

BEHRENS' TRAVEL AIR 2000 BIPLANE

HERE'S AN AIRPLANE WHICH HAS
ALWAYS BEEN A FAVORITE WITH
MODELERS FOR ITS GREAT LOOKS
AND GENTLE FLYING MANNERS

BY ROGER EDWARDS



Finally, my work is letting up a little, and at last I have some spare time to pursue my favorite hobby . . . that of building classic biplanes. It's pretty tough when your work starts to interfere with your hobby, so I was glad when things slowed down a bit.

Last year, at the Hemet, California IMAA Fun Fly, Ron Karwacky brought and flew a beautiful Jerry Behrens Travel Air 2000. I don't know if it was the classic light-blue-and-silver paint scheme of Ron's

1/4-scale version, or the low-and-slow passes he was making with it, but it captured my fancy, and I vowed that, someday, I'd build a Travel Air 2000, too.

The history of the very impressive full-scale aircraft dates back sixty years: Just about the time Lindbergh was taking bows for his historic flight across the Atlantic, aircraft designer Walter Beech and his business cohorts, Clyde Cessna and Walter Stearman, were laying the foundation for the design of the airplane which would

There are many documentation photos available for the Travel Air 2000, as many are still flying, and can often be seen at air-shows.

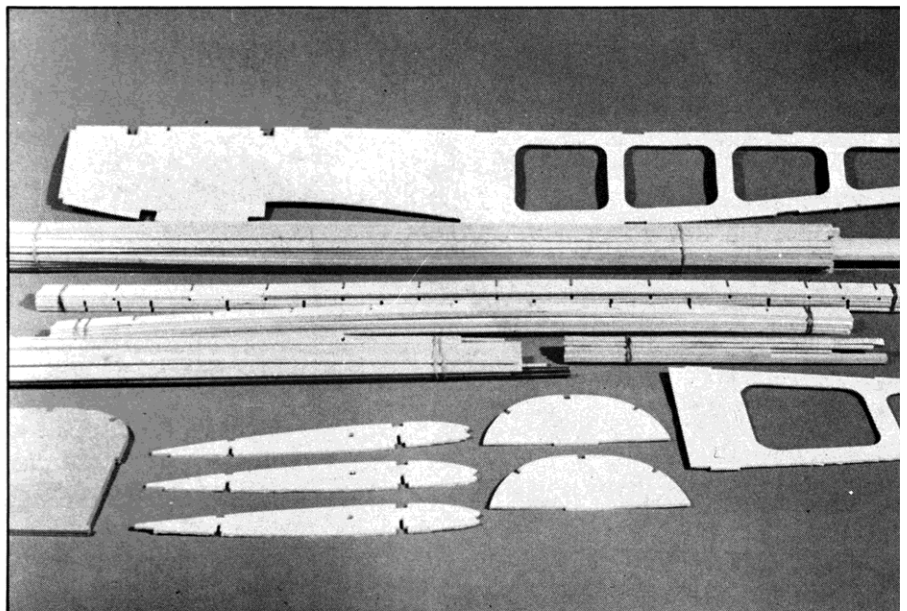
become the great Travel Air. (Both later went on to start their own companies.)

In the late twenties and early thirties, there weren't many aircraft designers with experience; and financing for aviation ventures was very hard to get. A large number of small aircraft companies were



The distinctive elephant-ear control surfaces, obviously copied from the very successful Fokker D-VII, can be seen in this photo.

The kit is packed with pre-cut and die-cut lite ply parts. A gentle press removes the parts from the punched wood.



started, but when they were unable to sell their products, even though some of the new planes were well designed, they soon went under. Other aircraft designs were simply unworkable, and failed before their first prototype was ever built. What they all needed to learn was that, in order to be commercially successful, it's not enough to design and build an airplane which YOU consider excellent, you must give the people what THEY want.

Although the "business" of public re-

lations and advertising was only beginning back then, both Walter Beech and Clyde Cessna were aware of the great value in name recognition, so they conceived and developed a strong racing program for the Travel Air. The effect was a huge wave of publicity given to the races by newspapers all over the country; this new awareness of the value and thrill of aviation, a direct result of Lindbergh's successful flight across the pond. Travel Air raced the very successful Travel

Air Mystery Ship; and Cessna flew their series of mid-wing racers known as the AW and MWs. They were developed to the point of having a retractable landing gear, very similar to the one used years later on the mid-wing Grumman Wildcat.

