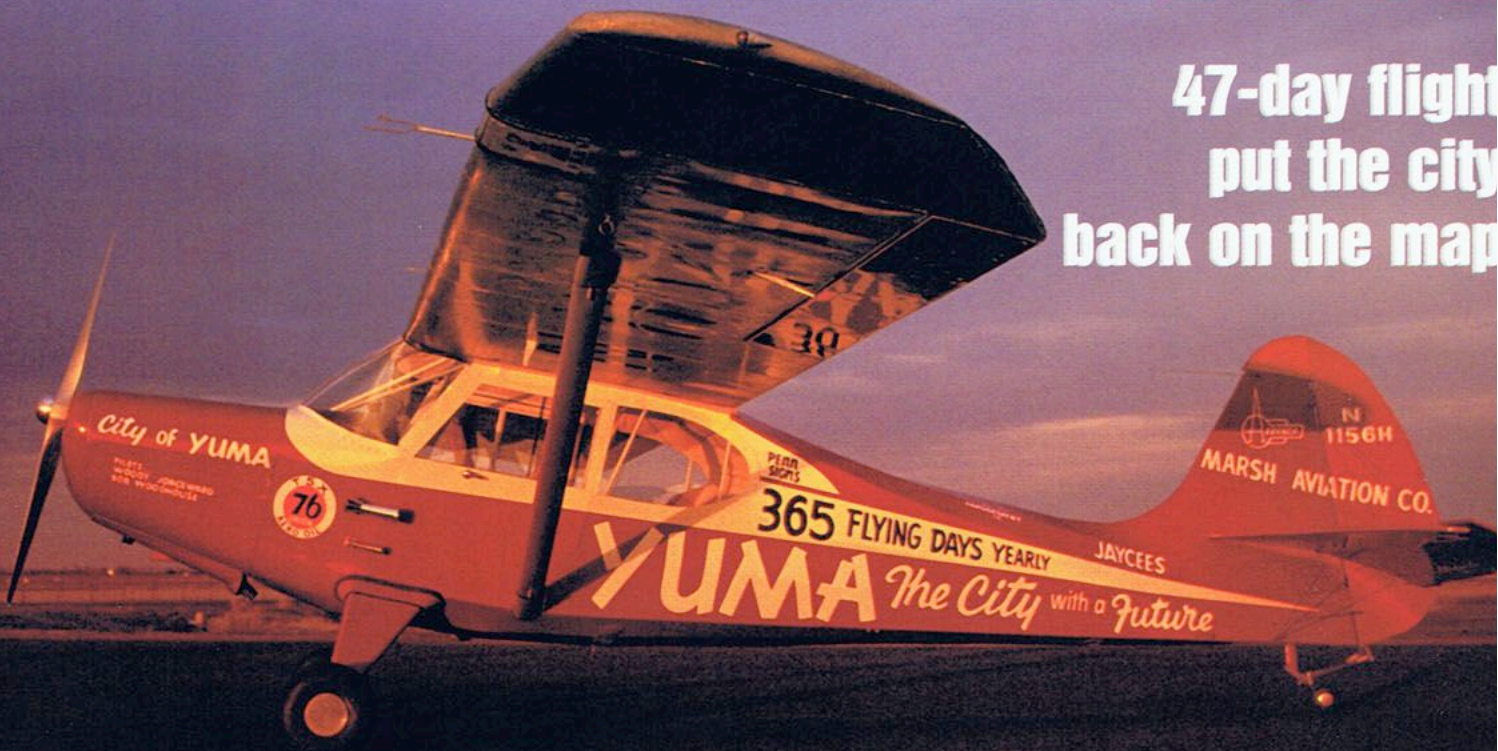


Arizona FLYWAYS

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YUMA'S PR RAINBOW

47-day flight
put the city
back on the map



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COVER



DAYS **LATER**

**A WORLD RECORD FLIGHT
AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE**

STORY

By JIM GILLASPIE

“Ray, you get the airplane, and Griff and I will fly it.”

This simple statement, made in late January 1949, led to perhaps the most successful aviation promotion ever seen in Arizona. Before it was over, 600 people had become involved, and their accomplishments changed the city of Yuma forever.

Like a lot of cities with military installations during World War II, Yuma was a boomtown. After the war was over, however, facilities such as the Army Airfield at Yuma and the Arizona and California Maneuver Area Camps closed, causing a significant drain on the local economy.

By early 1949, signs began to appear that the Army's Yuma Test Branch also would close, which would leave Yuma without any military presence. The city's chamber of commerce and civic organizations were working overtime to change the situation, but no solution was in sight.

