



Flying in Style in EAA's Ford Tri-Motor

The 1929 airliner coming to (CITY) was the height of flying luxury 85 years ago

Flying the airlines has not always meant connecting the entire world in a single day. Nor did it mean flight delays, security lines or baggage carousels. At one time, flying to a destination was an adventure and a whole new perspective on travel.

That sensation is coming back as a rare 1929 Ford Tri-Motor airliner, owned, and operated by the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) in Oshkosh, Wis., makes a stop locally as part of its nationwide tour. The aircraft will be at (FILL IN LOCAL INFORMATION HERE, AS WELL AS DATES AND TIMES). All are invited to see and fly in this historic aircraft.

Ford Motor Company founder Henry Ford, who had already changed America through his automobiles, also had a vision for moving people through flight. He saw a time when people would travel across America in airplanes at speed surpassing the fastest railroad.

“Preposterous!”, some uttered. After all, Charles Lindbergh had only two years before survived a harrowing 33-hour solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean and became a worldwide celebrity for doing it. The idea of the average person being able to fly to a distant destination on a scheduled flight ... well, that was just a dream.

Ford was driven to prove his concept, though. Although fewer than 200 of the Ford Tri-Motors were built over a seven-year period before it was overtaken by newer technology, it showed that passenger flights were possible on a grander scale than ever imagined.

“What Henry Ford did was bring the possibility of powered flight to the public, beyond the barnstorming and pioneer era that defined aviation to that point,” said Sean Elliott, an EAA vice president who is also an experienced pilot of the Tri-Motor. “His position as an influential industrial leader brought credibility to the nation of passenger air service.”

While you might consider today’s air travel less than luxurious, accommodations aboard the Tri-Motor were less so. But no one cared – it was the adventure of it all. There were only 10 straight-back seats, no more than parlor chairs, really. Passengers had a straight-in view of the cockpit. And the roar of the three-engines was loud, but also reassuring. Three engines, in Ford’s view, were safer than one for long-haul flights.

The Ford Tri-Motor appearing locally was No. 146 of the aircraft’s run, coming off the line in August 1929. It served for Pitcairn Aviation, a forerunner of Eastern Airlines, and then had its own adventure flying as an airliner in Cuba, working as a crop duster and aerial firefighting aircraft. It later became a barnstorming aircraft, offering flights for passengers throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.

After the airplane was severely damaged in a 1973 thunderstorm, EAA founder Paul Poberezny bought the salvage and worked with the EAA staff and volunteers for 12 years to bring the airplane back to life. It made its return to the air in 1985 and has been carrying passengers since. The aircraft has also starred in two major motion pictures: “The Family Jewels” starring Jerry Lewis in 1965 and “Public Enemies” starring Johnny Depp in 2009.

Primarily, though, EAA’s Ford Tri-Motor spends its ninth decade of existence much as it started life: carrying passengers on an aerial adventure unlike anything else available today. Today, however, instead of showing the promise of what lies ahead in aviation, it harkens back to a pioneering era in flight. It welcomes all to join in the fun while the airplane is at (CITY). You can find out more and reserve your own seat on the airplane by going to www.FlyTheFord.org.