

Flying The AERONCA

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By Robert Livingston

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Printed in United States of America

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Introduction

This booklet is meant to provide the Aeronca owner or operator with some information not normally found in print.

It has been the author's pleasure and privilege to own several Aeronca aircraft and I've spent a fair amount of time flying them under some varied conditions, for reasons both professional and pure pleasure.

The information in this booklet will apply to all types of Aeronca aircraft. To some that statement may sound not likely. But, in this booklet, we're covering some basic procedures that apply to virtually all tailwheel airplanes and my experience in some 2,000 plus hours of Aeronca flight have shown me that all Aeronca models have common traits and some of those are what we're interested in. However, every now and then, the reader will find something said that will refer to a matter of individualistic character regarding a particular model

When I was a student pilot, I began my serious flying in an Aeronca 7AC. I had a lot of trouble and surely made every mistake possible. Or so it seemed at the time, at least. It seems, even now, that every error made then still stands out sharp in my mind.

Equally vivid are the fond memories I have of the help I was given by some very fine flight instructors, men who now are referred to as "old-timers" and "old-fashioned".

At this point I must say that, in my opinion, one thing we desperately need now is more of those "old-timers" and some of that "old-fashioned" flight instruction. In the past 22 years of instruction I've given, that's the brand of teaching I've tried to give.

In a way, this booklet should maybe be entitled something like "An Incomplete Guide to Flying Aeroncas - . . .", because actually, every time a new pilot seats himself in the cockpit of an Aeronca, new things are discovered; things which I, for all my Aeronca time, may never have noticed.

My hope, overall, is to tell someone else about a few things I know, up to this moment, about flying Aeroncas. The reader is then encouraged to take my observations and build on them with his own experiences.

No written work will ever replace the value of effective flight instruction in the air, with controls in hand. So, find yourself a good teacher of tailwheel flight and work hard to learn all he knows.

I know it's getting pretty hard to find tailwheel teachers. But, keep looking. They're out there.

Have a good time in these few pages!

History of Design

An interesting fact is that the first, crude, efforts toward flight, efforts that would one day result in Aeroncas, began in Dayton, Ohio, the same city where the Wright brothers began.

Twenty-six years after Jean A. Roche and John Q. Dohse joined hands to produce a light plane, the Aeronautical Corporation of America (Aeronca) presented the Aeronca 7AC to the flying world. It was an instant success, as was the Chief before it and the C-3 even before them both.

This splendid time-tested example of utilitarian design trailed behind it some thirty-five worthy ancestors. Several of the models that immediately preceded the 7AC served honorably in the Great War as military craft for almost every branch of the armed services and were used as primary trainers, observation craft, ambulances and VIP transportation vehicles. An Aeronca even earned the very dubious distinction of being the first American aircraft to receive enemy aircraft fire at Pearl Harbor.

Various models followed the 7AC, but none became so famous or widely used as that model.

Before Aeronca ceased manufacture of aircraft in 1951, in excess of 20,000 were produced and a great number of them remain airworthy today.

But for the greater political efforts and public relations work of Piper, its major competitor, the name of Aeronca might now be regarded as the number one lightplane of that era. Today, the man on the street will usually recognize reference to a Piper Cub, yet scarcely one in a thousand may know Aeronca.

No matter. That just makes ownership and flying one all the more exclusive and fun.

Aircraft Characterization

When you approach an Aeronca 7AC for the first time, a number of good first impressions will be evident.

What you will see is the result of some fine aeronautical minds and thousands upon thousands of hours of engineering design and airborne experience.

Through all this scientific effort, the character of the Champ shines. The plane is at the same time both perky and pot-bellied. The setting of fuselage, wings and gear and the tail-feathers is basic, yet innovative in respects.

It must be one of the world's easiest planes to work on. Engine compartment, cockpit and fuselage framework are roomy and easy to maneuver tools, fingers, arms, legs and head in.

The more you look at the plane, the more you like it.

Cockpit visibility is super, with many square feet of open glass to peer through. The door is wide, with an uncomplicated fastening mechanism. The

main landing gear is wide-footed and the third wheel is at the rear, where it belongs.

Surely there are few other aircraft that can absorb as much punishment as an Aeronca can. During the lifetime of most of the Aeroncas around today, they have received a battering from students, ham-handed careless owners and operators who have used them for everything from sailplane towers, dusters and sprayers, ranch work-horses and many other purposes incredible in scope. Most have received some little damage, like a dinged wingtip or twisted gear and not a few have been virtually wiped out almost beyond repair, yet in a while flew again.

