

FORD TRI-MOTOR HISTORY

Midland will be hosting a classic, rare Ford Tri-Motor airplane which was the first successful passenger airliner in the world; this plane will be at the Midland Jack Barstow Airport August 18 (PM), 19, and 20 (AM). One hundred nine-nine were manufactured and there are only 18 of these in existence at this time and only 5 of those presently flyable.

After WWI, Henry Ford realized the potential for mass air transportation so he manufactured the Ford Tri Motor airplane from 1926-1933; it was flown by more than 100 airlines around the world. To overcome concerns of engine reliability he specified 3 air cooled radial engines but added features for passenger comfort such as an enclosed cabin. The first 3 had an open cockpit as many pilots of the time doubted a plane could be flown without the direct 'feel of the wind'. It carried a crew of 3 – pilot, co-pilot, and stewardess – and 8 or 9 passengers. Ford did not make a profit on its aviation business but his reputation lent credibility to this infant aviation industry. He helped introduce paved runways, passenger terminals, hangars, airmail, and radio navigation.

The Ford Tri-Motor coming to Midland is a model number 4-AT and its N number is NC8407. It will be flown to Midland by Cody Welch a Northwest Airline Pilot and founder of the Wings of Mercy charitable flights. This plane's first flight occurred in 1929. It was sold to Pitcairn Aviations' Passenger Division, Eastern Air Transport. Later it was leased to Cuban Airlines then also flew in the Dominican Republic. In the 1950's it was used as a barnstormer, crop duster, and aerial fire fighter here in the U. S. It was severely damaged in a thunderstorm in 1973 and the Experimental Aircraft Association purchased it and then took 12 years to restore it to its original condition – paint scheme included. It started flying again in 1991 and is hangared at the Pitcairn Hangar at EAA's headquarters in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

This is a rare opportunity to take a 'Ride Back Into History'. Long time Midland resident, Bob Baringer, remembers standing in line at the first Midland Airport (present site of Midland High School) with his brother to get a \$1.00 ride in a Tri-Motor when it came to Midland in 1933 or 1934. There was some disagreement between the ticket sellers and as a result Bob and his brother were treated to the \$5.00 ride (all the way up to Edenville) instead of the local ride for their \$1.00 purchase price. Local community leader Stuart Bergstein also remembers riding in this plane; the plane was boarded in the approximate area of the football stadium at the present Midland High School. Don Beckwith, another longtime Midland resident, was around 12 when he got his ride in this Tri-Motor. He vividly remembers how 'shiny' it was, having to take 2 -3 steps to get into it, then the unusual wicker seats.

This classic airplane will be arriving from Oshkosh at the Barstow Airport around noon on August 18 and will be here until noon on August 20. Everyone in the community and surrounding area are encouraged to come to Barstow to see the airplane and if you're interested take a ride in it. This will be a wonderful opportunity to expose many of our young people to this era of early aviation history.

There will be a fee of \$50 for a ride around Midland and for an extra \$50 you can serve as the copilot; looking is free!