

SELLING THE DREAM

*'Look, it's a Piper Cub'
—How everyman came
to know lightplanes*

BY THOMAS A. HORNE



Much of the Cub's success can be attributed to the marketing and promotional schemes devised by the Taylor Brothers Aircraft Corporation and the Piper Aircraft Corporation. While many of these schemes were deliberate efforts, others were a product of fate and spontaneity.

The airplane's endearing name dates to September 1928, when a test pilot for C. Gilbert (C. G.) Taylor's company, George Kirchendall, first flew a nameless prototype of what was to become the Taylor E-2 Cub. It was powered by a two-cylinder, 20-hp Brownbach "Tiger Kitten" engine. Taylor's accountant, Gilbert Hadrel, suggested calling the airplane the Cub, playing on the name of the engine. At this time, the company was based in Bradford, Pennsylvania.

The Taylor E-2 Cub was certificated in November 1931. The first E-2s sold for \$1,295—a lot of money in those days when the nation's economy had reached one of the lowest points in the depression. For \$333 down, with a 25-percent discount below list price, an airport operator could begin giving flying lessons for about 10 dollars an hour—one-third the cost of training in most competing airplanes, such as the Fleet and the Curtiss JN-2 "Jenny." Buy two Cubs and you qualified as a dealer able to take advantage of a 15-percent commission for each airplane sold.

Lest these costs appear excessively low, remember that a dollar then was quite different from a dollar today. Making adjustments for changes in the consumer price index over the years, the U. S. Department of Labor figures that a 1931 dollar was worth approximately \$7.06 in today's currency. Adjusted to today's dollar value, 1931's \$10 per hour of dual instruction rises to \$70.66. That gives an idea of the relative cost of learning to fly in the Depression. Learning to fly—even in a Cub—was expensive.

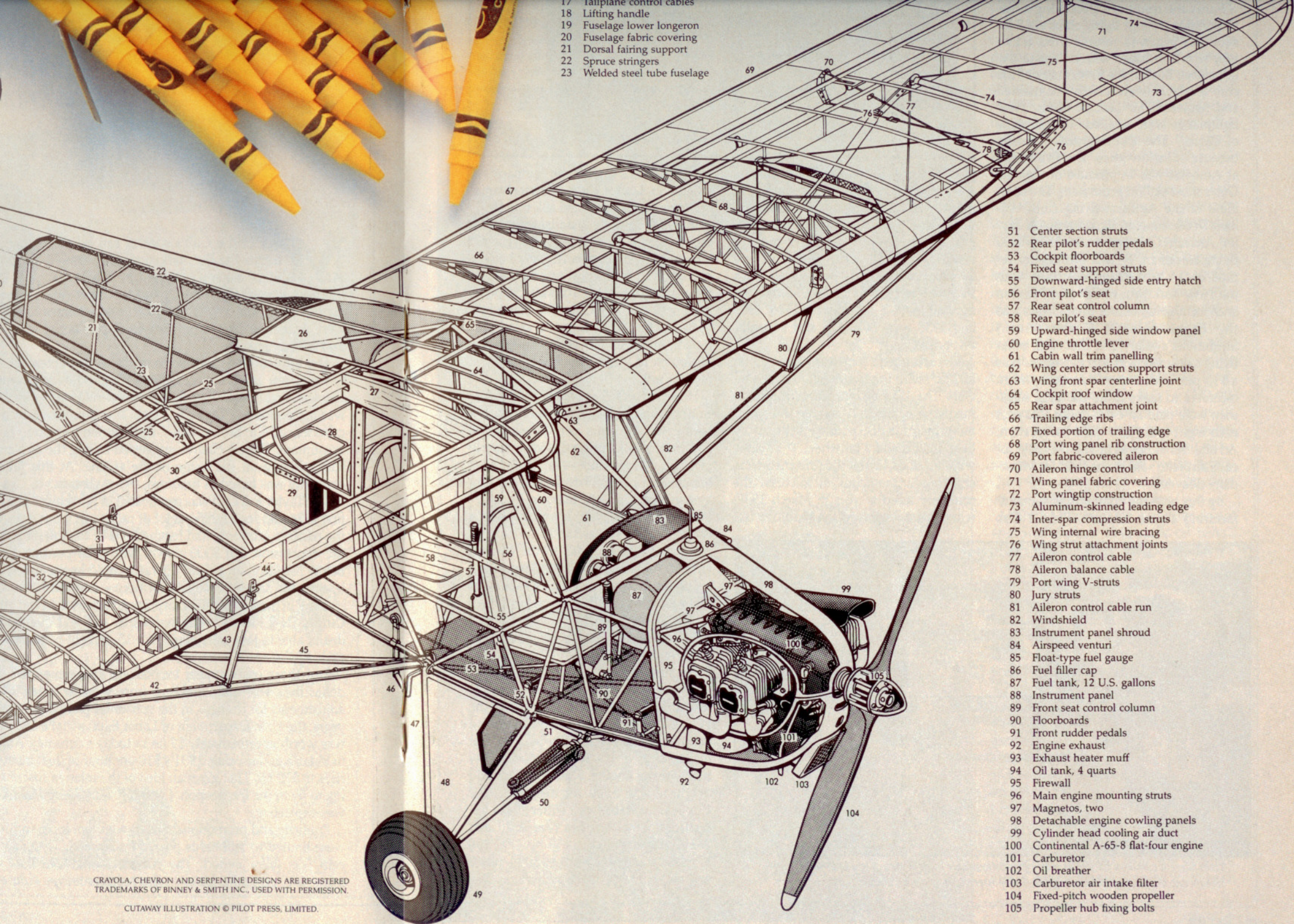
Publicity and promotional efforts were not top priorities but were limited to billboards posted on airports. The main concern was sales, period. The company established a "flying salesman" program; factory sales representatives scoured the

nation's airports, looking for potential dealers. Sales efforts were supervised by sales manager Jacob W. "Jake" Miller. Miller remained with Piper until his retirement in 1972, when he was the company's senior vice president of marketing.

