



First Douglas DC-3 to fly, at Santa Monica on Dec. 17, 1935, in American Airlines colors

By BILL EATON

Watch your mouth, around old ladies.

Never mind that it's their anniversary, don't say how old!

Ron Werner and Arne Hiersoux had worked all day on the phones and cargo manifests and maintenance records, and now they walked out into the chill evening at Oakland airport's North Field and kicked the wheel chocks away from N100ZZ.

They started one engine and pondered its sounds, and started the other.

Arne said, "This beauty has been in the air 12 hours today."

Is that so? Is that right?

Arne nodded. "And we're going to Salt Lake City and back tonight with her."

Really? That's remarkable for an airplane that is 40...

"Shh!" Arne put a finger to his lips.

Then she doesn't know? She

might? But she's got to pull a full load over the mountains and she ought to concentrate on gross weight and winds aloft and manifold pressure, and not think about all those years?

Arne smiled and waved. Air Charter West's N100ZZ roared down the runway and into the air until she was a fading twinkle of lights against the dark, and was gone.

It's 40 years.

The first Douglas DC-3 flew

on Dec. 17, 1935, 32 years to the day from the Wright's powered flight at Kitty Hawk, and if Orville and Wilbur gave us the airplane, it can be said that Donald Douglas gave us the airline business.

No airline made any money flying passengers until the DC-3. That's why they call her Grand Old Lady. She earned other names. Bouncing along in turbulence at 10,000 feet she was The Vomit Comet. Because of her tall landing gear and long wing the Army called her Gooney Bird.

She had no pressurized cabin for high altitudes, but she offered a heated cabin and soundproofing, powered brakes and an automatic pilot. Cruising at 185 miles an hour she could go coast-to-coast in 15 hours, with a couple of stops.

When production ended in 1945, Douglas had built 455 civil DC-3s and 10,200 military versions called C-47 in the Army and R-4D in the Navy. The Old Lady flew the Hima-

layan hump into China and dropped paratroops in Normandy, and in 1950 she lifted the bloodied 7th Marines out from Korea's Changjin Reservoir.

A new DC-3 sold for about \$110,000.

Today, at Oakland's North Field, Bob Kneeland at Bay Aviation Services will offer you an executive model of a DC-3 for around \$55,000. Kneeland takes ex-military C-47s out of desert storage at Tucson and builds them up into passenger or cargo transports, retailing for \$70,000 to \$90,000.

Kneeland says the DC-3 is the only airplane that can make any money under federal regulations governing "third level air carriers" at her weight and number of passengers — 33.

Kneeland says that if you bought a new turbine airplane at, say, \$1 million and went out and sold tickets at \$20 a seat in the short-haul market, "why, you'd NEVER recoup

your original investment."

Down the North Field line, at Air Charter West, Arne Hiersoux smiles at that. Sure, and that's why he and Ron Werner are in the cargo business with their DC-3s. They began early in 1970 with a small twin-engine Beech, and acquired their first DC-3 in 1973. That was N100ZZ, built in 1944, and still going.

Today, Air Charter West has three DC-3s of its own and has contracted for a fourth to handle the flood of business

that has come to them during this month's strike at United Air Lines.

Even before the strike, Hiersoux and Werner had built their payroll up to 35, and they've got seven aircrews working on their basic route from San Francisco to Los Angeles to Phoenix to Salt Lake.

Arne said they get a lot of the "belly cargo" normally carried in passenger jets, and cargo too large for passenger jets in short-haul service.

"The scheduled carriers fly in the daytime when the passengers want to, but cargo moves at NIGHT. We've taken advantage of that and we're a strong feeder for the big cargo carriers, like Flying Tiger for instance, bringing it in from Phoenix to them at Los Angeles."

Arne says they'll keep that fourth DC-3.

"Our estimate of the market in the first place turned out exactly right."

## Never Ask A Lady Her Age



Tribune photo by ROY WILLIAMS

Arne Hiersoux and Ron Werner with their DC-3 N100ZZ at North Field