It was by luck that four Yuma businessmen decided to ride together to a chamber meeting in Parker, Ariz. On the way, Ray Smucker, Woody Jongeward, Frosty Braden and Horace “Griff” Griffen talked about two pilots who were about to set an endurance record for keeping an aircraft in continual flight. Smucker, who was manager of the local radio station, commented about how much publicity the flight was getting and concluded that a local try at such a record would be a marvelous way to call attention to Yuma's great

AN OLD BUICK CONVERTIBLE (left) served as the refueler during the “City of Yuma’s” 47 days in the air. Modified cream cans of gas were passed from the car to the off-duty pilot.

flying weather and entice the
(Continued pg. 30)

THEY MADE IT HAPPEN: Above are members of the ‘49 Endurance Committee shown in early September as the “City of Yuma” plane stood ready to fly 47 years after its then-record setting flight in 1949. Kneeling in front l-r: Ron Spencer, Jim Siemens and Jim Gillaspie; middle row l-r: Perry Pensky, John Youkey, Jerry McGuire, Jim Allen and Ernest Munoz; standing l-r: Roy Contreras and Judy Spencer. SEE ‘CITY OF YUMA’ READY TO FLY AGAIN on pg. 13.



DAY LATE

Photos provided
by the 49 Enduran



military to come back.

Jongeward later challenged Smucker to find an airplane that he and Griff could fly in an attempt to beat the endurance record for continual flight. Three days later, Smucker called and said, "I've got the airplane (an Aeronca Sedan, AC-15, N1156H). "Let's get to work."

Word spread quickly, and more and more people got involved. They brainstormed ideas about how to carry out the many tasks required to keep an airplane flying for 1,010 hours to beat the then-record of 1,008 hours set by *The Sunkist Lady* and piloted by Dick Reidel and Bill Barris.

George Murdock volunteered his 1948 Buick convertible to refuel the airplane on the run. Call sign for the Buick was 1010.

Major sponsors were lined up by the Yuma Jaycees to prime the event. AA Amusement Co. provided the plane, Union 76 agreed to provide aircraft fuel and oil, Tate and Hobart Shell Oil Distributors provided gas and oil for the refueling car, Penn Sign Company painted the lettering on the airplane and Griffen Buick provided refueling personnel and a backup GMC vehicle.

The aircraft was fitted with two fuselage tanks from a Fairchild PT-23 for a total capacity of more than 80 gallons.

Plumbing was installed to transfer fuel from the fuselage tanks to the wing tanks, and the men devised a method to clean the spark plugs, using the manifold



"BUICK 1010": was fitted with a platform to serve as a secure working place for the refueling crew to hand up two-and-a-half-gallons of gas in modified cream cans to the off-duty pilot.

pressure line and water.

On April 21, 1949, *City of Yuma* took off on her first attempt, but was forced to land approximately 74 hours later because the engine was running too lean. Problems were resolved, and the second attempt was made May 6. Jongeward and Bob Woodhouse, Griff's parts manager, again were forced to land, this time with a hole in a piston and major oil loss. The second flight was 155 hours.

The record-breaking flight began August 24, 1949, and most of it was around Yuma. Trips were flown to Phoenix, Prescott and Los Alamitos Naval Air Station in California. The Los Alamitos flight was at the Navy's request, and the pilots were featured as special airborne guests at an air show.

At 7:19 p.m. October 5, 1949, the *City of Yuma* made its 1,010-hour goal and the record.

City of Yuma Endurance Flight made its 1,010-hour goal and the record.

Media representatives wanted a 3:18 p.m. landing time the next day to allow time for townspeople to gather.

Woodhouse, the duty pilot for the landing, asked Jongeward to call out their height above ground over the runway. He was concerned that 47 straight days in the airplane might affect his ability to land gracefully in front of the estimated crowd of 15,000 people, 6,000 more than Yuma's population at the time.

Word had spread quickly, and people came to witness the landing from Arizona and southern California. Ray Smucker was right: The record flight received worldwide publicity, schools let out early and employers let their personnel leave work to welcome *City of Yuma* home. The Navy sent a flight of F6F Hellcats to fly formation with the plane during its approach. Howard Pyle, soon to be governor of Arizona, handled "play-by-play" on KTAR Radio, which fed the broadcast to national news organizations.

Jongeward called out height above ground. When he thought it was touchdown time, he told Woodhouse to close the throttle. They were about three feet off the ground on throttle-back. They bounced.

Touchdown brought a new world record, 1,124 hours of continuous flight. The plane had landed without a right magnet.

The engine was disassembled and found to be in excellent condition.



FEDEX: During its 47-day adventure, City of Yuma dropped off a package at Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix (above). Photo at right shows the plane's fuel tank system. A hat hangs on the fuel tank, and a hand pump is to the left and below. The plane's door also was modified to allow for fueling.



Jongeward and Woodhouse later were guests on the TV show *What's My Line*. Their appearance prompted the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas, Nev. to sponsor an airplane, which later broke City of Yuma's endurance record. According to *Koop's*

Aviation Records, the current record is held by Robert Timm and John Cook in a Cessna 172: 64 days, 22 hours, a flight that left from McCarren Airfield in Las Vegas.

The attention given Yuma during the flight paid dividends: The city was named

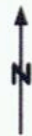
in 1950 as one of 10 potential sites for the U.S. Air Force Academy. In 1951, the Yuma Test Branch was reactivated and renamed Yuma Test Station, and the Army Airfield was reactivated as a training base.



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