From the outset, the goal was not personal ownership; the intent was to establish a dealer network in hopes that dealers could hook people on the ease and low cost of learning to fly Cubs. Sales to individuals would come later, once Cub trainees compared the Cub's cost with those of many other lightplanes of the day, which began at nearly twice the price and soared into the tens of thousands. The Cub's closest competitor was the Aeronca C-2, which sold for \$1,495, but it and its successors never experienced the success that Cub was to achieve. Because of the depression and Taylor's pricing policy, most private pilots had few other realistic alternatives when it came to buying an airplane.

Still, times were tough. By the end of 1931 only 22 E-2s were sold. The company had intended to make its money on volume, sacrificing profit margin per airplane. But with such a low volume, profits were not enough to keep the company afloat. And 1932 was just as bad—22 sales once again.

William Thomas Piper Sr., Taylor Aircraft's treasurer, borrowed heavily from the hometown banks of Bradford. He used projected income from his oil well business as collateral. In spite of this, employees sometimes could not be paid their 20-cents-per-hour wages, and inventory was kept very low. Frequently, a customer visiting Bradford to pick up his airplane had to be tactfully distracted while Piper kited checks (engines were paid for with cash on delivery) and workers quickly bolted the engine to the airframe. After lunch—if all went well—the customer's airplane would be ready for delivery. To mitigate the employees' plight, Piper began a policy that offered flying lessons to all workers at a dollar an hour. This boosted morale and ensured high-quality workmanship, as Piper reasoned that an employee who built the airplanes he flew was more likely to do a thorough construction job. But the Depression deepened. In 1933, 17 E-2s were sold.

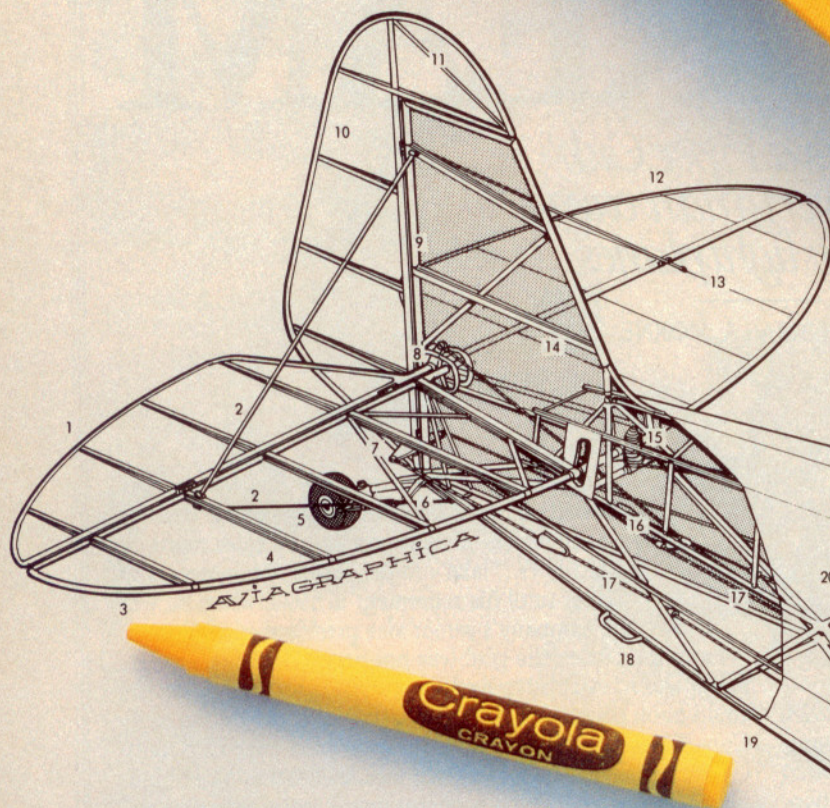
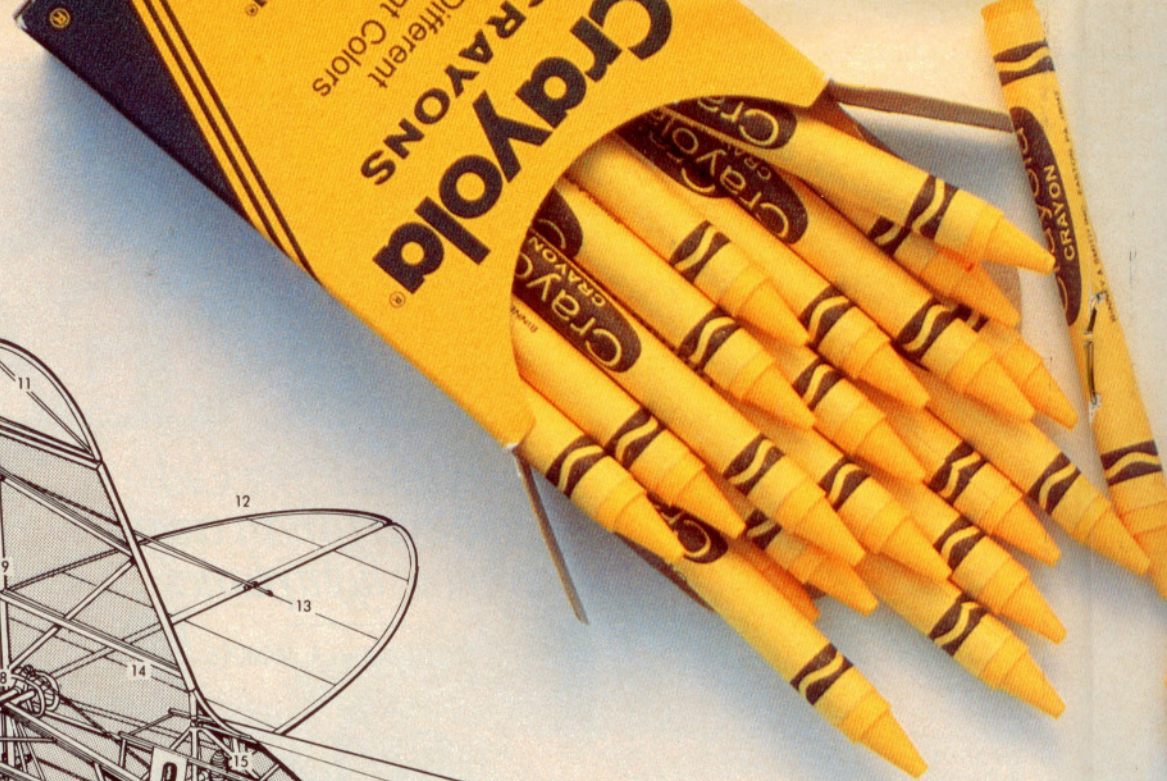


