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# AERONCA OF

The venture to Oshkosh '86 included a particular mission for my wife, Pam, and me. Our little girl was quickly outgrowing the somewhat limited space beside Pam in the back seat of our 7FC Champ. Our mission was to cruise the rows of airplanes and hopefully figure out what kind of four-seater might suit our needs. The selection process really ended rather quickly, but I didn't realize it at the time.

On our first trip out on the Classic line, we stumbled upon a beautiful blue and straw colored Aeronca Sedan, owned by NAA President Jim Thompson. Well, it didn't take much deliberation to agree that this was exactly what we needed. Now, I've been around little airplanes all my life, but I knew next to nothing about Aeronca Sedans. I did know that they were rather rare and I was sure that even a basket case Sedan would far exceed our finances. So, it was back to looking over the Stinsons, Pacers, 170s, etc. In our wandering, we ran across a few other Sedans and I found myself scrutinizing each one. In meeting some Sedan owners, I learned that a few were for sale and to my surprise, a couple of these were down toward our price range.

One day late in the week we found ourselves drawn back to that blue and straw Sedan



and found Jim Thompson and friends hiding in the shade of its huge wing. After interrogating Jim with all the typical inane questions, I reluctantly asked if my wife and I might sit in his Sedan. Jim agreed and we very, very carefully crawled inside. That did it! We were going to have one of these!

The day after we hit home

from Oshkosh '86, a couple of aviators in a military painted Champ stopped in to have a look at our Champ. Later that evening, two military painted Champs took off together. Our ex-Champ and its new owner, Col. Bob Beckman, would take their place in the ranks of the Mighty Wrong Brothers Air Force!

Having some capital to work with, our Sedan quest now became serious. Undoubtedly, I kept AT&T in business during the next few weeks. I followed up on leads I had from Oshkosh. I hounded Dick Welsh for more leads, and, of course, went through that yellow trade paper a lot. After a month of intense shopping we chose a Canadian based Sedan. We had met the owner while roaming Wittman Field and later received some photos of it. The Sedan looked pretty sharp in the photos and the





# THE MONTH by Paul Workman



Canadian Exchange Rate helped a little, too. A busy work schedule prevented us from going north to inspect the airplane, so I did the unmentionable. A deposit was sent and the owner agreed to fly the Sedan from Ontario to Ohio. . . . all sight unseen! Fledgling flyers beware: buying an airplane, or anything else, without looking it over is very risky business. You'd better be prepared for lots of surprises. Fortunately, we were prepared—and eventually surprised!

At first inspection, our new Sedan looked a little better than we expected—no cream puff, but okay! A couple of low cylinders, some oil leaks, bad brakes, a few rivets missing. . . . all repairable in a few weeks. My dad, an A&P for 40 years, was rather skeptical of this plan. As usual, he was right! The further we looked

into the airframe and engine, the worse it got. The Canadian Government requires very detailed maintenance logs, but these were the most

erroneous logs I've seen yet. Many items shown in the technical logs, including A.D.s were never done. Several cylinder base nuts could be removed without tools, and on and on. The previous owner had produced receipts, and had paid big bucks for work that was done haphazardly, if at all. I'm convinced he would not have made the 600 mile trip to Ohio had he known he was flying a "forced-landing-to-be." Moral of the story — log books are only as good as the folks who scribble in 'em!

Obviously, this would be no quick fixer-upper. So, it's off with the wings, tail, engine, and every other removable item. The fuselage was over a year in renovation in our auto upholstery shop. Having been recovered three years earlier, the tubing and fabric were in fine shape. Only the cabin sides and left door needed fabric work. An elaborate IFR panel was removed and a fiberglass duplicate of the original panel was installed. The new panel was fabricated from original drawings supplied by John Houser at Aeronca. Every removable airframe and control part was removed, cleaned and

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# Just When You Thought You Had Seen It All...

In the spring of 1950 Aeronca created an experimental twin engine based on the 15AC and aimed at a market price of less than \$10,000. It was hastily assembled in an atmosphere of secrecy around the first prototype, NX39800. A continental C-85 was added above the normal C-145-2. It proved to be underpowered with excess drag and trim problems and the program was closed out in July.



## Aeronca of the Month *Continued from page 10*

painted. All sheet metal parts (cowls, door, covers) were made new, along with a fiberglass nosebowl and composite wingtips. The Sedan was completely rewired per original Aeronca schematics. We chose to install a slightly customized interior, trying to retain an "original" look. Many of today's auto upholstery materials are quite suitable in color and style for older airplanes. For our Sedan I chose materials from the '86 Mercury Sable.

The all metal wings were completely stripped, missing rivets replaced, and wingtips fitted. As mentioned earlier, the fabric was relatively new and in excellent condition. Some fabric parts were opened slightly to check for corrosion. All fabric areas were wet sanded through the color coat to the silver coat. Sealer was applied over trim color areas (especially red) to prevent "bleeding" through the new paint. The aircraft was painted overall with DuPont "Dulux" enamel in original colors and paint scheme.

The Continental C-145 engine was disassembled for inspection. The crankshaft, cam, etc., were found to be well within acceptable wear limits. The cylinders however, would have been considered worn

out 1,000 hours earlier. They sported such features as loose valve guides, valve seats 1/2" deep, and a broken piston. Scary isn't it? Obviously, the engine would receive a complete top overhaul. An oil cooler system (required equipment) was supplied by Chuck Geary in Wassilla, Alaska. New baffles were fabricated and the engine was painted grey with black cylinders as original.

In the spring of '88 our Sedan was looking "airplane-like" again, but the Aeronca Fly-In was fast approaching. Being determined to have our plane on the Middletown flightline, we kicked our project into overdrive... and overtime. All the final nuts, bolts, and connections (the last 80 percent of any project), were finished a week before Middletown '88. Being re-imported to the U.S. meant that our Sedan was to undergo a "conformity inspection" by F.A.A. personnel. This inspection took place two days before the Aeronca Fly-In. When Pam and I touched down at Hook Field, our Sedan had barely 2 hours on the rebuild. We were thrilled just to get there without incident, and thrilled even more when our plane received the "Best Post-War Sedan" award. I thank everyone who helped with parts, drawings, information,

advice, elbow grease and encouragement!

For anyone with previous experience, either flying or working on Aeroncas, the Sedan is pretty familiar territory. The fuselage and tail are derived straight from the Champ and Chief...but, lots bigger! The all metal wings and single lift struts were the main departure from typical Aeronca technology. This wing is quite simple and lightweight, but tough enough to be Aeronca.

Flying the Sedan is like flying a Champ and Chief at the same time. With its big wing, take-off and climb out are quite respectable (even when overloaded). Cruise is 100 mph, no more, no less, loaded or not. Only on landing does the Sedan differ from other Air Knockers. Its stiff bungee type landing gear makes it less goof absorbing than its oleo geared cousins. Its big wing and tail, along with slightly inadequate brakes make it a bit of a handful in stiff crosswinds, for me, anyway. In any case, we have found the Aeronca Sedan to be both a unique classic and a perfect family truckster. Just try loading four people, full fuel, and the entire contents of a full sized Pontiac wagon into a Stinson, Pacer, or a Cessna 170!