



The Poulton Family's *Chief*



Aeronca 11BC

BY BUDD DAVISSON

BONNIE KRATZ

There seems to be two distinctly different types of people in the world of little airplanes: those who love and adore the Aeronca Chief and those who wouldn't know an Aeronca Chief if they found it floating in their coffee. It's not a question of liking it or disliking it, because it's one of those airplanes that has such a low recognition factor that a relatively

small percentage of the pilot population even knows it exists. In some ways that's a good thing, because it has helped keep the prices down for those who want a Chief of their own. One of those is Danny Poulton of Belton, South Carolina.

The Poulton's Chief is not your average Chief. We're all used to seeing the 11AC (65 hp) or the 11CC (85 hp)

—the postwar Super Chief—but theirs is an 11BC. We're not sure it ever carried a name, but maybe we should call it the Not-Quite-Super-Chief. It came out of the factory in 1947 with a C85-8, which meant no provisions for a starter. Not a normal one, anyway. It had a McDowell starter, which was a combination of ratcheted sprockets and a lever that worked very much like the pull starter on a lawn mower with the cable going back to a handle in the cockpit. By the time Danny bought the airplane as a project in Michigan, the starter had long since disappeared. In fact, everything fire-wall-forward had disappeared. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Danny had owned a number of airplanes in the past and, in fact, had learned to fly while he was still in high school.

"We had aviation on my mom's side of the family," he says. "My uncle was an airframe and powerplant mechanic (A&P) and a full-time corporate pilot, and he encouraged me."

He progressed through a number of airplanes, most of them some variation of the Piper PA-28 line, including an Arrow, although a '63 C-172 did follow him home one day.

"I met Donna and aviation became part of our life," he says, "In fact, we were married in a 421 Cessna at five thousand feet over Anderson, South Carolina."

Danny didn't get into vintage airplanes until four years ago with the Chief. It was a form of therapy, because he was on a crusade to lose weight.

"I had let myself balloon up to 460 pounds, and if I was going to live, I had to lose the weight. I had two sons, Dale and JD, and a wonderful wife, and I didn't want to lose all of that just because I was overweight. So, I started looking for an airplane to rebuild as a way to keep myself busy. We live on an airpark and we had a great guy, Gene Richburg, living just down the runway from us. He was 82 years old at the time and knew everything there was to know about rebuilding airplanes, and he volunteered to help me."

So, Danny launched on two projects at the same time, both of them



Danny Poulton holds open the top cowl to reveal the Continental C-85 installation. It appears Danny has decided not to trust his Chief mechanical fuel gauges, which are known to be troublesome, and is using an old standby, the wire and cork float gauge so common prior to World War II.



The tubular structure of the landing gear is covered with an aluminum fairing, leading to a nicely finished pair of replica fiberglass wheelpants. The small cable attached to the trailing edge of the landing gear is a safety cable. It was originally installed in case of a failure of the originally installed phenolic piston within the oleo strut. Later, after an airworthiness directive (47-20-02) and Aeronca Service Helps and Hints No. 12 required changing the phenolic part to one made of aluminum, the need for the cable was negated, but most owners keep it, just in case!



In keeping with the restrained nature of Danny's customized Chief, a few nice touches, such as the upholstered side panels and polished control wheel caps, brighten up the otherwise original-looking cabin. Look closely and you can see the toe brake pedals on the pilot's side of the cockpit. Those pedals are seen only on the 11BC, 11CC, and 15AC Sedan.

monumental. The first was to lose weight, and the second, to find a project that fit his goals and skill levels.

"I didn't look long and actually found the Chief on eBay. It belonged to an A&P in Michigan, who had started to rebuild it and then decided to put it up for sale. I hadn't done anything like this before, so I was really not sure of what I was doing, but I hooked up my trailer and headed up to Michigan to buy the Chief. That was in July of 2003."

What he saw, when he got to Michigan, was enough to encourage him, so he loaded it up and brought it back to South Carolina. As is always the case, however, he wouldn't really know what he had until he did a thorough inventory back home.

The large dorsal fin on the 11BC Chief (also used on the 11CC) makes identification of the higher-horsepower Chiefs a bit easier.





“When we unloaded at home, Gene came over and we spread the entire collection of stuff out to see what was missing and what kind of work was going to be needed. In general, the airframe was actually in great shape because the A&P had already started working on it and had finished the major components. The wings were more or less complete and finished,

and the work was beautiful. About all they needed were the leading edges and to be covered.