- 17 Tailplane control cables
- 18 Lifting handle
- 19 Fuselage lower longeron
- 20 Fuselage fabric covering
- 21 Dorsal fairing support
- 22 Spruce stringers
- 23 Welded steel tube fuselage

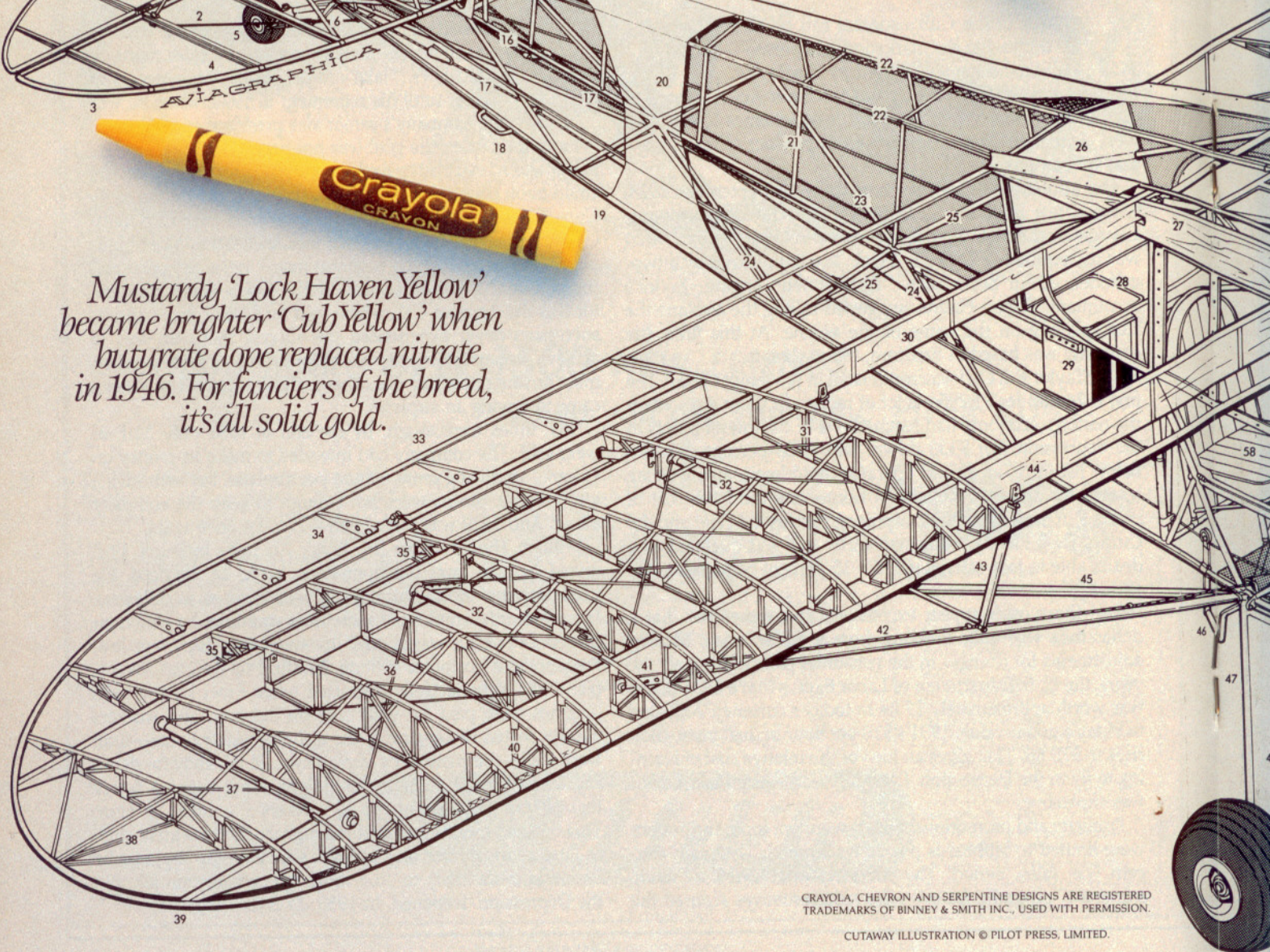
- 51 Center section struts
- 52 Rear pilot's rudder pedals
- 53 Cockpit floorboards
- 54 Fixed seat support struts
- 55 Downward-hinged side entry hatch
- 56 Front pilot's seat
- 57 Rear seat control column
- 58 Rear pilot's seat
- 59 Upward-hinged side window panel
- 60 Engine throttle lever
- 61 Cabin wall trim panelling
- 62 Wing center section support struts
- 63 Wing front spar centerline joint
- 64 Cockpit roof window
- 65 Rear spar attachment joint
- 66 Trailing edge ribs
- 67 Fixed portion of trailing edge
- 68 Port wing panel rib construction
- 69 Port fabric-covered aileron
- 70 Aileron hinge control
- 71 Wing panel fabric covering
- 72 Port wingtip construction
- 73 Aluminum-skinned leading edge
- 74 Inter-spar compression struts
- 75 Wing internal wire bracing
- 76 Wing strut attachment joints
- 77 Aileron control cable
- 78 Aileron balance cable
- 79 Port wing V-struts
- 80 Jury struts
- 81 Aileron control cable run
- 82 Windshield
- 83 Instrument panel shroud
- 84 Airspeed venturi
- 85 Float-type fuel gauge
- 86 Fuel filler cap
- 87 Fuel tank, 12 U.S. gallons
- 88 Instrument panel
- 89 Front seat control column
- 90 Floorboards
- 91 Front rudder pedals
- 92 Engine exhaust
- 93 Exhaust heater muff
- 94 Oil tank, 4 quarts
- 95 Firewall
- 96 Main engine mounting struts
- 97 Magnetos, two
- 98 Detachable engine cowling panels
- 99 Cylinder head cooling air duct
- 100 Continental A-65-8 flat-four engine
- 101 Carburetor
- 102 Oil breather
- 103 Carburetor air intake filter
- 104 Fixed-pitch wooden propeller
- 105 Propeller hub fixing bolts

