



It was the 1920s and 1930s when the jaw-dropping chance to ride in an airplane availed itself to the public for the first time in history.

Back in that era, entire towns would shut down as crowds gathered at county fairs or farmers' fields to witness the barnstormers performing amazing stunts with their biplanes. While anyone could watch the air circus, only the intrepid dared to buy a ride on the plane and venture skyward for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fly like a bird...

By Melinda Clynes





Barnstorming was popularized in the 1920s with the government surplus of aircraft, especially the Curtiss JN-4 Biplane, better known as the “Jenny.”

Jennies were training aircraft for the U.S. Army during World War I. Post war, these were sold off, often cheaply, to former servicemen and other enthusiasts. Simultaneously, new aircraft companies were buckling quickly as the aviation industry did not grow as expected. The lack of market interest put even more affordable aircraft into the hands of barnstormers.

Navigated by courageous pilots, the light planes, which could take off and land in fields, changed the entertainment industry. Barnstormers would usually

present an air show with stunts, followed by selling rides on the planes.

A typical barnstormer (or a group of barnstormers) would fly into to a town, gain residents’ attention by making low passes over Main St. at full throttle, and then negotiate the use of a farmers’ field to stage their shows and sell plane rides. Later, they might buzz the town dropping handbills advertising flights for a fee and the promise of a spectacular show.

For many, the arrival of the barnstormers was like a holiday—businesses closed shop and town folk converged on the field. At this juncture in history, many people had never seen an airplane, so the experience was exhilarating.

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BARNSTORMING

Fast-forward 90 years to this spring at the Yankee Air Museum where old-time, biplane rides will once again be available for those seeking the thrill of open-air flight.

On selected weekend and weekday evenings, passengers can travel back in time to the wild and woolly barnstorming days of old to experience the sensation of flying as folks first did in the 20s and 30s.

But passengers won’t be flying in an antique aircraft. Rather, they’ll climb into a brand new, open-cockpit replica of a popular 1930s biplane model, the WACO YMF-5C.

The plane is FAA-approved, and up to two passengers can ride up front for a true bird’s-eye view of the landscape with the pilot in the rear seat.

While the new, cherry-red biplane maintains the integrity of the original design, some modifications have been made for comfort and safety. The aircraft is wider so it’s more stable in flight and in landing. The cabin is slightly larger and more comfortable. The fuselage frame is made of sturdy steel, and it’s equipped with hydraulic toe brakes and advanced avionics. Heat is available if passengers catch a chill.

The plane will be handled by a fleet of experienced pilots, many of whom are retired military or civil aviation pilots.

A ride in the WACO YMF-5C will be a far cry from the confined, air-tight experience of flying in a modern jetliner. For aviation enthusiasts or straight-up adventure seekers, this feast for the senses should not be missed.

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Top: Waco 220 Straight-wing, photo courtesy of the San Diego Air & Space Museum; opposite: the Yankee Air Museum’s newest flyable, the WACO YMF-5C



By the late 1920s the military ceased sales of biplanes to the public creating a shortage of aircraft available for barnstorming performances. At the same time, the government began to impose safety regulations. Together, these factors led to the end of the spirited barnstorming era, although some pilots continued to traverse the country giving rides as late as the fall of 1941.

The Yankee Air Museum is proud to bring back the spirit of the barnstorming era and invites you to join the famous barnstormers of history by experiencing the thrill of an open cockpit flight. *Learn more about our WACO Flight Experience below and make your flight reservations soon!*

Famous thrill-seekers A host of characters flew the skies as part of the barnstorming movement in the first half of the 20th century.

Charles Lindbergh Though most well-known for the first cross-Atlantic solo flight in 1927, Lindbergh spent much of the early and mid 1920s barnstorming across America, joining other crews, but also on his own vessel inscribed with his moniker, *Daredevil Lindbergh*. Lucky Lindy used his trans-atlantic flight celebrity and fame to help aviation and other causes he believed in. Lindbergh was born in Detroit in 1902.

Lincoln Beachey Part stunt man, part engineer (of a racing airship balloon), and part pilot, it's not surprising that Beachey was drawn to barnstorming and thrill-seeking. He was the first person to fly an airplane over Niagara Falls, and the first known pilot to attempt and master the loop.

BARNSTORMING



Bringing back the thrill of open-cockpit flying

Founded in 1983, WACO

Aircraft's mission is to bring back the open-cockpit flying experience

of the 20s, 30s, and 40s. Yankee Air

Museum purchased its brand new WACO

YMF-5C from WACO Aircraft to provide rides to the public and offer the chance to experience the thrill of

early aviation. The plane is built at WACO Aircraft's North American headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan. WACO is the only FAA-approved manufacturer of 1930s-era sport biplanes in the world.

The original aircraft manufacturer—unrelated to the current manufacturing company—was founded in 1919 under the name of Weaver Aircraft Company of Ohio, later renamed the Waco Aircraft Company. During the Golden Age of Aviation, 1919 to 1947, the Waco

Aircraft Company produced more aircraft than any other manufacturer. The most celebrated of Waco planes, and its last open-cockpit model for the barnstorming pilots of the 1930s, was the Waco YMF. The company ceased operations in 1947.

In 1983, the founders of WACO Aircraft decided to reincarnate the Waco UPF-7. In the history of aviation, no company had ever taken a 50-year-old design and manufactured it as a new FAA-certified aircraft. WACO Aircraft hired a team of top engineers to modernize the biplane while maintaining the integrity of its original design.

In March 1986, the first WACO YMF-5C was produced and received FAA certification. WACO Aircraft company is not related to the original Waco Aircraft Company, but, clearly, the founders of both had and have a passion for aviation that is timeless. ✈

Right: the Yankee Air Museum's newest flyable, the WACO YMF-5C

He raced trains, flew upside down, and was known as the Master Birdman.

Wiley Post Acclaimed as the first pilot to fly solo around the world, Post's not-so-glamorous early years included working in Oklahoma oil fields, being arrested and jailed for carjacking, and working as a parachutist for a flying circus. He eventually bought his own aircraft for barnstorming, leading to his later flight triumphs.

Pancho Barnes A feminist before her time, Barnes soloed after just six hours of formal instruction. She had a barnstorming show, flew in air races, and broke Amelia Earhart's world women's speed record. She worked as a stunt pilot in Hollywood and founded a union for film pilots. Later in life she opened the Happy Bottom Riding Club, a dude ranch in the Mojave Desert catering to airmen and Hollywood hotshots. ✈



Top left: Pancho Barnes, photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; top right: Wiley Post; bottom left: Lincoln Beachey; bottom right: Charles Lindbergh, photos courtesy of the Library of Congress; opposite: Waco 220 Straight-wing, photo courtesy of the San Diego Air & Space Museum

BARNSTORMING

Experience your own 1930s-style air adventure This program will be the first of its kind offered through the Yankee Air Museum. Profits from the rides will be applied to Museum operations, programming, and expansion. Bring your taste for adventure and nostalgia—Red Baron Snoopy caps and leather goggles are optional!

Reserve your WACO Flight Experience now! To make reservations contact the Museum at (734) 483-4030 or www.yankeeairmuseum.org

WACO rides – one passenger:
Museum member \$250, Non-member \$250

WACO rides: – two passengers:
Museum members* \$295, Non-members \$325

**One passenger must be a Museum member.*

