



A Cardinal Returns Home

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DON PARSONS

Collecting antique airplanes is simply a passion for John Cournoyer. Known in antique airplane circles as the Waco guru, he is always on the lookout for rare and unique planes. The owner of Old Style Aircraft at Creve Coeur Airport, he keeps his planes at the Historic Aircraft Restoration Museum there and down at his farm in southeastern Missouri. Among the rare planes he has are a Spartan Executive, a Waco JYM, a Star Cavalier, and now, a flying St. Louis Cardinal.

One of 21 built between 1929 and 1931, John's St. Louis Cardinal is one of four left and is believed to be the only one flying. One hangs in the Sacramento Sky Ranch aircraft parts store, one in California, and one in Idaho. John's was the sixth one built and was originally registered as N951K. It is now registered as N951B. Originally built in August 1929 as a C2-65 with a LeBlond motor of 60 hp, it was upgraded by the factory to the more powerful 100-hp Kinner in 1935. The aircraft, now designated a Super Cardinal, only had 90 hours on it at this point.

Built by the St. Louis Aircraft Corporation, a subsidiary of the St. Louis Car Company, which built railway cars and streetcars, the airplane and its factory fell victim to the Depression. Having to compete with the likes of the Curtiss Robin and the Monocoupe was too much, so production was abandoned in 1931. The company had produced more than 400 Curtiss JN-4D Jenny's during World War I for the Army Air Corps. In 1939, it produced the PT-15 trainer for the Air Corps. Only 14 of the PT-15s were sold, with nearly all of them being sent to

Parks College, just across the Mississippi river from St. Louis.

Not being successful in the designing field, St. Louis Aircraft Corporation was again contracted to build other airplanes under license for the Air Corps. During the war, it would build Fairchild PT-19s and PT-23s to supply the military. The company ended production of these trainers in 1946, and with the country rapidly gaining population and the resulting urban sprawl, it folded in 1973 due to the lack of demand for its streetcars.

The Cardinal was unveiled to the public for the first time in 1929 at the Detroit Auto Show. The first 10 airplanes the company produced had the 60-hp LeBlond radial engine for power. The next few were upgraded slightly with the slightly more powerful 90-hp engines. One was converted to a Warner 110-hp for factory tests. The last six built had the 100-hp Kinner K5 engine and were called the Super Cardinals. The Cardinal has been in Illinois and Missouri all of its life.

Since the 1950s, Cournoyer has

been instrumental in saving several rare aircraft. Having a Travel Air on display at the St. Louis Science Center and a Spartan C-2 monoplane on loan to the Spartan School of Aeronautics in Tulsa, he felt the need to have an airplane built in St. Louis for his collection. He could get Robins, he had Monocoupes, but what he wanted was a St. Louis Cardinal. He really wasn't looking for one when fortune smiled and he stumbled across this very rare airplane.

As John tells it, " We were out flying around in the late 1950s, and we landed at a small airport up in Illinois. We were just kind of looking around. We walked back into a T-hangar, and there was an airplane sitting there that looked like a Ryan from the distance, with the wing off of it. We walked up to it and found out it wasn't a Ryan—it was a St. Louis Cardinal, which had been stored there. I tried nosing around the airport to see if anyone there knew who owned it. Later, I found out that a cou-

ple owned it, but didn't get any names. We had to leave then, so I left without finding out who owned it.

"Some years later, I heard of a Waco UPF-7 for sale in Beardstown, Illinois. I went up there to look at this UPF-7—that was about 1960—landed and went over to talk to the guy, Harold Baker I think his name was, who owned

St. Louis Cardinal C2-110 (company data)

Wingspan: 32 feet, 4 inches

Length: 20 feet, 6 inches

Clark Y airfoil

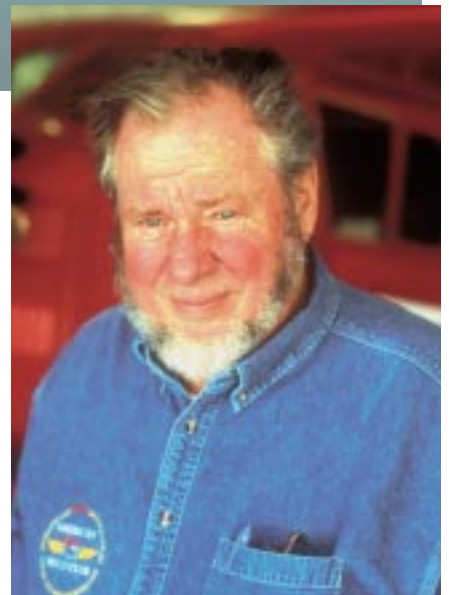
Empty Weight: 1,006 pounds

Useful load: 557 pounds

Cruising speed: 107 mph



The St. Louis Cardinal C2-60 (later converted to a C2-110) is reminiscent of the larger Stinson Junior, another high-wing monoplane of the same era. The 110 designation was actually a misnomer. The plan was to power the airplane with the 110-hp Warner Scarab, but a late change resulted in limited production with the 100-hp Kinner K5, but the 110 model designation stuck. To further confuse you, the next version of the C2 was the C-100, powered by, you guessed it, the 110-hp Warner!



