



Stearman Kaydet

AMERICA'S BIPLANE

For many aviators, the passion for flight began in a Stearman Kaydet. One of the most recognizable World War II trainers ever, the steady and forgiving Kaydet taught many thousands of pilots how to fly.

The two-seat, open-cockpit biplane was introduced by Stearman Aircraft Division of Boeing in Wichita, Kan., in 1934. It featured fabric-covered wooden wings, single-leg landing gear, welded-steel fuselage and a radial engine. At that time, biplanes were becoming a thing of the past, but the Stearman's simple construction, rugged dependability and responsive handling made it an ideal trainer.

The forerunner of the Kaydet was the Model 70 prototype. Intended as a military trainer, it was designed and built in just 60 days. But the U.S. Army Air Corps was not pleased with the Model 70—it was too gentle for a military trainer. To make its stall more abrupt, spoilers were added to the outer leading edges of the upper wing. These refinements resulted in the Model 73.

The U.S. Navy ordered the Model 73 in 1935. Powered with the Wright R-790-8 engine, it was designated the NS-1.

The U.S. Army Air Corps waited until 1936 when the improved Model 75 came available and designated it the PT-13, which was powered by the Lycoming R-680 engine. When the Navy ordered duplicates of the PT-13, they were designated N2S-2 and N2S-5.

The PT-13 had a blue fuselage and yellow wings, while the NS-1 was painted all yellow, earning it the nickname the Yellow Peril. Although some say this nickname came from the aircraft's challenging ground-handling characteristics, others believe it was a general reference to the dangers of primary flight training. This nickname was shared with the N3N Canary.

In 1940-41, the U.S. Army Air Corps was faced with a shortage of engines, and Stearman engines and designations changed accordingly. Stearmans fitted with 220 Continental R-670 engines were designated as PT-17s; those with 225hp Jacobs R-755 engine became PT-18s.

The aircraft was officially named the Kaydet in 1941 when the U.S. military began promoting the use of popular names instead of type numbers for the public reference of military aircraft.

Between 1936 and 1944, Boeing built 8,584 Kaydets, in all its versions, plus the equivalent of 2,000 more in spares. No other biplane was ever built in this quantity in the United States. It was exceeded in world production only by two Russian aircraft, the Polikarpov PO2 and the Antonov AN-2.

In addition to sales to the Navy and the Army Air Corps/Forces, the trainers were sold to Canada, China, the Philippines, Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil for both military and civilian uses.

After the war, the slow, low-level flying capabilities of the Stearman made it a popular aircraft for crop dusting and spraying. ■

