

YANKEES INVADE OKLAHOMA



Photos and Article
By Dick Cavin

The State of Oklahoma is one of the states that puts its money where its mouth is when it comes to alluring tourists and their greenbacks. No segment of the tourist population is too small to escape the notice of its alert planners.

In the eastern half of Oklahoma there is a string of large lakes that runs from the northern to the southern border. Large areas adjoining these lakes have been set aside as State Parks and first class tourist accommodations have been established to attract vacationers. Large luxury type motels, with excellent restaurants, grace a large, beautifully manicured park area overlooking the lake with expansive picnic and camping areas in close proximity. By leasing these lodges to national hotel chains, they are thus assured professional management and first class service by trained personnel.

The same top quality theme is echoed in the construction and operation of the adjacent marinas. Water sports, boating and fishing are the main magnets that draw most of the tourists that swarm in by the hundreds of thousands almost year round — but other recreational pursuits haven't been neglected either. Excellent tennis courts and golf courses cater to the athletically inclined, with miniature golf, croquet, shuffle board courts and playgrounds for the children and the less vigorous.

The private airplane owner hasn't been overlooked either. Each of these

State Parks has an excellent paved runway of about 3500 ft. in length and a large paved tiedown area, which can accommodate as many as 35 to 40 airplanes in secure tiedown. The lodge desk clerk monitors their Unicom and can dispatch a van to transport new arrivals to the lodge and assist them with their luggage.

Texhoma Lodge is located on the north shore of Lake Texhoma, which separates Texas and Oklahoma, and is on the Madill Arm of this huge lake. It can be accessed by a highway from the east, with a three mile long bridge spanning this relatively narrow neck of the lake. Durant, OK, which is about 15 miles to the east, and Madill, OK, also about 15 miles to the northwest, are the nearest airports for aviation fuel and FBO maintenance. The lodge overlooks Catfish Bay and the marina on the north, with a picturesque view of the well manicured golf course to the south. The runway is adjacent to the west side of the golf course and is 3000 ft. long.

This was the setting for the North Texas Chapter of the American Yankee Association's Memorial Day Weekend invitational fly-in. Some 75 invitations were sent out to Yankee (and Grumman) owners in a 500 mile radius of Dallas, with about one-third of that number actually making the event. Several sent regrets, saying previous family outings were scheduled.

There are 28 members of the AYA in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex alone and they have a very active squadron.

Any flyable weekend will usually see a dozen or more going somewhere as a group. Nearly all of them are EAA members, so they are always on hand for every EAA event in the area.

In recent years, owners of various types of light planes have polarized into groups of owners of a particular airplane type, forming national associations and publishing newsletters that inform owners of new AD's, part sources, activities, new STC's, etc. Some of these (i.e., Swift, Navion) even have limited manufacturing facilities for improved or hard to find parts.

Because of the very nature of purely recreational flying, it is perfectly natural that they all rally under the umbrella of EAA. This not only provides them with a national voice in EAA's Washington ambassadorship, but they are also a





vital part of any large EAA type fly-in. The handiwork of the many craftsmen that so painstakingly restore their favorite make of light plane to better than factory new condition is always a delight to the light plane enthusiasts that frequent the EAA events, large and small. In many EAA Chapters there are more owners and restorers than there are builders of experimentals. Yes, the manufactured light plane of yesteryear is a truly appreciated member of the EAA community.

The first production Yankee appeared on the scene 16 years ago, in 1969, and the last one came off the line in 1979. In that ten year span, there were five main models introduced. First was the Yankee AA1, a direct descendant of Jim Bede's BD-1. Next came the modified wing version called the Trainer. In place of the nearly symmetrical airfoil on the Yankee, its airfoil was nearly flat on the bottom and had a small droop snoot leading edge for a gentler type stall. The first four-seater, the Traveler, came next with its 150 hp engine. It looked a lot like the Yankees and even had the sporty sliding canopy, but it actually was an all new design, intended to compete with Cessna and Piper, offering a slight speed advantage. Further refinements were offered in the Cheetah and it was followed by the 180 hp Tiger.

At Texhoma, we had several examples of all of these models plus some that had been modified. The original 108 hp Yankee wasn't noted as a stellar performer on takeoff and climb, although it would out-cruise the competition a bit. The Lycoming O-320 of 150 hp would fit under the same cowl as the original O-235 engine and gave it a healthy increase in climb performance

and shortened takeoff performance. It's becoming quite popular to convert to the O-320 as the O-235 reaches overhaul time.

A one-of-a-kind modification of the Yankee was there — a 150 hp Yankee that has been converted to a taildragger by Gene Plazak and Lou Rainone of the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. It is in the STC process at the moment, flying as an Experimental, and it shows that eliminating the drag of the nosewheel is worthwhile in performance gain. At the moment, they are close to starting a clean-up program to even further improve performance. They will use a crankshaft extension to improve prop efficiency and it will also have a new cowl and baffling system, departing from the blunt front end nose cowl so many factory builds use. A more efficient crossover exhaust system is also on the agenda.

Two of the four-placers on hand were unique in that one of them was the very last airplane built. It even had a factory placard to that effect and a plea to the owner to take care of it. The other one was a Tiger and had been used for racing. It even had a large racing number on the tail. It was very attractive in a solid royal blue paint scheme, with contrasting white striping.

As a matter of fact, all of those present were very attractive, inside and out. Since their ages ranged from 6 to 13 years old, most of them had worn out their original factory paint and were resplendent in very tasteful new paint schemes that were original (individually). The new polyurethane paints (Imron, Acrolid, etc.) especially enhance their like-new appearance with the "wet look". One even had a pretty good scaled down version of the paint

scheme on the new Grumman Gulfstream III.

Interiors also were outstanding. They not only harmonized with exterior color combinations, but the choice of fabrics and colors was outstanding.

One of those present came from New Orleans via an intermediate RON at Shreveport, where he joined up with another AYA member for the final leg. Still another came non-stop from Houston.

After an excellent mid-morning brunch in a semi-private dining room, the group settled back to watch a NASA video tape of their research into light plane spin characteristics in which they used a much modified Yankee. This was a most illuminating study that all found most interesting.

The group then went back to the airplanes for a spirited bomb dropping contest. All of the airplanes can be flown with the canopies partially open, so this is a popular sport with AYA members.

All too soon it was time to get ready for the trip home and back to such prosaic things as lawn mowing and other forms of drudgery afflicted on the general population on holiday weekends. Before everyone fired up and left the scene though, we got the remaining Yankees all lined up in a big semi-circle for more picture taking. A few were going to stay overnight and get in a little boating, but the rest opted to get back home and partake of ground level activities for the balance of the Memorial Day weekend.

I rode up to Texhoma with Tom Martin in his Cheetah. It was my first time in a Cheetah and I was pleasantly surprised with it. It is roomy and comfortable inside, relatively quiet, has good visibility and is quite stable. It has excellent balance of control pressures and response on all three axis and very good slow flight characteristics. The constant chord wing doesn't give it any surprises at the stall either. Tom folded the back seats down, which makes a flush floor baggage area nearly 5 feet long . . . making it an airborne station wagon for a couple.

Looking at the design closely, I could see possibilities of making this airplane into a very desirable kit airplane by some relatively minor design changes. It wouldn't be much of a problem to substitute standard riveting techniques for the autoclave bonded construction. Performance loss would be negligible and matched hole tooling methods would make it a natural jigless project for the homebuilder.

Perhaps careful evaluation of such minor redesign of manufactured airplanes for the kit market might show the way out of the present industry stagnation that skyrocketing prices and liability fears have engendered.