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History of the Stearman Aircraft

Nicknamed the "Yellow Peril" thanks to its somewhat tricky ground handling characteristics, the Stearman is one of the most easily recognized aircraft. Its simple



construction, rugged dependability and nimble handling made the Stearman much loved by those who flew and trained on it. The Stearman

Kaydet, as it was officially named, was the only American aircraft used during World War II that was completely standardized for both Army and Navy use as the PT 13D (Army) and N2S-4 (Navy). Sold by the thousands after World War II, the Stearman has had a long and full career as a trainer, crop duster and air show performer. The name "Stearman" is so widely known that it has become the generic name for almost all currently flown biplanes. It is truly a "classic."

The famed Stearman Model 75 has its roots in the earlier Model 70, which was chosen in 1934 as the U.S. Navy's primary trainer. At a time when biplanes were becoming a thing of the past, the Model 70 offered the fledgling pilot a steady and sturdy steed. Designed and built in only 60 days, the prototype Model 70 could withstand load factors much higher than were expected to occur in normal flight training. The U.S. Army and Navy tested the prototype in 1934.

At the conclusion of these tests, the Navy ordered the aircraft while the Army decided to wait for the introduction of the improved Model 75 appearing in



1936. Over the next decade, the Army received nearly 8,500 Stearmans in five different variants. The difference among these versions were the engines fitted; Kaydets were fitted with Lycoming (PT 13), Continental (PT 17) or Jacobs (PT 18) radial engines. The U.S. Navy took delivery of their first Stearman (called the NS-1) in 1934. Powered with the obsolete but readily available Wright R-790-8 engine, the NS-1 proved its worth as a primary trainer. The Navy purchased several thousand of an improved model, the N2S. The N2S was built in five sub variants, each variant being equipped with a different model engine. Additionally, the Canadian armed forces took delivery of 300 PT 27s, a winterized version of the PT 17.

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A later, more powerful version of the Stearman, the Model 76, was purchased by Argentina, Brazil and the Philippines. The Model 76 featured wing mounted .30 caliber machine guns, a bomb rack between the landing struts and a single machine gun for the rear cockpit. These aircraft were used as light attack or reconnaissance aircraft. After World War II, many Stearmans were fitted with Pratt & Whitney 450 HP engines and utilized as crop dusters. These more powerful Stearmans are also commonly used for wing-walking or aerobatic routines at air shows.

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Here is a guide for the various Air Corps and Navy versions produced during WWII

Army Air Corps versions

PT-13 (215 HP) R-680-5 Lycoming engine
PT-13A (220 HP) R-680-7 Lycoming engine and improved instrumentation
PT-13B R-680-11 Lycoming engine
PT-13C with night-flying instrumentation
PT-13D R-680-17 Lycoming engine
PT-17 R-670-5 Continental engine
PT-17A blind-flying version
PT-17B pest-control equipment
PT-18 R-755-7 Jacobs engine
PT-18A blind-flying
PT-27 Canadian export model, winterized

Navy versions

N2S-1 R-670-14 Continental engine
N2S-2 R-680-8 Lycoming engine
N2S-3 R-670-4 Continental engine
N2S-4 R-670-5 Continental engine
N2S-5 R-680-17 Lycoming engine

General Specifications

First flight (Model 73): Nov. 26, 1934
Model number: Wichita 75
Classification: Trainer
Span: 32 feet 2 inches
Length: 24 feet 3 inches
Gross weight: 2,717 pounds
Top speed: 124 mph
Cruising speed: 106 mph
Range: 505 miles
Ceiling: 11,200 feet
Power: 220-horsepower Continental R-670-5 piston radial engine (PT-17)
Accommodation: 2 crew

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