aircraft based on the original type certificate but with numerous modern upgrades. Rare Aircraft in Owatonna, Minnesota, has gained its reputation not only for its FBO and maintenance facility but also for its show-quality rebuilds and its interesting hangar full of restored Waco models. It makes a good gas stop for those in the area.

No less interesting is the Waco Classic Aircraft Corporation at Battle Creek, Michigan. Waco Classic Aircraft is collocated with Centennial Aircraft Service, a full-service FBO under the same ownership as the airplane factory. Wander around the office for a minute and you'll come upon a picture window into the factory, allowing you to watch restoration of older models and construction of new ones. It's a little like a child wandering in a chocolate factory. One of the company's most famous historic restorations involved a Waco ARE model used by the *New York Daily News* to take news photos. After an appearance at EAA Sun 'n Fun this year, the Waco ARE was flown to New York where it was reunited with the pilot who flew it for the paper decades ago. Current work includes the restoration of three Spartan Executive aircraft. The nearby hangar houses beautiful Super Wacos and other classic aircraft.

—AKM



The JPI FS450 fuel flow indicator (above) answers critical fuel questions about the Waco, which can burn from 16 to 22 gallons per hour in cruise depending on power settings.

and don't forget that you have a year before the taxes come due. But if you can't, then what's the worst that can happen? You experience the romance of old-time flying for a year, sell it, pay off the taxes, and pocket as much as \$100,000. With that you buy a Piper Cub and you're back in business with extra cash for the first year of hangar fees and operating costs. No, you're not facing poverty and hardship if you win a free airplane.

## 2. It's speedy, comparatively.

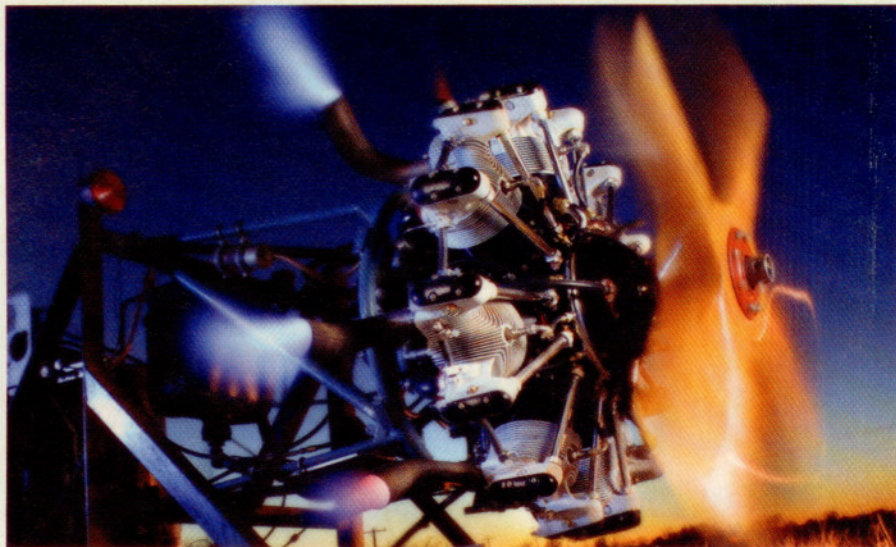
Those who have flown the original 220-hp Waco UPF-7 say they can achieve 120 mph only in a descent—it gets 140 mph in a power dive—but our Waco can do 135 mph in level flight, thank you. That's an acceptable speed for most GA pilots, but endurance is another matter: It carries 50 gallons of gas but burns 16 gph at its cruise-power setting. That means you'll have to land every two-and-a-half hours, giving the aircraft a bladder-friendly if not timesaving range. It was meant to go on short training hops, not set cross-country records. Compared to other biplanes of the

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era it's fast, and compared to auto travel on the roads of the 1940s, it's a screamer.

### **1. You're going to want it.**

Based on surveys taken earlier, there is a good chance you'll keep it, even if you're not a tail-wheel pilot. Even if you are one of those who said they would sell it. Why? When we asked members who had never seen it, two-thirds said they would sell it for sure, or "probably" sell it. But 100 percent of those who saw it in the flesh—er, Ceconite—said they would do whatever's necessary to keep it. Now here's the catch. Those who won a



**How can you resist the thrill of a rumbling radial engine, this one an upgrade to a Jacobs 275 hp that results in spectacular takeoffs? Normally a UPF-7 has a 220-hp engine.**

Yes, we'll follow up and let you know what happens when the winner is announced.

**ACPA**

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ride in a similar Super Waco YMF during our monthly drawings were fist-pounding fanatical about their need for our UPF-7. In other words, the closer you get, the more you want it. Since you'll both see it and ride in it on award day, you won't have a chance.

There's no way you won't keep it.