





the stately Aeronca sedan

IT'S NOT TOO WIDELY KNOWN, BUT
ONE LOOK AT THAT TAIL AND YOU
KNOW IT HAS TO BE AN AERONCA!

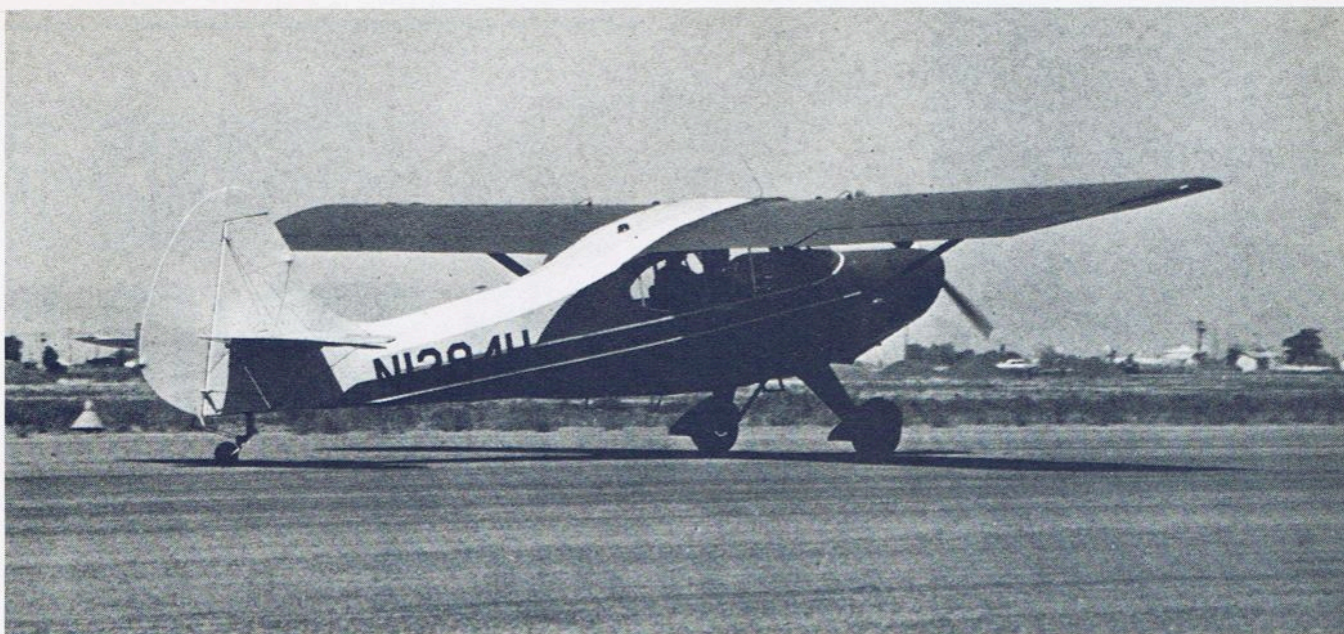
MOST PILOTS have become accustomed to thinking of the venerable Aeronca in terms of Chiefs, Champs and Chums, but lest you forget, one of the most distinctive of the Middletown, Ohio, products was the four-place Aeronca 15AC Sedan, last flying machine of Aeronca Manufacturing Corporation before they turned to military and space sub-contract work back in 1947-48.

We'd often heard pilot tales about the economy and simplicity of this four-place job, which originally sold for \$4,795 at the factory, and now and then we've spotted one sailing across the sky, like a fat, dumb and happy old gooney bird.

But not until recently have we had an opportunity to actually fly an Aeronca Sedan, and naturally we leaped at the chance, courtesy of our editor and publisher, who lined up a test flight for us at Bakersfield's Meadows Field, with a happy A&P mechanic and plane owner named Ken Massey.

So off we went from the smog-pit of Los Angeles Basin, cleared the Ridge Route north of the city, and dipped down into the bright sunshine of San Joaquin Valley, a crop-duster's paradise, which is the reason Massey located there — he has a full time job keeping the ag ships flying.

There she sat on the line — N1394 Hotel — all red and orange and pretty as a miniskirted chick at a hippy wedding. There was definite sex appeal, and more — a sense of solidarity



Fuselage pinches down aft of cabin, so headroom suffers in favor of lift and the sleek lines of a tapered fuselage.