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CUTAWAY ILLUSTRATION © PILOT PRESS, LIMITED.



Mustardy 'Lock Haven Yellow' became brighter 'Cub Yellow' when butyrate dope replaced nitrate in 1946. For fanciers of the breed, it's all solid gold.



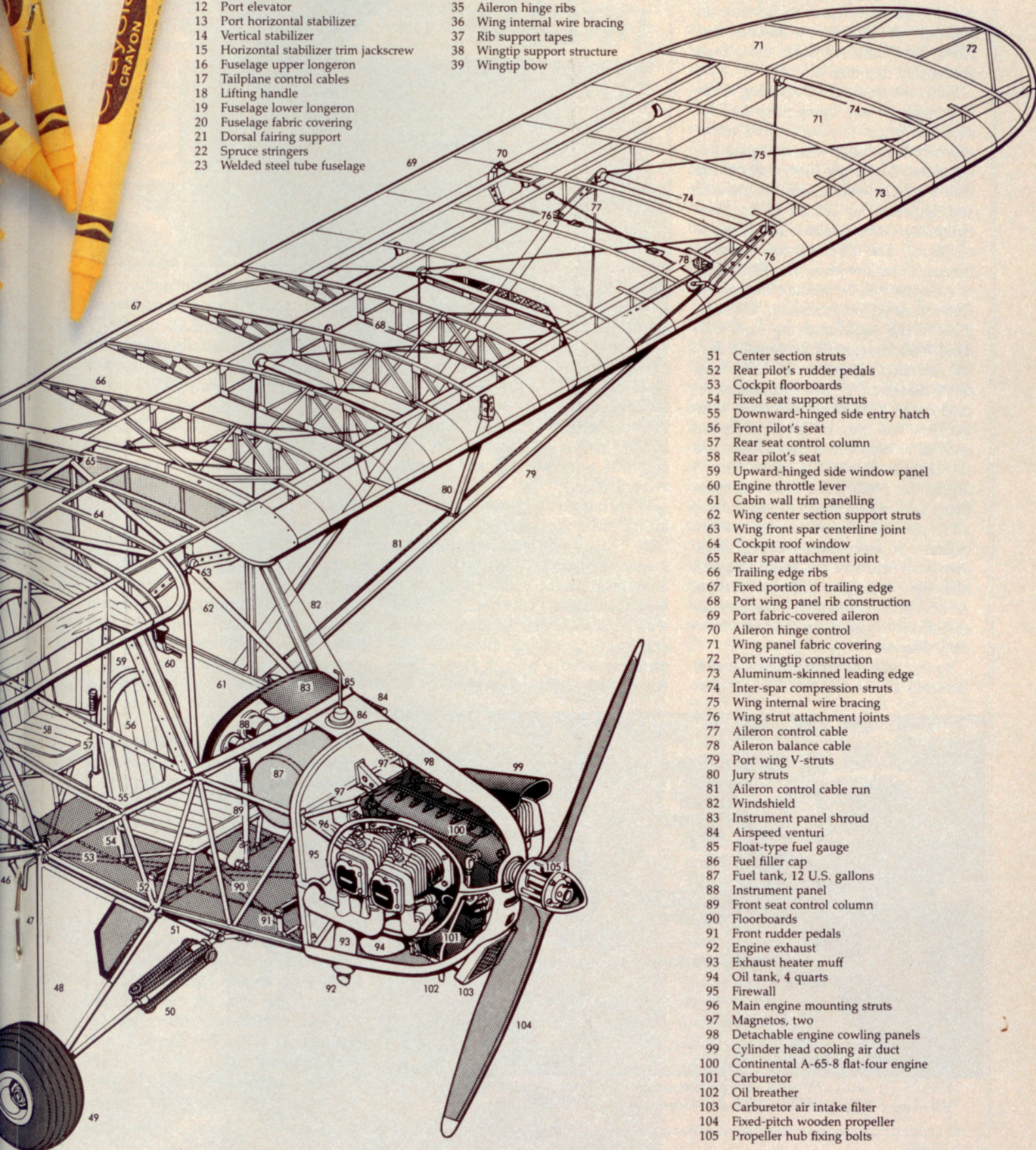
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CUTAWAY ILLUSTRATION © PILOT PRESS, LIMITED.

