


# TRANSPORTATION

SUNDAY  
JUNE 22, 2003

AUTOMOTIVE CLASSIFIED INSIDE AND AT  THE TRIBUNE'S ONLINE AUTO GUIDE

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On centennial of powered flight, pilots re-create National Air Tours of 1920s-'30s



Robert Newhouse of Rockford will fly his 1931 Brunner Winkle along with a couple dozen other pilots in antique aircraft.

Tribune photo by Bonnie Traflet

## ETA: Yesteryear

By Chuck Green  
Special to the Tribune

Robert Newhouse's plans are up in the air—and that's the way he likes it.

The Rockford resident is among 30 pilots from across the country—and the only one from the Chicago area—invited to participate in a re-creation of the National Air Tour, which will recall the Golden Age of Aviation in the 1920s and 1930s. The tour is part of the 100th anniversary celebration of the Wright brothers' first powered flight in 1903.

As many as 10 of the aircraft that flew on the first National Air Tours, including Ford Tri-Motors, Stinson Tri-Motors, Travel Air, WACO, Curtiss and Eaglerock, exist and some will be featured in the tour. It will start Sept. 7, beginning and ending in Dearborn, Mich., just as the original tours did from 1925-1931.

Newhouse, 43, a pilot for 27 years, revels in the idea of being part of such an event.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I go to a lot of antique airplane flying shows across the



A Ford Tri-Motor takes off in the 1927 National Air Tour. The competition measured efficiency, not speed.

Photo courtesy of San Diego Aerospace Museum

country during the year, but this is [special]. They'll never re-create this again. It's such an undertaking, and by the time the bicentennial comes, think of how old the airplanes will be."

That's why Newhouse, a technical representative for Bombardier Aerospace, based in Montreal, is taking a month off from his job, virtually all of his vacation time for the year, to strut his wings in the tour.

### From town to town

Many of the 26 cities on the 2003 air tour were original tour stops.



Tribune map/Dino Muiroz

"This is my love," he said.

And his baby, a '31 Brunner Winkle, will be the only plane of its kind in the tour. The Brunner Winkle flew in the 1931 Ford Air Tour, which is why Newhouse was asked to join the tour by the Aviation Foundation of America ([www.NationalAirTour.org](http://www.NationalAirTour.org)), host of the re-creation.

PLEASE SEE AIR TOUR, PAGE 5.

# AIR TOUR: Pilots to fly over Meigs Field

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Greg Herrick, AFA president, said he had no trouble finding "volunteers" to fly in the tour. "I'm calling people and saying, 'Look, you have a very interesting vintage airplane. Here's what I'd like you to do. Quit your job for a month, fly to Detroit in your vintage airplane from wherever you are, fly 4,000 miles, then fly home. And by the way, we'd like for you to pay for it yourself.' A lot of people with a lot of interesting airplanes signed up."

Herrick also has been securing sponsorship for the event. "We're speaking with Ford, and with lot of cities and towns along the way."

Newhouse, who received his pilot's license before his driver's license, acknowledged funding is a challenge.

"I've been trying to hook up sponsorship since I was invited," Newhouse has raised about \$5,000; his goal is \$30,000, which would essentially cover the expenses for his plane, as well as lodging and meals.

"We've had some pretty good luck with some of the cities where we're stopping. They've said they'd pay for pilot's food and fuel. So some of that will help," Newhouse said.

Herrick says pilots will take off in groups of three every five minutes until all the planes are airborne in about an hour.

"That way, the pilots will have a buddy system. And we're going to have one of them squeaking what they call 'flight following code,'" enabling people to track each group's progress on the Internet. "People will see little images of airplanes on a map of each day's route," Herrick said.

The tour will visit 26 cities and towns, many of which were original tour stops. That will include the Lansing Municipal Airport in the south suburb, home of one of three hangars built by the Fords. (According to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Division of Preservation Services, Henry Ford used his reputation and resources to promote aviation broadly, including the early development of air services, airports and hangars. At a time when airplanes were generally housed in dark, barnlike wooden structures and other temporary buildings, the substantial hangar designed by Ford's chief architect Albert Kahn helped establish a specialized building in which to store and maintain an airplane.)

"I've been here 20 years, and I haven't even seen some of the aircraft [in the tour] before," said Robert Malkas, manager of the Lansing airport. "I know about Ford Tri-Motors, but I've never seen a Stinson Tri-Motor. We'll do all we can to make the opportunity available for people in the area to come out and take a look at the planes and talk with the pilots."

After an overnight stay in Lansing, the pilots had planned to stop at Meigs Field for a luncheon in their honor. But in March, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley closed the lakefront airport by bulldozing 'X' marks into the runway.

