# Why you need an airplane… and how to get it

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If you fly airplanes you’ve probably felt it at long intervals, when a chance coincidence led you through a particularly memorable flight, or to a specially welcome haven in a storm, or to meet a friend you might otherwise not have met, who knew something about flying that you needed to know. If such things have happened as often to you as they have to some, you might be one who believes that there is a kind of principle of the sky, a spirit of flight that calls to certain among mankind as the wilderness calls to some and the sea to others.

If you do not yet fly, perhaps you’ve felt that spirit when you suddenly realize that you are the only one in the street who looks up to watch an airplane overhead, the only one who slows and sometimes even stops at an airport to watch the little iron birds come down to earth and to lift off again into thin air. If you act this way, it’s possible that in flight you’ll find much to learn of yourself and of the path of your life on this planet.

If you are indeed one of these people, it is not coincidence that has brought you to this page or to flying. Flight, to you, is a required essential tool in your mission of becoming a human being. Here’s a rough sketch of most of the people who fly, and if you stop and watch airplanes, it’s a rough sketch of you, too.

Flyers are distressed when they must blindly trust uncaring others to take them where they want to go. Railroads, buses, airlines can all break down, can all be delayed and strand people in unwanted places. Automobiles only travel where highways go, and highways are lined with billboards. Flyers choose to be in command of any moving machine, and to pick the course it will follow.

Flyers feel a certain kinship with the sight of the earth unencrusted by humanity, they want to see it that way in one sweeping view, in reassurance that nature still exists on her own, without a chain-link fence to hold her.

Flyers value the fact that one cannot give excuses to the sky, that in the air it is not talking that matters, but knowing and acting. There is a person within each of them who stands off and watches how they act and fly, notices when they’re happy and what they do about that. The person within cannot be fooled or lied to, and the flyer is quietly glad that the inner observer most often judges him an acceptable controlled human being.

Flyers have a sense of adventures yet to come, instead of dimly recalling adventures of long ago as the only moments in which they truly lived.

Other points in common are details: flyers have weekend horizons measured not in tens of miles, but in hundreds; they sometimes use their airplanes to aid their business; they find perspective in the air after a pressured week on the ground.

The one lasting basic current among flyers is that this act of flight is the path that each has chosen, that each needs to demonstrate his control of space and time in his own life. If you share that current, your distant wish to one day own an airplane is not idle dreaming, it is a requirement of your life, which you ignore, some radical aviators say. at the cost of your humanity.

There is another being within us all, though, who is not our friend, who would gladly see us destroyed. His is the voice that says, “Step in front of the train, leap off the bridge, just for curiosity, just jump …” For those born to fly, the same voice speaks different words: “Forget flying. You can’t possibly afford an airplane. Be practical, after all. Let’s keep our feet on the ground. What do you know about airplanes, anyway?”

It is a cautious, conservative figure, and true—ninety percent of the people who own light airplanes today can’t afford to own them. They need the money for home and family, for savings and investment and insurance. But each of them one day decided that owning an airplane was more important than any other money-needing cause. To fly, for them, is an important part of home and family, to fly is itself savings and investment and insurance.

The most critical time in the purchase of an airplane is the instant in which the decision is made to own one. The crucial moment is making that decision, is setting top priority on finding an airplane. Everything else is inevitable. Not time, not money, not geography can stand in the way, because buying an airplane is almost entirely a mental action, a process uncanny to live or to watch. Decision made, the more you hold the airplane in your thought, the more you see it begin to appear in your life, as well. You don’t find your airplane as much as your airplane finds you.

Once you know that you need it, the process moves quickly and automatically. What kind of airplane? New or old? High-wing or low? Two-place or four? Complex or simple? Fabric or metal? Nosewheel or tailwheel? Rugged or dainty? Fast or slow? Answer the questions, and there are the first vibrations of your aircraft, surrounding you. Your airplane has changed from wish into books and magazines with articles about different kinds of airplanes, it has changed into newspaper clippings and the famous yellow Trade-A-Plane from Crossville, Tennessee, with its listing of thousands of aircraft for sale and trade across the country.

Choice made, whether simple eight-hundred-dollar Taylorcraft or thirty-thousand-dollar Beechcraft crowded with radios and instruments, the airplane often appears next in miniature before it springs full-size.

One flyer decided to buy an airplane at a moment when his total bank account was less than ten dollars. He decided that he would one day own a classic little 1946 Piper Cub; fabric-covered, high-wing, two-seat simple light tailwheel airplane. Cub prices ranged from eight hundred to twenty-two hundred dollars. He held the airplane in his thought, watched it there often and affectionately.

He spent ninety-eight cents for a stick-and-paper model of the airplane (it came to $1.01 with tax), which he built In two evenings and hung from a string from the ceiling. It had entered his life in miniature, where it turned this way and that in every light breeze.

He read Trade-A-Plane, he spent weekends at airports, he talked about Cubs with mechanics and pilots, he looked at Cubs, and he touched Cubs. The model turned in the air. Then the strangest thing happened.

A friend of his had been given five hundred dollars to rent an airplane for company business, and mentioned it to the flyer. Knowing from his weekends a thousand-dollar Cub for sale, the flyer borrowed five hundred dollars from one friend, joined it with the five hundred dollars rental of the other, bought the Cub, and loaned it till the company business was done. Business finished, debt eventually repaid, he is now the owner of a full-size, flying, 1946 Piper Cub. As well as a tiny Cub that still hangs from his ceiling.