John Cournoyer



A Consolidated instrument cluster dominates the center of the instrument panel on the St. Louis Cardinal. On the far left is the Splitdorf magneto switch, with a nonsensitive altimeter to the left of the Consolidated panel, and the tachometer on the right. An original-style steel ball turn and bank is installed in the right side of the Consolidated panel.

the UPF-7. We got to visiting, and he said he had a Cardinal. I asked him if that was the same Cardinal I had seen previously up in Illinois. He said it was and that he had bought it. I didn't buy the UPF, but thought to myself, Remember where that Cardinal is so you can

check back later into buying it.

"In the mid-1960s, Harold moved to a little field where Spirit of St. Louis airport is now called Loadmaster. Harold was running a little operation over there, and I went over there to look at a Cabin Waco a buddy had wrecked, to see

about buying and fixing it up. I looked up and saw Harold. I asked him if he still had the Cardinal. I told him if he ever wanted to sell it to let me know.

"We let that go for awhile, and then he was killed in an airplane crash. I tried to track down where the airplane went from there. Turns out his brother got all the stuff. His brother, Wayne Baker, moved over to Columbia, Illinois. I went over one day and started visiting with him. I got to know him pretty well. He ended up with the Cardinal. I kept trying to buy it, but he wouldn't sell it. I finally

told him, 'Look, if you ever decide to sell it, give me first crack at it, because I've been chasing this thing for about 30 years.'

"He agreed to that. Some time passed; then one day I got a call at the shop. He says, 'This is Wayne Baker,' I said, 'Hey Wayne, what's going on?'

"He says, 'You want to buy that Cardinal?'

'Yeah. I told you I've been after that Cardinal for a number of years.'

'Well, you better get over here, because I got a guy coming up from Farmington to buy it.'

'Hey, you were supposed to give me first crack at it!'

'I am, but you better get over here.'

"I dropped everything and ran over to the house to get the big trailer. George Garrett and I went over there. Just as we're pulling in, this truck from Farmington pulls in.

'Hey Wayne, there's those guys from Farmington. Didn't you tell them that this other guy [me] wanted it?'

'Oh, I needed a backup. In case you didn't want it, I'd sell it [to them]. You did bring me cash?'

'Yeah, I brought you cash.'

"I paid him, and this other guy was hot. You wouldn't believe how hot he was. Here he'd driven all the way up from Farmington. And old Wayne, he's the type of guy, he just told him, 'I told ya there was another guy interested, and if he didn't show up to get it, it was yours. But he's here, so it's his.'

"That's how we acquired it. From about 1954 to 1994, that's how long I chased it. All we had was a pretty badly rusted fuselage, some tail pieces, two wing struts, and a little box with the instruments in it. We had to build the wing."

John began rebuilding it over at



From about 1954 to 1994, that's how long I chased it.

his home in Maryland Heights. Starting from a minute drawing of the wing he got in the paperwork from Wayne, he started in on the ribs. The one-piece wing is all wood, a Clark Y airfoil.

"Me and the kid next door did most of the work, with Steve Brown assembling the wing. We worked on it, off and on, about six months. We had to plumb it," John says.

"We cut about a third of the tubing out of the fuselage and replaced it. Me and my son John went downtown to Washington University, which has the archives from the company. John [my son] knew the gal, so she had all the pictures out. We put a Consolidated instrument cluster from a Curtiss Robin in it that went through the flood [of 1993.]

"I contacted George Meissner [the former president of St. Louis Car] about the airplane. I went down to his office, and he had a whole bunch of pictures laid out that helped me with the lettering and the cowling.

"We rebuilt the ailerons. Made a new motor mount. I took the ring off of a Kinner-powered Fleet biplane.

"It has the original Bendix brakes in it, a rarity for a 1929 aircraft. They were in fairly good

shape. We put the two wing tanks back in once the wing was finished. They hold 22 gallons total.

"The tail is all steel tube. We had to build up a new one, as the old one was all mangled.

"The aircraft has its original landing gear with rebuilt struts. The airplane originally had a tail skid, but John replaced that with a tailwheel from a Piper Cub so they could operate the airplane off pavement.

"They recovered it with Ceconite 102 with Randolph dope in the colors of Cardinal Red and White. The airplane was originally available in a variety of colors, with the red being the base or trim color, and silver, Waco Maize, and Niobe brown being the other colors available.

"Engine is a K-5 Kinner of 100 hp rebuilt nine years ago. It was acquired from Wayne Baker, along with the prop," says John. "We had the prop redone too. It's a Sensenich that's been pitched for the Kinner."

The airplane originally sold for \$4,250, but it is priceless now. It occupies a space of honor among John's Wacos in one of the hangars at Creve Coeur Airport.

Terry Chastain flies the Cardinal about six times a year and reports the airplane has no vices. "It's a typical late-20s airplane, he says. Steer with the rudder. It's terribly blind, especially in turns, and awfully hot in the cockpit. The airplane is as easy to land as a Cub, with its wide-track gear. We cruise at 90 miles per hour with a top speed of 105 to 110. With that big wing, she gets off the ground quickly and will climb out at over 1,000 feet per minute. It doesn't have much useful load though. People were smaller back then."

It looks like the St. Louis Car Company isn't gone after all. 🐣