

# ***The Ford Air Tours 1925 - 1931***



***A complete narrative and pictorial history  
of the Seven National Air Tour competitions  
for the Edsel B. Ford Reliability Trophy.***

Reprinted in support of the 2003 National Air Tour.

***by Lesley Forden***

Copies of this book may be ordered at [www.NationalAirTour.org](http://www.NationalAirTour.org) or by calling 800-225-5575  
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# THE FORD AIR TOURS 1925 – 1931

by  
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2003 additions and corrections by  
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AVIATION FOUNDATION OF AMERICA  
*A 501(c)(3) public charity*  
New Brighton, Minnesota

THE FORD AIR TOURS  
1925 – 1931

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This book has been reprinted by digitizing an original printed copy, as the original materials have been lost to time. The text has been reset utilizing optical character recognition software in order to accommodate corrections and additions. While every effort has been made to insure correctness during this process, some errors may have occurred which have escaped our attention. We apologize if this is the case and we appreciate your indulgence in this regard.

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A special thank you goes to the estate of Lesley Forden for donating the rights to this wonderful book. Thanks also to our friends who assisted us in making the corrections and additions. And Lesley, thanks to you for writing this book in the first place.

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# New Edition Introduction

Dear Reader:

It was 10:35 a.m. on December 17, 1903 when, at Kitty Hawk, N.C., the Wright brothers made the world's first powered, controlled and sustained flight. It was a momentous occasion and the age of aviation had just begun.

As with so many innovations, some of the greatest advancements come not long after the first successful experiments. For those in the United States, many advances in aviation occurred during the period between World War I and World War II – a time referred to as the “Golden Age of Aviation.”

Ironically, the Golden Age of Aviation is sometimes forgotten – overshadowed by the aircraft and action of the two wars that framed it. When the period is remembered, it is often a recollection that Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic or that Amelia Earhart disappeared over the Pacific. Yet, the Golden Age of Aviation was a period of extremely significant advancements in all things aviation including aircraft, infrastructure and the public acceptance of air transportation.

Certainly the National Air Tours were one of the crowning achievements of the Golden Age. Between 1925 and 1931 the National Air Tours for the Edsel B. Ford Reliability Trophy took place to promote aviation advancements in both aircraft technology and aviation infrastructure. Dozens of aircraft featuring the latest in aircraft development, would tour across the United States creating a traveling air show of sorts. The annual tour promoted aviation and encouraged cities and towns to build airports or improve their existing ones.

In September 2003, to celebrate the centennial of flight and to remember this important era in

aviation, the Aviation Foundation of America will bring the National Air Tour back to life. The 2003 tour will follow the route planned for 1932 but never flown. Included in the tour will be a number of the actual aircraft that flew in the original tours more than seventy years ago. In the spirit of the original air tours, other vintage aircraft representing the best of the Golden Age, as well as later aircraft representing the progress of aviation, will also take part in the tour.

This book, well researched and written by Leslie Forden, chronicles the original tours, and provides the single best description and understanding of the subject while taking you back to that glorious time. Proceeds from the sale of *The Ford Air Tours 1925 – 1931* go toward supporting the non-profit effort of the 2003 National Air Tour.

As we look back and celebrate the first century of powered flight, we have the opportunity to rekindle an appreciation for the many advancements that have occurred, including those made during the Golden Age of Aviation. The 2003 National Air Tours, along with other celebrations planned for the Centennial of Flight, will help us show our respect to those wonderful aviation pioneers.

Sincerely,



Greg Herrick, President  
Aviation Foundation of America

## Original Introduction

Airplane goodwill flights and cross-country tours were very much in the headlines of the nineteen-twenties; as much a part of the American scene as The Fourth of July Parade and The County Fair.

The Ford Reliability Tour, properly called “The 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 in a well publicized contest, to “show the flag” for dealers and salesmen, convince the man on the ground he should take to the air.

And for pilots and passengers who went along, the tour was a fine annual gathering of the clan.

# Background Material

The previously published material gathered in these pages was found in the Library of Congress, The National Archives, The National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, The Detroit Public Library, The Library of the *Detroit News*, The University of California Library at Berkeley and various city libraries in the San Francisco Bay Area. Reference librarians in many cities in this country and in Canada answered inquiries, mailed material, suggested people in their communities who could offer help.

Material was received from various aircraft manufacturers: from Beech, Cessna, Fairchild, Martin, Ryan, and United Aircraft, and from the distinguished pioneer, Igor Sikorsky. We are indebted also, to historians of the Federal Aviation Administration, The United States Air Force and The Air Force Museum, The Air Mail Pioneers, The American Aviation Historical Society, The Antique Airplane Association, The Early Birds, and The OX-5 Club.

The list of individuals who gave generously of their time and resources is too long to repeat here; however, some of their names will be found in the photograph credits. The photographs are credited to the agency or person who supplied them; not always the person who originally took them. Those listed *NASM* were found in the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, and many of these are from the *Aero Digest* collection which was given the museum when the magazine ceased publication. The pictures credited *Ford/Hudek* are from original Ford Motor Company negatives which were copied by Stephen J. Hudek of Detroit. Some pictures in the book are of poor quality; however, these were used because they were the best, or the only ones, or the most interesting that we could find of a particular subject. We thought it fortunate that of the one-hundred and twelve pilots who flew competition airplanes in the tours, we found some kind of picture of all but eight.

The two books quoted in the text are *So Away I Went!* by William B. Stout, Bobbs Merrill Company, New York, 1951; and *I'll Take The High Road*, by Wolfgang Langewiesche, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, 1939. The poem *The Westbound Mail* appeared in *Literary Digest* for March 17, 1928; the Lindbergh tribute *Wings Of The West* in *Western Flying* for July, 1927. Joy Palmer's Prayer is thought to have come from a more recent magazine, while the Ray Collins tribute is from his collection. Other quotations used in the general narrative text are from various sources and are not considered of sufficient import to require footnotes or references.

The biographical sketches in the back of the book are intended to include people who took an active part in the tours. Undoubtedly, in such a long list there will be names left out which should have been included; and obviously by the time the book reaches the reader, our notes on each person can no longer be current. We can say only that we did the best we could.

A very great effort was made to get in touch with every person who was "there." The response was most helpful, even including that of a forthright lady who answered an inquiry mailed to her husband. "His name is the same as your 1929 aviator," she wrote, "however he is no flyer. I cannot so much as get him to climb a ladder to wash the kitchen windows. My husband is not the man you think he is."

Other inquiries of course, did reach the right people, and most of them responded generously, sharing albums and clippings and memories of those glorious days. And for those we could not reach or for whom our information is not complete, we hope very much that readers who can help us out will write and do so. Only in this way can the full story be told — hopefully in a second edition of this book.

This writer had a glimpse of one National Air Tour, on Thursday, July 19, 1928. On that great day, the aerial caravan passed over the farm town of

Hood River, Oregon — and we small boys were there, perched on top the barn roof, waiting and watching for this great fleet of airplanes, come all the way from Back East. They came overhead about noon, twenty-five of them; flying within a few miles of one another, filling the whole summer sky with a glorious roaring of motors and bright flashing of wings. They were low enough that we could identify all but two or three; make out colors and markings; imagine the pilots up there: alert, watchful men

peering straight ahead, with an occasional knowing glance at charts and instruments — every one a more dashing and daring hero than all the spacemen and moon walkers who came after them could ever hope to be.

And that’s reason enough to share these stories and photographs with others, to hope a reader may agree, “Why sure, I remember. That’s just the way it was!”

Lesley Forden  
Alameda, California  
January, 1973