Another man chose a Cessna 140 for his target. There was one particularly handsome 140 at an airport nearby, but he didn’t have the three thousand dollars it was worth and even at that the owner did not wish to sell the airplane. But this man so wanted a 140, he so enjoyed the personality of this particular machine, that he asked the owner if he might polish the Cessna, just to be near it. The owner laughed and bought him a can of wax.

Now polishing an all-metal airplane is no simple task, but a fresh shining Cessna 140 is indeed a lovely thing. It was only right that the owner offer the polisher a ride in the plane for payment. They became acquaintances, then friends, and today are partners in that same polished Cessna.

Everyone who owns a light airplane today at one time went through the same course: Decision, Study, Search, Discovery, and eventually it happened that they came to own all or part of the airplane they now fly.

Be extremely aware, owners will advise, be on the lookout for coincidences, for what seem to be chance events falling across your path. Coincidence is the touch of that strange invisible spirit of the sky, which perhaps has been calling you ever so gently all your life long.



A woman pilot, dismayed by the problems of scheduling rental aircraft, decided to buy her own plane. She decided that this was important enough to spend her savings on, that flying had a higher priority in her life than money waiting in a bank. She looked at scores of airplanes, on paper and in person, but never picked just the type she wanted, though she did narrow it to something that would be all-metal and two-place. But nothing was right, she wasn’t drawn emotionally to any airplane she had seen through her search, not a single for-sale sign held her eye.

Then one Saturday, just as she was leaving an airport, a white Luscombe Silvaire hushed down to land and taxied to stop near the restaurant. She liked that airplane. There was something about it that felt right to her, and though there was no for-sale sign on it, she asked the owner if he would by any chance consider selling his airplane.

“As a matter of fact,” he said, “I am kind of looking for a bigger airplane. Luscombe’s a fine flying machine, but it only carries two pepole. Yes, I might consider selling it …”

The woman flew the white airplane, liked it all the more for the way it acted in the sky, and knew that this was the one for which she had been searching. It took some careful arranging, an agreement to let the former owner use the aircraft until he had found his four-place, but the Luscombe was hers.

Consider. Had she not come to that particular airport at that particular time on that particular day so that she would, preparing to leave, have seen the Luscombe fly down that particular final approach to land, she would have missed it. Had the wind been from the opposite direction, she would not have seen it land. Had the owner delayed two minutes longer any time that day before he flew to the airport for a cup of coffee, she would not have seen it.

But all those things happened. The chain of peculiar coincidence that is the mark of that spirit calling us and guiding us where we best may learn, happened, and today the woman flies an all-white Luscombe Silvaire which she needs and loves.

“My work takes from me all week,” she says. “My airplane gives me back on weekends.”

Listen, as you search for your airplane, for the following words: “Oh, no. You don’t want that airplane. You won’t even find that kind of airplane around here at all.” The words mean that you are getting very close. I heard just those words about Fairchild 24s a week before I found my Fairchild 24. I heard them years later when I asked about trading the Fairchild for a biplane, shortly before I traded the Fairchild for a biplane. Remember, “… haven’t got a chance” means, “… you’re practically standing on it.”

The whole trick in searching is simply to do your best, looking, and let the eerie old sky-spirit rig events so that if you aren’t careful you’ll walk into the wing of the airplane you are meant to own. The spirit cannot be put down. If you haven’t yet learned to fly, and if you want to fly more than anything else, you will learn. No matter who you are or how old you are or where you live, if you wish it, you will fly. It sounds spooky, but it works.

It works even if it has to take the long way around. Nearly every new pilot today, for instance, learns to fly on modern nosewheel airplanes that are built for simple handling on the ground as well as in the air. As a result, the older tailwheel airplanes have become known as fierce unpredictable demons requiring superskills for takeoff and landing, which will groundloop and roll themselves up in crushed heaps if the pilot relaxes for a moment when the airplane is landing. Yet modern trained pilots often find themselves buying tailwheel airplanes simply because these cost so much less and perform so much better than do nosewheel airplanes. The guided path had led them face to face with demons.

Not very kind of the sky-spirit to set blocks in the way of its own special human beings. But the spirit mentions something about fears are built for overcoming, and the new pilot finds himself, because he needs an airplane, because he must have an aircraft to advance along his road of knowing, owner of a tailwheel machine about which he has heard terrible unforgiving stories.

He approaches his airplane with all the enthusiasm of a riding academy student approaching Old Dynamite in his stall. But as the rider, in no hurry, gets to know the thoughts and ways of Dynamite, discovers he’s terrified of wind-blown papers and a pushover for carrots, that there are times to relax and times to be very careful, riding him. so does the pilot discover that a tailwheel airplane, properly flown, is more spirited and more fun to fly than any nosewheel machine. To see the delight in a student’s eye when he finds that he can handle the Dreaded Taildragger is to understand something of what the spirit of flight had in mind all along.

If you hear that call toward the sky, as many thousands of people do, flying or not, answering or not, you are required to have an airplane to become more truly yourself than you have ever been. If you know this and do your best to learn to fly and to own that airplane, trusting that nutty spirit to arrange the impossible strange eerie coincidences for you as it has for everyone now flying, the life in flight that you must have, will be yours.