Ken Massey opens single right-hand door which is entered from ahead of strut.

Snap-out rear seat arrangement allows Sedan owners to convert most of the cabin to a vast cargo-hauling space.



Viz from the Sedan is good, even in a turn, and structural braces make good handholds when entering the cockpit.



and reliability that belied my first frivolous reaction.

So, with no more ado about her background, we climbed aboard, occupying the right seat with Ken in the left and a buddy of his in back. From the outset it was easy to see that Aeronca achieved its goal in the Sedan as a price-tag product, built to meet a postwar demand for a low-priced four-placer stripped of frills and follies.

Scanning the cockpit layout, you start at the upper left and go to the upper right, where two plexiglass tubes serve as gas gauges, a foolproof system that can't trick you because, like with the old Champ system of a float cork and a bent wire smack ahead of you, you can tell at a glance what your fuel load is.

This is not to say Ken flies off without the safe method of removing the gas cap and checking inside visually; it's simply a peace-of-mind goodie to give you the answer in flight. Ken's rebuilt Sedan has a well-planned instrument layout with the flight instruments grouped at the left and engine gauges at the right. Novel is the fuel valve on the panel, left side — a simple on-off switch as both wing tanks (18 gallons each) feed together. There's no primer, but there is an accelerating pump in the carburetor — a couple of pushes on the throttle does the trick in cold weather.

There's more to tell about the cockpit and cabin arrangement, but for the moment, let's go fly!

Cleared for takeoff by Meadows Tower, we followed Ken through to check his style — it's his ship and I wanted to see how he does it. He does it well! With due respect for his C145 Continental he opened the throttle smoothly and fully, and there was no forward shove on the wheel to get the tail up — it simply flies off the ground from three-point position, a feat Ken attributes to the high-lift wing section.



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Climbout at 650 fpm indicating 80 mph at climb power (full) was smooth and steady, and so up we went to 2,000 feet msl, where we took over, trimmed out for straight and level, and checked performance in that mode and in steep turns. The airspeed meter read 110 mph IAS at 2450 rpms, and curiously enough, we got the same reading at 5000 feet.

I'm no aeronautical engineer, but I've flown enough airplanes to know that the Aeronca Sedan is stable, easy to handle, with good visibility and maneuverability, the things I like about an airplane.

In an approach to a stall from a climbing left turn, with reduced power, the horn started blowing at 60 mph and somewhere under that she shuddered to tell me she was through flying — almost. There was still more back travel on the elevator, so we put it all in, and got a clean break, with only a slight rolloff over the top, gentle enough to catch with opposite rudder, followed by easy aileron as we came back to the horizon.

The aileron sensitivity is no illusion — it's there when you want it, and in another stall, power off, we tried quickly feeding in right wheel to pick up a dropping left wing and got away with it nicely, though I do NOT recommend aileron use in stall recovery until after nose meets horizon, simply because that's the way I've always flown and don't intend to change, being old hat.

The point is that the Sedan combines good stability with control sensitivity, so that it is no wallowing hippo, but a responsive ship that feels good to fly. In steep turns left and right, with some extra engine power, she fell into the groove, and even while banked well over the visibility was unusual for a high-wing aircraft, due to the configuration of the windshield, which curves back into the wing overhead.

After an hour or so of playing around the clear skies of the San Joaquin Valley, it turned out in my book that V_x (best rate of climb) was 70 mph IAS, and V_y (best angle of climb) was around 75 mph IAS. Ken likes to set the speed meter at 90 mph IAS on a cross-country climbout because, he says, he gets better engine cooling, better ground speed and about the same fuel consumption as in a steeper climb. Optimum climb for airport flying, says Ken, works out to 80 mph IAS.

After doing some more three-point attitude power-off stalls, to find out how she'd behave on the ground, Ken let us take her into a little-used field at nearby Shafter, where we elected to use 80 mph IAS on base and final, with a touch of power as we settled through a low wind shear. Over the fence at 75 we began a flareout, expecting and finding sufficient

ground cushion, even with a high-wing craft, to guarantee an easy three-pointer. There was absolutely no sweat, even though a mild 10-knot crosswind was blowing from off the starboard beam, as us hot pilots say. Full back wheel held the steerable tailwheel solidly on the deck and braking down was easy.

