



Up in the air

Maryland museum's plane never really took off

BY KRIS CORONADO

When it comes to aviation history, the Wright brothers often get all the glory, but plenty of others have tried to make a name for themselves in the field. In the late 1930s, the Engineering and Research Corp., a Riverdale aircraft company, developed an atypical recreational airplane called the Ercoupe. Designer Fred Weick envisioned a single-engine plane anyone could fly. "He developed this plane that is controlled with hand controls, like a steering wheel," says Tiffany Davis, curator of collections at the College Park Aviation Museum.

The museum (1985 Corporal Frank Scott Dr., 301-864-6029, www.collegeparkaviationmuseum.com) has two Ercoupes on display (one is cut in half to give visitors a peek at the interior). "It was advertised as you could drive it and park it like a car," Davis says.

After the war, ERCO began rolling out Ercoupes in full force. "They anticipated they were going to have 10,000 orders by the end of 1946, but the market dropped out really quickly,"



Made of mostly aluminum, the Ercoupe weighed about **845 pounds** when empty and had a maximum weight capacity of 1,400 pounds. It is about 20 feet long, with a wingspan of 30 feet.

In 1945, **Ercoupes** were sold by Macy's in Manhattan for \$2,994 (about \$38,600 today). After the market fell, ERCO founder Henry Berliner left the industry in 1947 and sold the Ercoupe rights and parts to Sanders Aviation.

The Ercoupe was first designed with a single tail, but it caused the plane to veer left under certain conditions and was difficult to correct. Weick later switched to a **twin design** and slanted the plane's engine slightly to the right to solve the problem.



Davis says. "They only produced about 5,000 of these."

Why'd the market go? Davis believes it could be a variety of reasons. "A lot of these soldiers were coming home, and they were looking to buy houses, cars and have babies — they just weren't interested in flying," Davis says.

Here, a look at the Ercoupe.

The museum has two Ercoupes: A suspended 1946 model mimics what it would look like in the air; visitors can peer into the **cockpit** of another model. There are no pedals.



Unlike most airplanes, in which pedals control the rudders, the Ercoupe used **hand controls** to maneuver the rudders, ailerons (hinged sections on wings) and a steer-able nose.

Weick invented the plane's tricycle **landing gear**, featuring a third wheel under the nose of the plane (making it less likely for the plane to pitch forward) rather than under the tail of the plane (called a taildragger).



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