Travel Air had the name and the reputation, and they (very wisely) supplied the public with a series of biplanes which could be custom-built to the buyer's own specifications. While many aircraft in that

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era were still using construction techniques similar to those employed in the Jenny of 15 years before, not Walter Beech and his Travel Air. His airplanes had modern steel-tube fuselages, side-by-side seating for passengers in the front cockpit, and if the customer was well-heeled, he could order his Travel Air with the same engine Lindbergh used, a Wright J-5.

In those days, a new biplane with a Curtiss OX-5 surplus engine cost \$2,950 while a Travel Air with a Curtiss Wright J-5 220 HP engine cost \$8,500. What a deal! And there were so many different airframe/powerplant combinations available that you almost needed a program to tell them apart. Today, there are still many surviving Travel Airs, and most have been re-engined, making the job of identification even more difficult. There are more Travel Airs still operating today than any other aircraft from that time period.

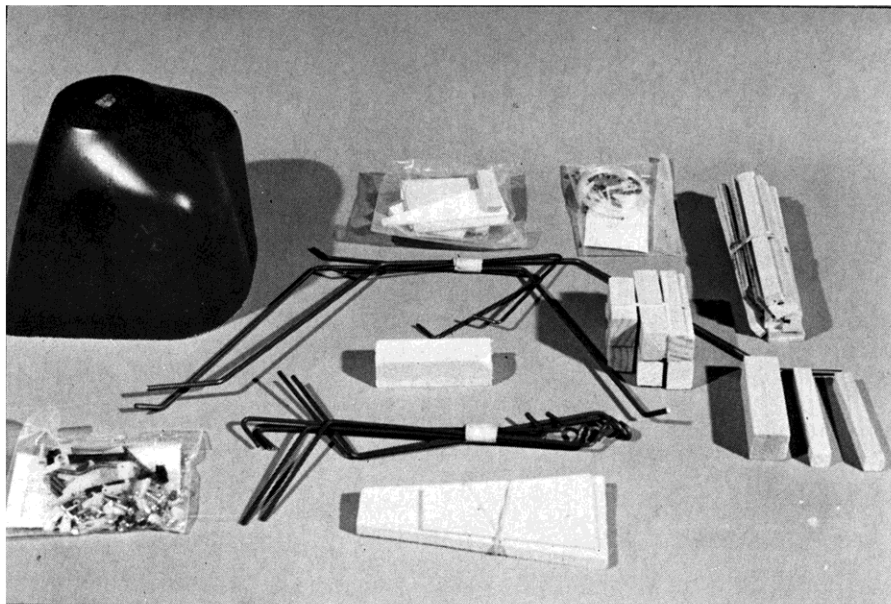
For modelers, the most popular is the model 2000, because the original had a long nose for its OX-5 engine, and that makes the model much easier to build than the radial-engine version. The kind of engine which was installed in the Travel Air determined the model designation, as almost all changes which were made were from the firewall forward: 2000s had OX-5s; 3,000s had Wright-Hispanos; and those Travel Airs with Wright J-4s and J-5s were designated the (very popular) 4000s.

When Hollywood movies took to the skies, directors discovered the elephant-eared Travel Airs, and those excellent aircraft were disguised and substituted for Fokker D-VIIs in a large number of World War I classic films. In fact, they were used in so many movies that the nickname "Wichita Fokker" stuck to the model 3000. All the studios had to do to convert one to its German look-alike was to add a false, flat-front, radiator, paint it red, put a few Maltese crosses on it, and . . . voila! . . . instant Fokker.

Down through the years, pilots made many changes to their Travel Airs: Some added balloon tires, speed wings, tail wheels, and even wings with Frieze-type ailerons.

