

Delta Air Lines' Travel Air



1929

Delta Air Lines



The Travel Air Company Led by Three Aviation Pioneers

Beech, Cessna and Stearman are names instantly recognized as pioneers in the aviation industry, but few people realize that Walter Beech, Clyde Cessna and Lloyd Stearman were once partners, a most impressive trio who guided the fortunes of the Travel Air Company, manufacturer of Delta Air Lines' original passenger aircraft.



The Travel Air Carried Delta's First Passengers

The Travel Air carried Delta Air Lines' first passengers on June 17, 1929 over a route from Dallas, Texas, to Jackson, Mississippi, with stops at Shreveport and Monroe, Louisiana. Traveling at speeds of 90 miles per hour, the five-passenger aircraft made the trip in five hours 40 minutes.





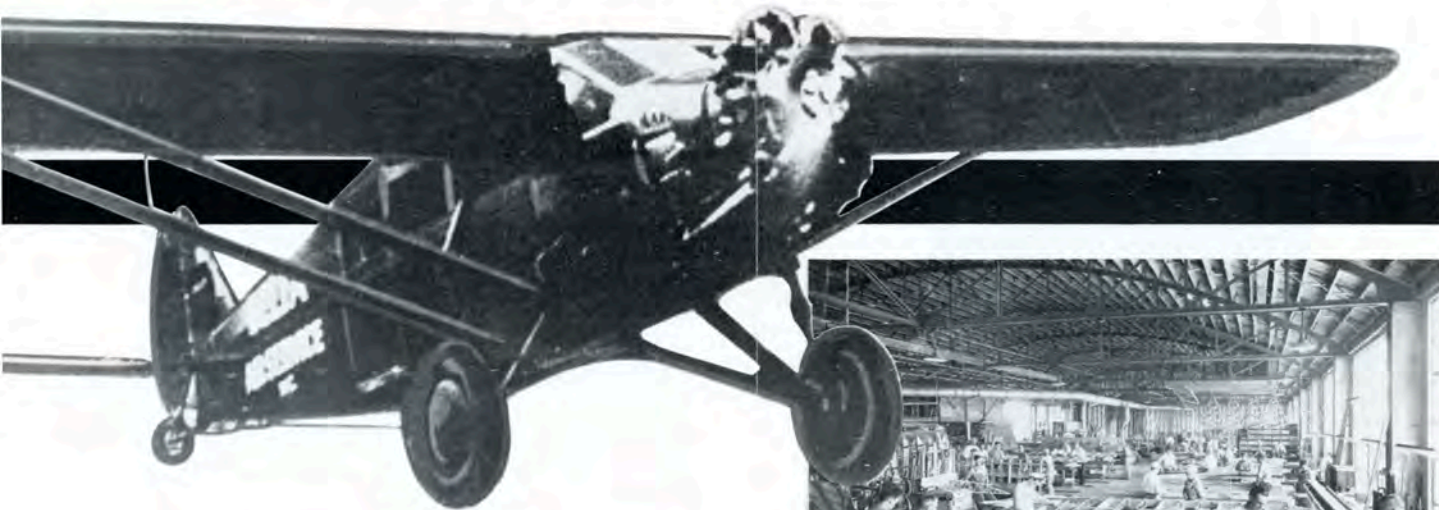
The Travel Air Model 6000B, a six-seat monoplane (five passengers and one pilot), was the pride of the Travel Air fleet at its introduction in 1928. It was described as a “big beautiful

airplane” that incorporated the very latest features expressly designed to promote a better acceptance of the convenience and comfort of travel by air—still a new means of transportation at the time!

The Travel Air 6000 was not the Travel Air Company’s first successful aircraft, however. The company was founded in 1925 with Cessna as president, Beech as vice president and Stearman in charge of design and production. The money for the enterprise was supplied by six Wichita, Kansas, businessmen.

During its first year, Travel Air built and sold 19 Model 2000 aircraft. The following year 46 Travel Airs were built. Strong, confident minds began to clash, and Stearman and Cessna eventually left the Travel Air Company. Beech then had Travel Air more or less to himself, and the company continued to grow at an astonishing rate. In 1927, 154 Travel Airs of various types were delivered, and in 1928 they built over 500! By this time the Travel Air name was respected in aviation circles.

In August 1929 Travel Air became a part of the Curtiss-Wright organization. Sales declined during the Depression, and the Travel Air factory in Wichita was closed in 1932. Production of certain models was transferred to the Curtiss-Wright factory in St. Louis, Missouri.



Heralded as “the limousine of the skies,” the Travel Air featured wicker chairs equipped with hand holds rather than seat belts. The heated cabin’s insulated, soundproof walls kept noise and vibration at lower levels. Conversation in an airplane while flying in those early days of aviation could be impossible due to the noise from the engine, so the Travel Air’s soundproof walls were a selling point with passengers.

Aboard the plane, passengers could lower the Travel Air’s roll-down windows for ventilation. It was noted that the cabin was so “spacious” that passengers could even exchange seats during flight!



Powered by a 300-horsepower Wright J6 engine, the Travel Air Model 6000B could carry only 150 pounds of baggage with the five passengers and pilot. The plane’s wings span 48 feet 8 inches with a fuselage length of 30 feet 6 inches. It stands nine feet high.

The Restored Delta Travel Air

The Travel Air on display was restored by Delta Captain Doug Rounds who spent eight years painstakingly restoring it. It is basically identical to those flown by Delta.

"There are only seven Travel Airs remaining and only a few in flying condition. Most are in museums," Rounds noted. The Delta L-1011 Captain purchased the Travel Air in 1975 from a friend in San Diego.

"At that time this Travel Air would still fly, but it was in pretty poor condition," he said. Restoration took 5,000 hours' work over an eight-year period, involving Rounds, his family and friends.

The restoration began with an overhaul of the struts. New trailing edges were installed on the wings and repairs were made to trailing edge ribs, wing tip bow, gas tanks and wiring. All metal controls were sandblasted, new elevator trailing edges installed, vertical fin repaired, bottom trailing edge of the rudder replaced, the prop overhauled, the seats replaced and new wicker installed. A new fuel system was plumbed, an all new wood fuselage made, a new electrical system designed and installed, accessories overhauled, new instrument panel made, and countless other details completed!

Today, the Travel Air is in perfect condition. Its travels throughout the Delta system provide a reminder of how far commercial aviation has come during its short half-century history.



Doug Rounds

Delta Has Come A Long Way Since The Travel Air



From its humble beginnings carrying passengers to four cities aboard the Travel Air, Delta Air Lines today is one of the six largest U.S. airlines, serving over 100 cities throughout the world.



Delta has long been acknowledged as a leader in the aviation industry for its modern, efficient fleet. Today's fleet of some 250 aircraft includes the Lockheed 1011, Boeing 767, Douglas DC-8, Boeing 757, Boeing 727, Boeing 737, Douglas DC-9 and soon the MD-88.

As an airline which takes pride in its customer service, Delta for 12 consecutive years has achieved the lowest complaint record of all the major airlines according to the Department of Transportation records. Delta, for four years in a row, has been voted the first place air carrier in the United States by readers of TRAVEL & HOLIDAY Magazine, one of the world's most prestigious travel publications. Readers evaluated the airlines on overall aspects of courtesy of personnel, on-time arrival and departures, efficiency of baggage handling, and in-flight food service.



To give Delta's passengers the best personal service, the airline's 39,000 professionals work together as a team, priding themselves in being more than experts at their jobs.