- 1 Starboard elevator
- 2 Tailplane bracing cables
- 3 Starboard horizontal stabilizer
- 4 Welded steel tailplate
- 5 Castoring tailwheel
- 6 Tailwheel self-centering spring
- 7 Rudder hinge control
- 8 Elevator hinge control
- 9 Sternpost
- 10 Rudder construction
- 11 Rudder horn balance
- 12 Port elevator
- 13 Port horizontal stabilizer
- 14 Vertical stabilizer
- 15 Horizontal stabilizer trim jackscrew
- 16 Fuselage upper longeron
- 17 Tailplane control cables
- 18 Lifting handle
- 19 Fuselage lower longeron
- 20 Fuselage fabric covering
- 21 Dorsal fairing support
- 22 Spruce stringers
- 23 Welded steel tube fuselage

- 24 Diagonal frame members
- 25 Horizontal spacers
- 26 Rear cabin bulkhead
- 27 Wing root bib
- 28 Baggage compartment
- 29 Battery (optional)
- 30 Spruce rear spar
- 31 Wing lattice rib construction
- 32 Inter-spar compression struts
- 33 Starboard aileron
- 34 Fabric-covered, aluminum aileron
- 35 Aileron hinge ribs
- 36 Wing internal wire bracing
- 37 Rib support tapes
- 38 Wingtip support structure
- 39 Wingtip bow

- 40 Leading edge nose ribs
- 41 Wing strut attachment joint
- 42 Aileron control cable run
- 43 Jury struts
- 44 Spruce front spar
- 45 Wing V-struts
- 46 Boarding step
- 47 Main undercarriage hinged leg struts
- 48 Fabric-covered leg fairing
- 49 Starboard mainwheel
- 50 Elastic cord shock absorber



- 51 Center section struts
- 52 Rear pilot's rudder pedals
- 53 Cockpit floorboards
- 54 Fixed seat support struts
- 55 Downward-hinged side entry hatch
- 56 Front pilot's seat
- 57 Rear seat control column
- 58 Rear pilot's seat
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Once the problems with the E-2's 37-hp Continental A-40 engines were ironed out in 1934 (a second thrust bearing was added to the crankshaft, and the engine was fitted with a dual-magneto ignition system and better-fitting cylinder head gaskets; these changes eliminated what threatened to become an epidemic of broken crankshafts and blown head gaskets), sales more than quadrupled to a total of 71.

Partly the result of a slackening in the Depression, college flying clubs at 15 institutions began to resume their activities, which included intercollegiate flying meets. But by this time, many of the club airplanes were poorly maintained and neglected for lack of funds. New lightplanes were needed. The airplane of choice? The Cub, naturally, chiefly because of its low price. The flying club at Amherst was to produce one of the Cub's most skillful promoters. The president of the Amherst flying club, William D. Strohmeier, signed on with Taylor Aircraft Corporation in 1936 as a flying salesman. (When Strohmeier retired as an advertising executive with the New York firm of Friedlich, Fearon and Strohmeier, one of their clients was the Piper Aircraft Corporation.) Strohmeier's salary, like that of all other flying salesmen, was \$15 per week, plus a \$15 per week expense account. As an incentive to make more contacts, salesmen were paid an extra dollar a day for each night spent in a different location. An additional bonus of \$25 was paid for each airplane sold in the field for immediate delivery.

By this time the company was manufacturing a new airplane, the J-2 Cub

SELLING THE DREAM

FREE! Mail this cover for beautiful new FREE Catalog of latest Piper Cub Airplanes. AND IF YOU WANT YOUR PILOT'S WINGS—as pictured here—enclose ten cents in stamps or coin. Mail to:
PIPER AIRCRAFT CORPORATION, FEDERAL ST., LOCK HAVEN, PA.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____

NOT MAIL MATCHES



(the "J" stands for Walter C. Jamouneau, a newly hired designer whose improvements—an enclosed cockpit and optional side door/window combination, among others—pleased Piper but angered Taylor). The price of the J-2 was \$1,495, but a partially painted, all-black J-2 was offered at \$995. The J-2 did better than the E-2. J-2 sales for 1936, 1937 and 1938 were 515, 658 and 23 units, respectively.

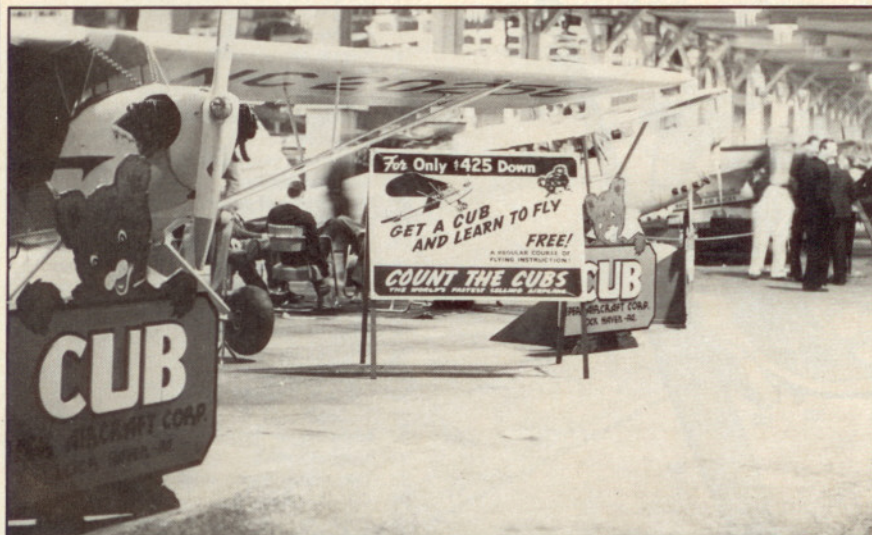
The salesmen's jobs were made easier in 1937, with the introduction of the J-3 Cub. The J-3 had numerous improvements over the J-2: aluminum spars, more instruments, padded seats, cabin heat, brakes and a tailwheel. (J-2s came with tail skids.) But if the salesmen were enjoying a modicum of success, the company faced a crisis in March 1937, when a fire destroyed the Bradford fac-

tory. At Miller's urging, the company relocated to Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, occupying an abandoned silk mill.