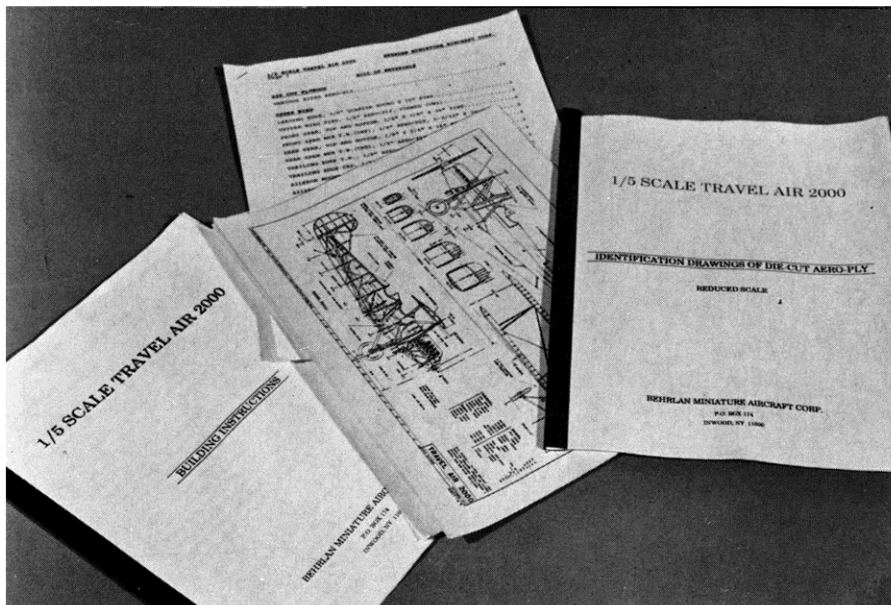
In 1929, Curtiss Wright purchased the company from Beech & Company so, from that date, our beloved Travel Airs should really be called Curtis Wrights, but no owner will ever admit it.

Probably the most famous Travel Air still operating today is the brilliantly-painted red-white-and-blue 4000, owned by the Pepsi Cola Company. It's often seen in television commercials, and at airshows all over the country, usually flown by a pretty young woman pilot named Suzanne, who delights in expertly smoke-writing



All small nuts and bolts are included. Landing gear struts and cabanes are supplied from pre-bent wire, and all hardwood has been cut and notched for your convenience.

Behrans has included very complete building instructions, including three-views, parts identification, and building and flying instructions. A beginner could build this kit.



her sponsor's name all over the skies. She also gives excellent interviews, much to the delight of members of the media.

When the editor of *Scale R/C Modeler* called me, and asked if I'd like to build a Travel Air because he'd just received a new, easy-to-build 1/5-scale kit from the Jerry Behrens Plans, I naturally agreed, and he gave me the kit when we met at the QSAA Meet in Las Vegas recently.

Although I was eager to inspect the contents, I waited until I got home to open the box. Here's what I found:

The kit is made with a system called "Ultralok," a new locking-type construction which greatly simplifies building. The

lite ply was of good quality, and gentle persuasion was all that was needed to pop out the parts. Even all the ribs were die-cut from lite ply; in fact, the only balsa in the aircraft is in the form of strips which are used sparingly through the aircraft. The many spruce strips are of even weight, and very good quality. One of the jobs I enjoy the least, when I'm building a biplane, is the construction of all the cabane and wing struts, not to mention making the multiple wire landing-gear struts. In this kit, they're formed in jigs, making your job much easier. Instructions which come in the box say that, if CA-type glues are used, the kit can be framed in about 25 hours. Now, that's MY kind of

kit. Some of you modelers may already be familiar with this style of construction, because it's been used in Pilot Kits for a short time, and also in the Carl Goldberg Eagle Series. It's very time-saving, strong, and only slightly heavier than standard construction. Besides, in a large 1/5 scale biplane, a small amount of additional weight shouldn't be a problem.

All the nuts and bolts are included, and they're all properly packaged and labeled so that you know where each and every part goes. The kit also contains a very nice fiberglass cowl, as well as four instruction books, guaranteed to speed even the beginning modeler along his way.

Jerry Behrens has given *Scale R/C Modeler* his permission to print the plans for his Travel Air 2000, so a modeler can see for himself how easy it is to build this aircraft. Even so, don't let this fool you because, properly built and detailed, this model will definitely qualify for scale competition.

The Behrlan Corporation also offers several other 1/5-scale, and 1/4-scale classic biplanes, either in kit form, or you may purchase only the plans: Travel Air (all models), Fleet, Fokker D-VII, Waco UPF-7, Sopwith Tripehound, and Sopwith Pup. All kits include all the required wood and metal parts; and 1/5-scale kits feature the unique Ultralok construction techniques for super-fast assembly. I've seen many models of these aircraft in the air, and they're all good, very consistent flyers.

So, O.K., you modelers out there who are lovers of biplanes; here's one which WILL take a variety of engines, and WON'T take you all year to build, AND you can build your Travel Air in any of a number of versions just by changing the engine and cowling.

Talented Jerry Behrens designed the plans, and the kits and plans are available from the Behrlan Corp., PO Box 174, Inwood, New York 11696, Phone (718) 337-6987 or (516) 868-5194. ●