"When [Mayor] Daley tore up [Meigs], we had to cancel it, so our alternative is to either go around Chicago to the west, or over the lake," Herrick said. "I've polled the pilots and they all want to fly along the lakeshore in honor of Meigs Field."

"If we can't access Meigs, we're going to fly over it anyway."

The tour's stymied efforts by the Friends of Meigs Field and pilots associations to restore the airport. The fact the air tour can't use Meigs and cannot come to Chicago is "tragic, especially since this is the year we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of flight, which is what the air tour is all about," said Richard Steinbrecher, director of aviation education for Friends of Meigs.

From the Meigs flyover, the pilots will stop at Timmerman Field in Milwaukee and then con-



Photo courtesy of National

Standard Oil of Indiana sent a Ford 4-AT-A on the 1927 tour.



Photo courtesy of NationalAirTour.org

A Ford Tri-Motor competes in the 1930 Air Tour, the second to last one.



Photo courtesy of NationalAirTour.org

Edsel B. Ford, for whom the Air Tour trophy was named, waves the starting flag in the 1925 tour.

tinue to Wausau Downtown Airport in Wausau, Wis., Sept. 10 in honor of Wausau's John Wood, who won the 1928 National Air Tour, which was a competition rather than a race.

According to "The Ford Air Tours 1925-1931," the Ford Reliability, or National Air Tour, for the Edsel B. Ford Reliability Trophy was an efficiency contest held every year from 1925 through 1931. The tour gave airplane builders an opportunity to take their latest models around the country to "show the flag" for dealers and salesmen, to convince the man on the ground he

should take to the air. It was more about maintaining a schedule than winning a race.

The Depression effectively put a stop to the tour, with the last one in 1931. "They couldn't get enough support [for the tour]. But we know the approximate route of the '32 tour, so we're bringing it full circle, completing what they set out to do," said Herrick.

The tour was organized by Ray Collins, who flew as referee or manager in all seven. The Detroit Aviation Society, including Detroit business people interested in promoting aviation, such as Edsel B. Ford, sponsored the tour. The Fords donated \$50,000 to it.

Aviation was in its infancy in the 1920s and 1930s. Herrick said the intent of the tours was "to bolster the public's confidence in air travel." The tours were designed to promote air transportation and to convince people that air transportation was viable and safe. "Participants included pilots such as Wiley Post, Jimmy Doolittle, Frank Hawks and Johnny Livingston.

Herrick noted that the tours also were intended to encourage manufacturers to develop aircraft that would fill the needs of the transportation system.

"It took a tremendous amount of convincing. Most people had never even been in an airplane. There were probably even people who had never seen an airplane at that point." To further demonstrate the effectiveness of air transport, Henry Ford carried the mail for free for the U.S. Postal Service in 1926, said Herrick.



Inhouse photo by Bonnie Tufelot

"It takes lot of money just to keep these old planes airworthy and flying," says pilot Robert Newhouse.

Preparing such veteran aircraft for this year's tour takes dedication. Hours flown by such aircraft are difficult to determine because of the age. For example, Herrick said he figured the Ford Tri-Motor slated for the tour had flown 1.5 million miles based on its air hours. "But that's just anecdotal almost, because it doesn't represent the other airplanes that are on the tour."

Most of the planes scheduled to fly are owned by the pilots, with Herrick and organizations owning others.

"It takes lot of money just to keep these old planes airworthy and flying. Insurance costs are high, fuel costs are high, then if you figure out your overhead and divide that by an hourly rate, you're probably talking about close to \$100 an hour to fly," Newhouse said. "The tour is 4,000 miles, so you're talking more than 700 gallons of fuel and probably about 60 hours of actual flight time, and that's with no deviation for weather. In September, you're always going to have some weather," he said.

Not only that, to prepare his plane for the tour, Newhouse took his engine to Oklahoma City for an overhaul. Only certain facilities do such work, he said, and the facility in Oklahoma City specializes in vintage radial engines.

"I'm doing it specially for [the tour]. It probably had another 400-500 hours, which would be four, five, six years, but I wanted to start this tour with a brand-new overhauled engine." Ordinarily, he said the time between engine overhauls is about 1,000 hours, "depending on how much you fly."

Newhouse also has a 1931 Aerona C-3 plane purchased new by his grandfather in 1931. He inherited the "31 Brunner Winkle from his father, who had bought it in 1926. He keeps both at the Poplar Grove Airport, near Rockford. "I used to hitchhike down Route 36, out to a park, and west, to Charles, to fly the airplane. Then I hitchhiked back home to Wheaton."



Photo courtesy of NationalAirTour.org

Phoebe Fairgrave Omie was the only woman on the 1928 Air Tour, and the first to depart that year.