In 1938, Taylor's dissatisfaction with the changes to his original design caused him to leave the company. Piper bought him out, and the reconstituted company, now called the Piper Aircraft Corporation, sold 647 J-3 Cubs. In that same year, Strohmeier was made sales promotion manager. His imaginative ploys did much to increase public awareness of the Cub.

How do you sell airplanes in a depression? Strohmeier's answer was matchbooks. For 40 cents per thousand, he had matchbooks printed with a simple message: "Piper Cub—easy to fly, easy to buy; For only \$333 down you can buy a new Piper Cub and learn to fly free." On the inside of the matchbook was a coupon with spaces for a prospect's name and address. Mail in the coupon with 10 cents and you would be mailed a Cub lapel pin or tie clasp, a catalog of Piper airplanes, and a pamphlet, "How To Fly a Piper Cub." The response was tremendous, and Piper made a two-cent profit on each mailing.

Business picked up. In 1939, 1,347 J-3s were sold. Factory employee wages rose to 60 cents an hour. The price of the J-3 was held at \$1,495, and the increased volume of sales raised profits. The cost of building a J-3 was approximately \$300 for the engine, \$300 for labor and overhead and \$300 for materials. The Cub was available with either 40- or 50-hp Continental engines (the A-40 and A-50, respectively); a 50-hp, AC-150 Franklin engine; a 50-hp, M-50 Menasco engine; a 50-hp, three-cylinder radial,



Cubs were a common fixture at many expositions and trade shows. This 1946 photograph shows one on display in Los Angeles. The poster reads "Get a Cub and learn to fly free."

Lenape "Papoose" engine (see "Lenape Papoose," p. 63), or a 50-hp, O-145 Lycoming engine.

With the approach of World War II, sales received another boost, thanks to government policy. In December 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced what was to become the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) Program. Funded in large part by the federal government's newly-created National Youth Administration, the goal was to train 20,000 new private pilots per year.

By the end of 1941, approximately 250,000 students were enrolled in public and private high school and college aviation courses. The Cub's heyday had begun in earnest, and Strohmeier knew how to exploit the turn of events.

The days of the flying salesman were largely over. In his place came nationwide publicity campaigns, and sales totaling over \$4.5 million for the years from 1938 to 1940. Two new Cub models, the J-4 Cub Coupe (a "luxury" model of the J-3, with fabric-lined cabin

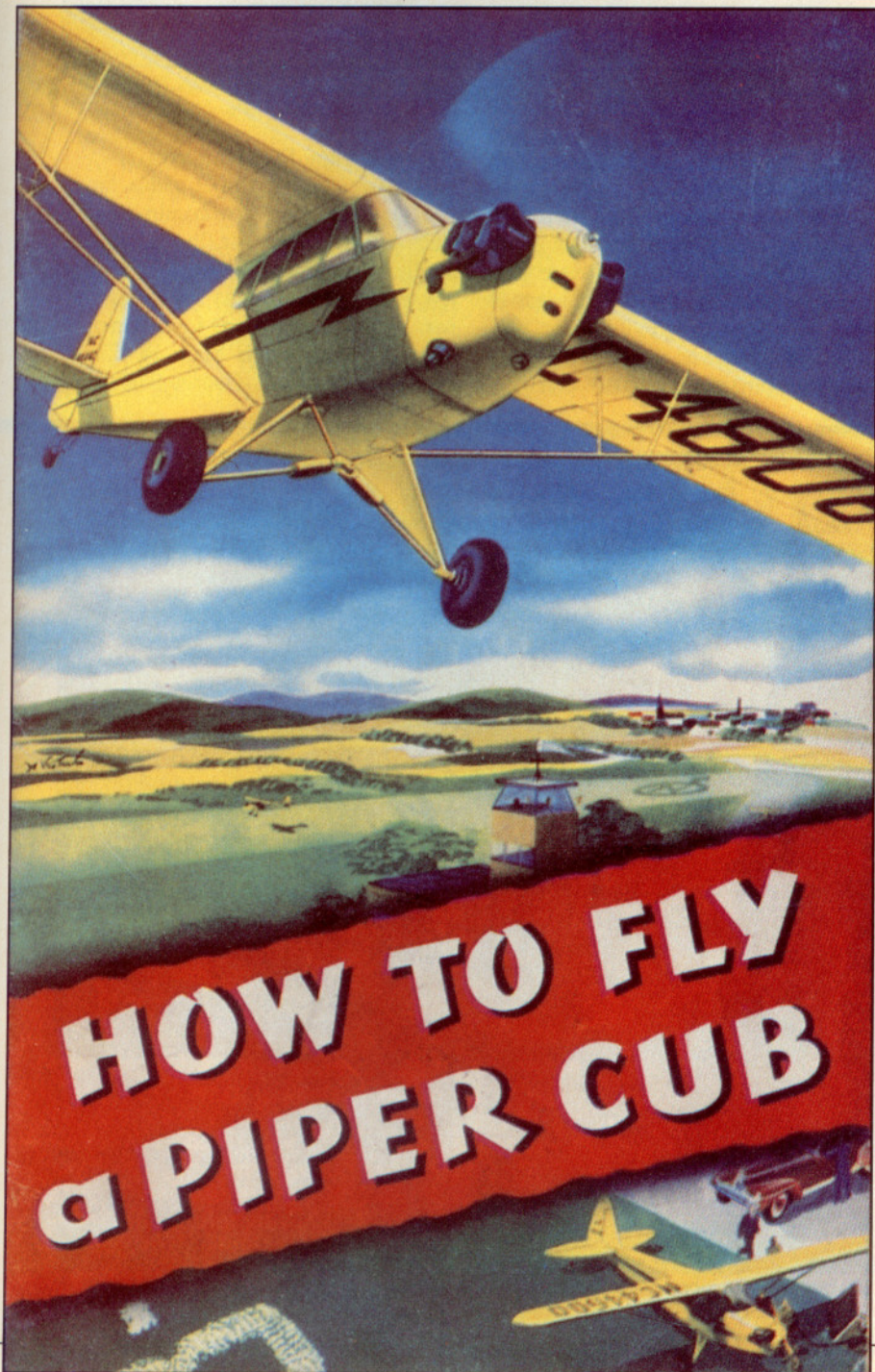
and floor mats, and engines ranging from 50- to 75-hp) and the J-5 Cruiser (a three-seat model with a 75-hp engine) were introduced.

