

FORUM of FLIGHT

In November 2025, Textron Beechcraft announced the termination of the G36 Bonanza and G58 Baron production bringing an end to an 80+ year run. Moreover, it brings an end to Beechcraft's production of piston powered aircraft, as well, after almost 100 years. This Forum of Flight takes a look back at some of these piston powered planes.

The Forum is presented as an opportunity for each member to participate in the Journal by submitting interesting or unusual photographs. Most of the images come from contributions to the AAHS archives. Unfortunately, with older images the contributor information has been lost. Where known, we acknowledge them.

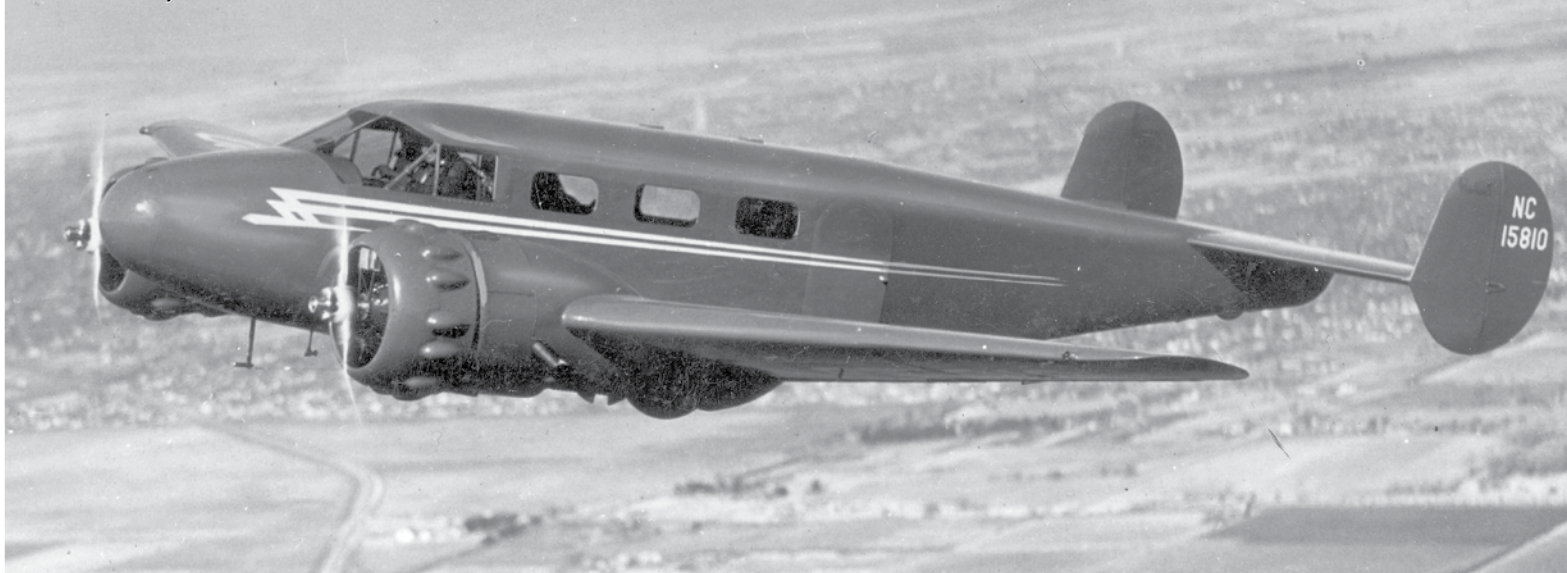
Negatives, slides, black-and-white, or color photos with good contrast may be used if they have smooth surfaces. Digital submissions are also acceptable, but please provide high resolution images (>3,000 pixels wide). Please include as much information as possible about the image such as: date, place, msn (manufacturer's serial number), names, etc., plus proper photo credit (it may be from your collection but taken by another photographer).

Send submissions to the Editorial Committee marked "Forum of Flight," P.O. Box 483, Riverside, CA 92502-0483. Mark any material to be returned: "Return to (your name and complete address)." Or you may wish to have your material added to the AAHS photo archives.