They have been and continue to be magnificent trainers. They meet all qualifications necessary for light two-place trainers - unique requirements that are not necessary in other aircraft: relatively inexpensive in initial cost, fairly cheap to maintain, repair and operate; strong enough to withstand significant forms of abuse; and components not too expensive to replace or to duplicate if not readily available. On the other hand a trainer must be easy to fly, a handy vehicle to teach the novice how to fly, a forgiving machine, have instruments sufficient to make the training program complete as possible, and be suitable for the week-end flyer with a narrow wallet. Aeronca more than fills the bill.

Whether you call it "Aeronca", "Ay-ron-i-kuh", "Ronkuh", or "Air-Knocker" makes no difference.

By any name, it's a "champ".

Procedures

The fact that you have enough interest in learning how to be a better pilot and have taken the trouble to obtain this book, toward finding out all you can about flying Aeroncas, is encouraging to me. Too many fliers seem to be "know-it-alls" and are of the closed-mind sorts who have learned all they care to know.

There is really nothing "new" about procedures to fly. Surely, by the middle 40's most mistakes had been made - mistakes that destroyed an untold number of aircraft, maimed an equally untold number of good people and killed not a few. All these tragedies told us, the flying fraternity, what **not** to do, and developed procedures accordingly.

There are procedures for every phase of flight; pre-flight, start-up, taxiing, run-up, take-off, and on and on. As a pilot, you've already absorbed dozens of procedures and follow them religiously every time you go aloft.

Where we get instantly into trouble is when we neglect our training and make up our own way to fly, either as a result of pure bull-headedness or foolish pride, or press of emergency.

To my reader I make this urgent plea. Develop procedures. Whether you carefully work up your own, through personal checklists, or use the procedures generated by others, come up with standardized ways of doing things. Continued practice of these procedures, you see, will get you quickly and safely through

times of emergency or other lesser distractions. Military, airline and other professional flight crews learned the great value of procedures many, many years ago. And my friend, what's good enough for them, flying multi-million dollar aircraft, is good enough for us, with our Aeroncas.

Our aircraft may cost less than theirs, but our rear ends are just as valuable, Right?

Flight Instruction

Somewhere in the distant past of aviation, men flew alone and without advantage of being "checked-out". And, at about the same time, there was a heap of crashing going on, as brave but too bold candidates for flight zipped off the edge of the runway or fell otherwise into the weeds as a result of ignorance about the task at hand. Pretty soon, it was a common decision among those who hankered to fly or go aloft in strange machines that the real smart thing to do might be to have someone who had already done what they wanted to do show them the dos and don'ts of it. Hence was born flight instruction.

Those who aspire to fly Aeroncas in the manner most expert are therefore in need of a flight instructor who knows the creature. Alas, nowadays, this is easier said than done.

From a day in the mid 40's, when there must have been thousands upon thousands of Airknocker teachers, we have now come to a sad state of affairs where there are few left. Truly they, like the Whooping Crane, are an endangered species.

I have long held the ambition within me to launch some great survey across this land, the results of which, hopefully, would be a massive cross-indexed file of every Aeronca instructor in America. Then, on request, I could flip to a certain page and advise all who ask exactly where their likely source of assistance was. But I haven't done that yet. So, I will do the next best thing.

Here is where you will usually find experienced Aeronca CFIs. Not at any big airport, I dare say. At the bigger fields, where the Spam Cans dominate, they don't know what an Aeronca is, unless they are over age thirty, or so. The few old-timers that are at the big airports are usually wrapped up in corporate jobs, so they don't have time to get with you. And you can bet your oleos that the FBOs don't want you trying to attract their staff away to fly around in your bird when some charter trip comes up and they need them. The rare FBO that will permit one of their instructors to fly with you wants an arm and a leg for his time. What to do? Get out of the big city, friend!

Taildragger and/or Aeronca qualified and current CFIs will be found at the smaller, satellite fields that radiate out from the big cities. They will nearly always be happy to help you.

For instance: In the Chicago area, go to the Joliet, DuPage, Clow, or Campbell airports. Around the Philadelphia area, go to Easton, or Wings, or Pottstown. Around Atlanta, go to Covington, South Fulton or Gwinnet. Around