At the 1939 World's Fair in New York City, Strohmeier succeeded in arranging for two Cubs to be displayed. One was at the RCA pavilion, where it served as a model to demonstrate the first television set. Another was set up at the transportation pavilion. The transportation people had some strict rules: no advertising. Strohmeier dodged this rule by trailing the "basic black" \$995 J-3 to the pavilion at six o'clock in the morning, before anyone else had arrived. He asked for, and received, an N-number of NC995. After he set up the airplane at the pavilion, his last act was to peel off a piece of black tape covering the space between the "NC" and the "995." Underneath was a small dollar sign.

Another publicity event was the Cub Convoy. This was timed to coincide with the annual Miami All-American Air Maneuvers, a popular pre-war air show. Piper and the Gulf Oil Company joined in an effort to support a mass fly-in of Cubs to Miami. Any Cub pilot in the United States was eligible to participate, and most arranged their flights in formations of several dozen. Gulf paid for the gas. Groups from the entire country met at Orlando, Florida, planning a huge formation flight to Miami. Ironically, thunderstorms south of its course forced the Convoy to seek shelter at a small grass strip at Vero Beach, Florida, site of Piper's present headquarters. Once the storm passed, all the Cubs flew on to Miami without incident.

Another memorable publicity event was Strohmeier's 1941 raffle on behalf of an organization to help disabled Royal Air Force pilots, RAF pilots' widows and their dependents—the RAF Benevolent Fund. The Battle of Britain was on, and President Roosevelt's Lend-Lease program was designed to help England. (One portion of this legislation, House Resolution 1776, gave old American destroyers to the British.) Strohmeier's idea was to convince a Piper dealer from each of the 48 states to purchase a silver-painted Cub marked with a British roundel on the fuselage and bearing the name "Flitfire"—a play on the Supermarine Spitfire, a contemporary British fighter. On April 29, 1941, all 48 Flitfires flew to New York City's LaGuardia airport. Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia presided over the ceremonies. Comely young women from each

Matchbook advertising (left) was favored in the 1930s because of low cost and high volume. Mail ten cents to Lock Haven and you received Cub wings and the booklet pictured below.



state christened the Cubs by popping balloons filled with champagne gas. Later that evening there was a black-tie party in the airport cafe. British officers from the battleship *H. M. S. Malaya* were the guests of honor. At the dance, singer Libby Holman sang the hit song "Body and Soul" for the first time. Then came the raffle. A silver Flitfire, number NC1776 (a number Strohmeier sought to commemorate the House resolution) was won by a New York City man whose name is lost to history (see "A Flitfire's Odyssey," below).

There were radio promotions for the Cub over a nightly radio show called "Wings of Destiny." This popular adventure show was broadcast nationwide, sponsored by the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company. Each week, Brown and Williamson gave away a Cub to one of the show's listeners.

In 1940 and 1941 Piper sold 1,977 and 1,855 J-3 Cubs to the civilian market. The military market had yet to be tapped. In the summer of 1940 Strohmeier devoted his time to convincing the U. S. Army Air Corps of the Cub's military usefulness. He gave demonstration flights in Tennessee, New



Salesmen William D. Strohmeier (left) and Thomas H. Davis (right) in 1939. Strohmeier went on to head an advertising agency; Davis became chairman of the board of Piedmont Airlines.

Mexico, Texas and California. One day, while at Camp Polk, Louisiana, he invited an Army colonel along for a ride, so that he could check bivouac areas. The colonel said he had a private pilot certificate, earned flying a Stearman while on duty in the Philippines in 1937 and 1938. "He was very good with a map," Strohmeier remembers. The colo-

nel was Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The Army bought the Cub idea. From 1942 to 1945, the Army acquired 5,673 Cubs designated as L-4s (the "L" stands for liaison). During World War II, the L-4 (often referred to as the Grasshopper) served many roles, from personal transport of Generals Mark W. Clark, George C. Marshall, George S. Patton,

A FLITFIRE'S ODYSSEY

The New York mystery man who won the Flitfire raffle sold the aircraft to Safair, a fixed base operator located in Sunbury, Pennsylvania. There, it served as a training airplane for the Defense Department. Two owners later, it wound up in the hands of Marquis C. J. "Old Man" Markle (one of the first Pennsylvania air mail pilots, and whose pilot certificate is number 1776) and R. Harding "Breity" Breithaupt, who, until his recent retirement, was part owner and chairman of the board of directors of Reading Aviation and Suburban Airlines in Reading, Pennsylvania.