“The fuselage tubing had been cleaned and painted, and most of the fuselage wood was usable, too. Part of the airplane’s condition is probably because it had only 400 hours on it and had spent most of its life stored inside somewhere. We don’t have much of the airplane’s history, but you could see by looking at the wood and steel that it hadn’t been left outside to rot like so many Chiefs have been.

“When we were done inventorying it, we found a lot of missing or unusable stuff that I hadn’t noticed when picking it up. It had no tail wheel or wing struts, and the doors were not only the wrong doors, but were badly crushed. There were no control yokes and all of the logos were missing. Same thing for all of the interior upholstery boards. Plus, there was essentially nothing firewall-forward.”

It’s still easy for most of those who have restored airplanes to remember what it was like in the days before computers. The dozens of trips to fly-markets, the phone calls, and the constant surveillance of *Trade-a-Plane* were not only aggravating, but added a huge amount of time to finishing the project. Danny came into the Vintage world PC, post computer, so he was able to take full advantage of cyber searching for parts.

“Besides buying the airplane on eBay, that service proved to be a terrific source for some of the rarer parts I needed. Among other things, that’s

What’s in a Model Number?

By H.G. Frautschy

The differences between the 11BC Chief and the 11CC Super Chief are tough to spot, but in today’s sport pilot market, one distinction can spell the difference between flying one and just owning one.

Both airplanes are powered by the Continental C85-8, and both came equipped with the rather clever McDowell starter. The McDowell was vilified by some as being a cheap substitute for an electrical starter, but having had one for years on my Super Chief, I’d have to say it’s one of the neatest inventions added to the postwar lightplane. If treated with respect and used in the way the manufacturer intended, it worked perfectly. It did have one design weakness that could have been easily solved, but it didn’t last long enough on the market to make it that far.

The McDowell was activated using a cable with a ball, swaged on the end. Because of the way the ball and cable were retained in the starter’s pulley sheave, the cable would fray and then break just below the ball, or an overly enthusiastic pull on the starter cable would pull the ball right off the end. If McDowell had used a small fitting inside the sheave to allow for a straight pull on the cable (and if the cable had a ball and shank swaged fitting), I’m convinced the McDowell would have been much more popular.

It allowed for a lightweight starter to be installed on an airplane intended to be flown by casual travelers who were interested in ease of use and safety. It allowed my wife and her instructor, both petite women, to independently fly the airplane without requiring a flip of the prop by someone else. As long as the engine was in good tune and one could reasonably expect the airplane to start when the impulse magneto fired, the McDowell was a great way to pull the prop through safely.

The 11BC and 11CC interiors were similar, with a slight edge going to the 11CC for a few interior appointments added to enhance the automobile-like feel to the cockpit. Hap Granier, the designer of the interior of all three postwar Aeroncas, worked his magic on the Chiefs to give them a small sedan or coupe feeling. Bedford whipcord upholstery and side panels, the zebra-wood pattern wood-grain-printed instrument panel, and control wheels instead of control sticks all contributed to that atmosphere.

Both the 11CC and 11BC featured a large dorsal fin, but the 11CC had a different elevator/stabilizer configuration. That fact is sometimes lost on restorers and aircraft modifiers, who incorrectly (and illegally) put the earlier 11AC or 11BC stab/elevator combination on an 11CC. The 11CC has an aerodynamically balanced elevator, designed to meet the hands-off gliding speed requirements of the then-new CAR O3 regulations. Aeronca also had the 11CC certified in the Utility category as well as the Normal category, with maximum gross weights of 1,290 and 1,350 pounds, respectively. That right there is a major difference in the airplanes as they are viewed in the market today. The 11BC, with a maximum gross weight of 1,250 pounds, is sport pilot eligible, while the 11CC, by virtue of its 1,350 weight, is not.

Interestingly, a few 11CC additions made it into the 11BC as well. Both Chiefs, as well as the four-place Aeronca Sedan, shared the same rudder/brake pedals, with toe brakes instead of the heel brakes seen on the Champ. Both feature flight characteristics similar to the Champ, with the Chiefs having the edge when it comes to cross-country flights. With a 70-pound baggage allowance and up to 23 gallons of fuel on board, the Chief is a great traveling machine, if you’re not in a hurry. But when you’re flying something as pretty as a Chief, who’s in a big hurry?