

YESTERDAY'S WINGS

THE ALEXANDER FLYABOUT



The squat Alexander Flyabout was designed expressly to meet the general aviation marketing conditions following the Great Depression. Good performance on low horsepower was achieved with long, gliderlike wings. This is the D-2 model, powered by the 45-hp Szekely radial engine. Author's photos.

by PETER M. BOWERS / AOPA 54408

■ ■ One of the immediate effects of the Great Depression was to virtually wipe out production of the large and relatively low-powered three-seat biplanes that formed the backbone of the sport-trainer market. A few manufacturers, most notably Monocoupe and Aeronca, were in the market with two-seat monoplanes before the crash, but neither had a really significant share of the market at the time; rather, they were oddities in an era dominated by the big biplane.

The depression changed the monoplane/biplane ratio drastically, and in short order old-time builders rushed into the market with new, low-powered, low-cost two-seat monoplanes. It was a desperate attempt to stay in business by catching the few private pilots' dollars that were still available. Notable examples of the new monoplanes were

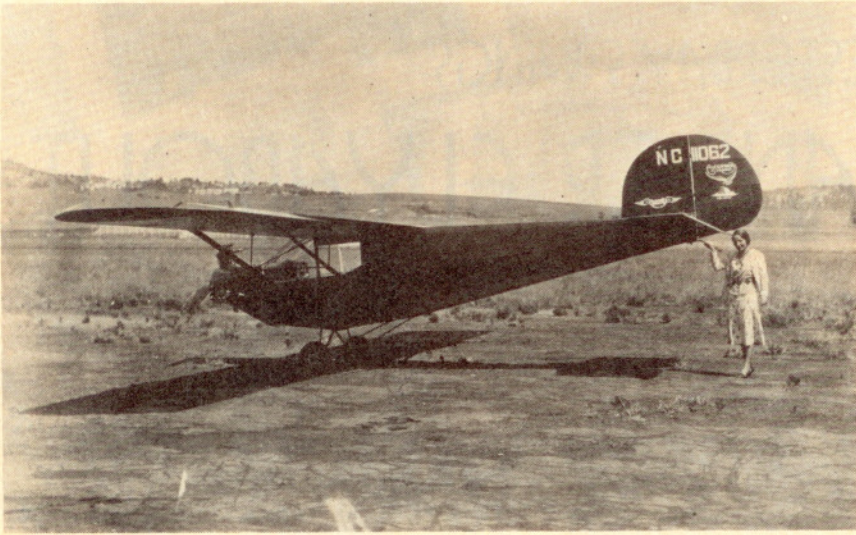
American Eagle's "Eaglet" and Alexander's "Flyabout."

Alexander Industries of Colorado Springs, Colo., a producer of training and sales films, got into aviation in 1925. Its second design, the basic Eaglerock biplane, was a winner, and—with a variety of engines ranging from 90 to 220 hp—was one of the "Big Three" in the three-seat biplane field from 1926 through 1929.

Alexander's depression baby, the D-1 Flyabout, came about as close to being a powered sailplane as a side-by-side, two-seat cabin monoplane could be at the time. It seemed to have much more wing than was really needed, but that reflected Alexander's previous philosophy of generous wing area for altitude capability. (The factory was located at an elevation of about 6,000 feet, and the old Eaglerocks were superior mountain flyers.)

Designer Proctor Nichols recognized the importance of long wings and light

In spite of its light weight and low power, the Flyabout was not really a small airplane, as can be seen by the relative size of the woman who is holding up the tail of this pioneer ultralight.



THE ALEXANDER FLYABOUT continued

loadings for successful flight with low power. However, the original engine picked for the Flyabout, the new 37-hp Continental A.40, wasn't quite up to handling the long-winged craft in its home environment. Although the D-1 was the first airplane certificated with the A.40, the little flat-four was quickly replaced by the 45-hp Szekeley SR-3-0, a three-cylinder radial. While the A.40 went on to become famous and establish the reputations of such famous lightplanes as the Taylor E2 Cub and the post-depression Taylorcraft "A", it was unable to do the same for the pioneering Flyabout.

The Flyabout's airframe was the ulti-

The first four Flyabouts were the D-1 models, with the 37-hp Continental A.40 flat-four engines. These proved unsuitable, and three of the four D-1s built were refitted with Szekeley engines. This is the second production D-1 after its conversion to a D-2.



THE ALEXANDER FLYABOUT D-2

Specifications and Performance

Span	37 ft 10 in
Length	21 ft 7 in
Wing area	175 sq ft
Powerplant	Szekely SR-3-0, 45 hp
Empty weight	590 lb
Gross weight	982 lb
High speed	90 mph
Cruise speed	77 mph
Initial climb	600 fpm
Ceiling	13,000 ft
Range	175 mi (3 gph)
Price	\$1,590

mate in structural simplicity, as dictated by the requirement for low cost (the selling price was \$1,465). The fuselage and tail were welded-steel tubing, and the wing was wood frame, all fabric covered. The prototype D-1 had rubber-cord shock absorbers in the landing gear, but the later models used rigid steel-tube gear with the shock taken by the new Goodyear Airwheels. The tail skid was a flat-leaf spring and was novel in being steerable, a welcome feature in the absence of wheel brakes.

The D-1 was awarded Approved Type Certificate No. 439 in July 1931, but only four examples were built. An improved model, designated D-2 and using the Szekely engine, received ATC No. 449 six weeks later. The A.40 proved so unsuited to the D-1 that three of the four Flyabouts were re-engined with Szekelys and redesignated D-2s.

Unfortunately, the improvement did little to save either the career of the Flyabout or the fortunes of the Alexander Aircraft Co. The company closed down in 1932, but some of the employees, led by Proctor Nichols, formed a service organization known as Aircraft Mechanics. Operating in the same plant, this firm took over the design rights to all Alexander airplanes and continued to supply parts and service. Aircraft Mechanics also sold a few more Flyabouts, built new or assembled from Alexander Industries' parts, into 1935.

Accurate production figures are not available, but approximately 12 D-2s were built by Alexander—a few more coming from Aircraft Mechanics. □