In 1976, representatives of President Richard M. Nixon asked Markle and Breithaupt to give the N-number over to Air Force One, in honor of the nation's bicentennial year. No deal, said Markle.

In 1982, Markle and Breithaupt sold NC1776 (by then painted yellow and bearing no Flitfire markings) to Steven Rubino of Woodbury, Connecticut. But Rubino had a problem: no convenient airport to keep his Cub. He tried one grass strip and farmer's field after another, to no avail. A telephone call to Lawrence Pond, owner of Goodhill Farms Airport, a private strip in Roxbury, Connecticut, brought the same response. But when Rubino mentioned that the airplane was a Cub, Pond immediately asked "Is it



Strohmeier, as one of his publicity schemes, flew NC1776 around the Statue of Liberty. It was part of a campaign to raise money for the RAF Benevolent Fund—and Piper.

NC1776, by any chance?" In disbelief, Rubino listened to the story of NC1776's pilot becoming lost while on a promotional tour in 1950. The pilot made a precautionary landing at Goodhill Farms. Pond was then a child of 10, but he remembered the event vividly. "Welcome back," he said. The airplane is

now based at Goodhill Farms, along with three other classic airplanes.

Rubino says he plans to fly NC1776 to the "Sentimental Journey to Cub Haven" fly-in at the Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, airport, where it began its odyssey as a Flitfire 46 years ago.

—TAH

Omar N. Bradley and Eisenhower, to services such as medical evacuation, artillery spotting and covert operations. When the Nazis invaded Norway, King Haakon VII fled in a ski-equipped Cub and used the airplane to maintain contact with loyalists to his regime. Even the British prime minister, Sir Winston L. S. Churchill, once flew in a Cub.

War correspondents used L-4s to gain access to battle areas and to take photographs. In their reports, there was frequent mention of the airplane and its attributes. The Cub's patriotic image was now firmly entrenched in the American mind. Sure, Taylor's airplane—the Taylorcraft—and other lightplanes saw service in the war, but Strohmeier did his job well. To just about everyone, any single-engine lightplane was a Piper Cub.

At war's end there was a pervasive belief that private flying would become universally popular. For a time, this sentiment appeared to be well-founded. Sales went through the ceiling. Production of J-3 Cubs reached 938 in 1945 and 6,320 in 1946. Piper built 20 Cubs per day in the Lock Haven plant and another 10 per day at a manufacturing fa-

cility in Ponca City, Oklahoma. Cub advertising went upscale, with full-page color advertisements in *Reader's Digest* and *Country Gentleman* magazines. Everything looked rosy. The lightplane industry envisioned mass ownership of the personal lightplane on the scale of the personal automobile. But it was not to be. The market was glutted with inventory. In March 1947 sales came to a virtual standstill. The Cub and other lightplanes had prospered on government support. Without it, demand shrivelled. Production costs rose. Prices rose. Pilot war veterans did not buy lightplanes as anticipated. No more new J-3s were sold after 1947.

There are a number of theories concerning the reasons for this precipitous decline in lightplane sales. One asserts that the large number of ex-military pilots were simply tired of flying, and diverted their attention to returning to school or raising families instead of retaining their interest in aviation. Another explanation is that lightplanes such as the Cub did not appeal to pilots and prospective pilots because of a perception of their limited utility. The introduction of the Beechcraft model 35 Bo-

nanza in 1947 reinforces this view. The V-tail Bonanza has a more modern design than lightplanes produced in the pre-war years, and cruises at speeds that matched those of contemporary airliners. It was a success in spite of a price tag four times that of the Cub.

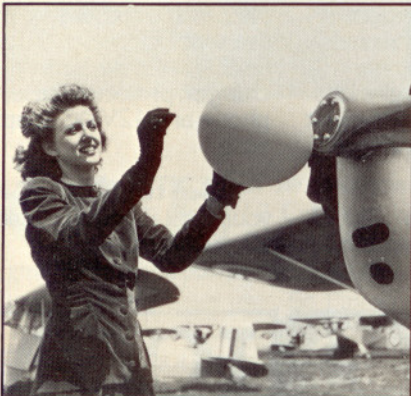
Though other Cub derivatives (the PA-11 Cub Special, PA-12 Super Cruiser, PA-14 Family Cruiser, PA-15 and -17 Vagabond, PA-16 Clipper and PA-18 Super Cub) would be produced in the years that followed, none matched the popularity of the basic J-3. With total sales of 20,870 airplanes it is among the most successful lightplanes of all time. To a certain extent, the Cub may have become too popular an idiom for lightplanes. When Piper introduced the twin-engine Apache (1954) and Aztec (1960), it had to fight the Cub image. "When is a Piper not a Cub?" the advertisements read. Beyond doubt, its name is still the most recognized, both among pilots and non-enthusiasts. Though a King Air may be flying overhead, the unenlightened are apt to call it a Cub. After all, everyone knows the Cub. Taylor, Piper, Miller and Strohmeier saw to that. □

LIFE/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS



Forty-eight Flitfires—one from each state—assembled at LaGuardia Field, New York City, in May 1941. After Mayor LaGuardia gave a speech, there was a black-tie dinner-dance.

JOHN PHILLIPS, LIFE MAGAZINE ©1941, 1969 TIME INC.



The christening of a Flitfire with "champagne gas"—marketese for CO₂.

JOHN PHILLIPS, LIFE MAGAZINE ©1941, 1969 TIME INC.



Guests of honor at the dinner-dance were officers of H. M. S. Malaya.

JOHN PHILLIPS, LIFE MAGAZINE ©1941, 1969 TIME INC.



At the dance, singer Libby Holman first sang the hit song "Body and Soul."

JOHN PHILLIPS, LIFE MAGAZINE ©1941, 1969 TIME INC.



Standard paint scheme for a Flitfire was all silver, with British roundels.