Now that we felt more familiar with Ken's true love, there was time to examine her fine points in more detail. First, let me say that the Aeronca Sedan has a surprisingly roomy cockpit, with the left pilot seat adjustable both up-and-down and forward-and-backward with a single bell crank. The rear seat is quickly removeable by disconnecting two aluminum bars, so that the baggage compartment — actually just more room behind the rear seat — can be used to haul bears, coyotes, camping equipment or blondes, depending on your taste.

Aileron cables are out in the open, beside the back seat, as an economy measure, but they're tempting to pull on, thus scaring hell out of the pilot. The fuselage slopes sharply toward the tail overhead, giving added lift to the wing area but making for low headroom in the back seat for tall, lanky passengers, which we're not, so we didn't find it a problem.

Under the dash, we found toe brakes on the left side only (disc brakes on Goodyear wheels). Aeronca cut the production cost down on the Sedan by using as many Champion parts as they could interchangeably — to wit, the single right door, front seats and window. Brakes, panel, control wheels, glove compartment and ash trays come from the Chief.

Such economies have given the Sedan a reputation as an economy-class family flyabout, but there are more features of interest, such as the all-metal wing, the rest of the aircraft being fabric-covered tubing. Aeronca decided that the wing requires the least maintenance, so made it of tin. A single strut braces the wing, and you enter the cabin from in front of it, by means of a stirrup step. Twin landing lights outboard provide 400,000 candlepower, enough for almost any tule-fog landing.

There are no moveable trim tabs on the ailerons, but along the rear of both wingtips are metal strips you can hand-bend to jury-rig any wing-heaviness. In the cabin ceiling is a quite sensitive elevator trim, the subject of some argument in the old days, some pilots believing you could get into trouble by taking off tail heavy with the elevator trim rolled full back. I suppose you could, but you can also get into trouble taking off with your eyes shut.

Nevertheless, we like to fly by trim tab, and in climbs, level flight and power-on and power-off glides there is sufficient sensitivity to trim the Sedan up so it is a do-it-yourself airplane, designed to be one of the most safe and gentle of general aviation birds.

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Ken Massey, who started flying back in 1955, now holds a commercial ticket as well as an IA rating, and has logged some 500 hours since he first leaped off in a J-3. In 1969 he found the Aeronca Sedan lying in little bitty pieces up at Minter Field, an old military base, where it got smashed when the hangar roof caved in during a freak snowstorm. With a well-trained eye, Ken figured out how to rebuild it, the main damage being a broken right wing, and bought it at the right price.

Then, while he was busy putting on a new right aileron and wingtip, along came this Grumman Ag-Cat at a fast taxi clip and chewed off the tail.

"Some guys woulda threw up their hands," says Ken. "But I had some spare time, and rolled her back into the shop and put on a new tail."

He is being modest — Ken did many more things to make the Sedan perhaps one of the prettiest flying today, and there aren't too many — about 200 are reportedly active in the nation. After repainting the rebuilt wing and tail and partially recovered fuselage, Ken went inside and reupholstered, put in a new headliner, fixed up the panel and otherwise made her a mint job, all in original Champion red and creamy colors.

Ken's investment so far has been around \$3,000, plus a lot of hard work, but he now has a slick four-seater with more room and better performance than the comparable Stinson Station Wagon, a ship with an economy cruise of about 105 mph which is all Ken wants for San Joaquin Valley flying.

We thanked him and took off in our Luscombe 8E photo plane, shot some air-to-air shots, and headed back to Smogtown, thinking, boy, wouldn't it be fun to run down to Acapulco in the Sedan, two couples with plenty of fishin' gear, and . . . Well, I can dream, can't I?

SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum Gross Weight	2050 lbs.
Empty weight	1170 lbs.
Useful Load	880 lbs.
Baggage allowance	120 lbs.
Fuel Capacity	36 gals.
Wing loading (lbs. sq/ft.)	10.25
Power loading (lbs/hp.)	14.14
Wing span	37' 6"
Chord	66"
Wing area	200 sq/ft.
Height (Three point)	7' 0"
Height (Level)	10' 4"
Length	25' 3"
Tread	7' 0"
Engine Continental	C-145
Landing Gear	Fixed
Flaps	None

PERFORMANCE

Speed Maximum	120 mph
Cruise Speed (75% power)	105 mph
Range (with reserve)	430 miles
Rate of climb, sea level	650 fpm
Stall Speed	53 mph
Service ceiling	12,400'