

BACKGROUND

About the National Air Tours, 1925-1931



The Wright brothers showed that flight was *possible*. The National Air Tours demonstrated that flight was *practical*.

Introducing America to the Notion of Commercial Flight

The National Air Tours were conceived by a group of air-minded Detroit businessmen to demonstrate the safety and reliability of civil aviation. The Tours laid the foundation for our modern system of air transportation.

Prior to the Tours, the notion of safe and reliable air transportation was a foreign concept to most people. Many citizens thought flying was either a military function or for showmen such as wing walkers and barnstormers. In fact, few airports as we know them today even existed. In their place, airplanes would land on farm fields, river sandbars or other unimproved areas

The National Air Tours raised public visibility of the safety and reliability of civil aviation as aircraft safely made their way from city to city according to a set schedule. In addition, the Tours were configured to promote the development of aircraft design, manufacture and aviation infrastructure. It was considered an honor for the Tour to land in one's hometown. For some, it was the first time they had seen an airplane and for others, it marked the dedication of an airport or the improvement of an existing grass airstrip. In fact, Tulsa International Airport was built to the specifications of the 1928 National Air Tour. The 2003 Tour's arrival at Tulsa International will commemorate its 75th anniversary.

Efficiency Contest

The National Air Tour organizers held efficiency contests to encourage aviation businesses to improve aircraft designs, develop navigational aids and even use brakes. One such contest, known as the "stick" and "unstick" trials, promoted short take-off and landing distances for the short runways of the era. Those airplanes with brakes performed better in the trials. As a result, more Tour aircraft installed brakes in subsequent years. Other factors that determined an airplane's efficiency include the airplane's load carrying capability in relation to the engine's horsepower and speed.

Modeled After Automobile Tours

The National Air Tours were modeled after the famous "Glidden Automobile Tours" of the early 1900s which popularized the notion of automobile transportation.

From 1925 through 1931, an average of 29 aircraft flew various routes across the United States and on occasion, into Canada to promote the safety and reliability of civil aviation. The routes varied in length from 1,775 miles in 1925 to more than 6,300 miles in 1928. The seven tours traveled 29,432 miles.

Ford Supported Original National Air Tours

The original Air Tours received significant support from Edsel and Henry Ford. By lending the trusted Ford name, they helped convince a skeptical public that passenger flight was a sensible means of transportation.

Officially known in 1927 as the National Air Tour, the Tours were frequently referred to as the Ford Air Tours. Edsel B. Ford, a staunch supporter, provided the elegant trophy and Ford Motor Company provided financial support. Ford dealers along the various Air Tour routes often sponsored the Tour stops.

###

For additional information about the National Air Tour 2003, visit www.NationalAirTour.org or contact Suzanne Fedoruk at 612-861-7807, cell: 612-247-3079, or sfedoruk@mn.rr.com.