The Beechcraft Model 17 Staggerwing was introduced in 1932 and remained in production until 1948, being replaced by the Bonanza. Featured here is a 1937 D17S, NC18575, c/n 179, photographed October 14, 2016. (Robert Burns photo)



The Staggerwing was followed by the Model 18, Twin Beech, introduced in 1937 and produced until 1969. Seen here is a photo of the prototype, NC15810, somewhere over Kansas. (Monte Barnes photo from John Underwood collection)





A



B



C



D

A. During WWII, both the Army Airforce and U.S. Navy operated variants of the Beech 18. This example is a C-45H Expeditor, 52-10894, that started life as AT-11, 42-37199, and seen here in Navy markings at the Beech Museum, Tullahoma, Tenn., in October 2017. (Robert Burns photo)

B. An aide to Army Air Force commander Gen. "Hap" Arnold, visiting Beech in 1940, saw their production of Model 18s modified as bombing trainers / light bombers for China. Arnold ordered 150 similar AT-11 Kansans for bombing and gunnery trainers for the AAF. Over 1,500 were built by 1945, training most U.S. bombardiers with its Norden bombsight in a Plexiglas nose, and rack for ten 100-pound bombs. One or two .30-cal. machine guns in top turret & belly trained gunners. It also served as a navigation trainer, and for aerial photography. This AT-11B-BH, 41-9474, c/n3811, N7179C, photographed Oct. 14, 2017, over South-Central Tennessee. (Robert Burns photo)

C. 1946 D18S, N30G, s/n A-131, owned by Ag Air, Inc., photographed October 15 at the 2017 Beech Party, Tullahoma, Tenn. (Robert Burns photo)

D. A 1952 D18S, N4477, owned by Robert Parish is captured in flight in this photo shot October 14, 2016 at the annual Beech Party. (Robert Burns photo)



A

A - The final version of the Beech Staggerwing was the G17S, represented here by James B. Hawkes 1947 beautifully restored example, NC80315, s/n B-14, photographed October 17, 2017. (Robert Burns photo)

B - The Staggerwing was replaced by the all-metal Model 35 Bonanza, which derivative versions would remain in production for almost 80 years. N9799R, s/n D6345, is a 1960 M35 version of the famous V-tail design photographed April 29, 2022. 210-mph max., 50-gallon tanks, 5th seat optional. This one has optional long-range tip tanks. (Mark Nankivil photo)

C - 1963 Beechcraft P35 Bonanza, N7797R, s/n D-7152, photographed October 14, 2023. (Mark Nankivil photo)

D - 1967 Beechcraft V35A, N390HW, s/n D8608, taxis in at the 2017 Beech Party, Tullahoma, Tenn. (Robert Burns photo)



B



C



D

E



A



B



C



D

A -Based on the Bonanza design, Beechcraft created the T-34 Mentor flown by both USAF and USN. Shown here is the first T-34B, BuNo 140667, delivered to the USN. (Beech photo, AAHS archives, AAHS-P000202)

B -USAF T-34A Mentor, 52-7626, was among the first production units delivered to the USAF. (Beech photo, AAHS archives, AAHS-P000228)

C -Beech 50 Twin Bonanza, created by splitting Bonanza fuselage down the middle & inserting a plug, first sold in 1951, to compete with Piper Apache, Cessna 310, and especially Aero Commanders. (AAHS archives, AAHS-S033252)

D -The Model 50 Twin Bonanza (Army designation: L-23 Seminole, then U-8), was first flown in 1949. This one was N3674B. (AAHS archives, AAHS-S033865)

E -A Model 50 Twin Bonanza taxis in at Antique Airfield, Ottumwa, Iowa, in 2024. (Mark Nankivil photo)



E



A



B



C



D

A - Beechcraft Model B55 Baron, N6847Q. (Beechcraft photo, AAHS archives, AAHS-P006626)

B - Short-lived (1965-1968) pressurized Model 88 Queen Air (only 47 built) was a piston-engined King Air 90 -- unlike the unpressurized Queen Airs, with square windows, which were cabin-class evolutions of the Twin Bonanza. (Beechcraft photo, AAHS archives, AAHS-P006639)

C - The Model 35-33 Debonair featuring a conventional tail was introduced in 1960 as a lower priced version of the classic V-35 (Beechcraft photo, AAHS archives, AAHS-P006654)

D - Model 60 Duke -- introduced in the late 1960s to bridge the gap between Baron and King Air -- featured pressurization and high performance. (Beechcraft photo, AAHS archives, AAHS-P006622)

E - Early 35-33 Debonair. (AAHS archives, AAHS-S032749)



E



A



B



C



D



E

A - The Model 23/24 Musketeer/Sundowner was targeted compete against the Cessna 172 and Piper Cherokee. (AAHS archives, AAHS-S032729)

B - The Model 76 Duchess was produced from 1977 to 1983 as a light-twin trainer. (AAHS archives, AAHS-S033436)

C - The Model 79 Skipper was design as a low cost trainer to compete against the Piper Tomahawk and Cessna 150. (Wikipedia commons)

D - The Model B24R Sierra was intended to compete again the Piper Arrow and Cessna Cardinal RG. (AAHS archives, AAHS-S033275)

E - Beechcraft modified a few A36 Bonanza airframes to create the QU-22B spy drone that saw limited use usually manned) in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (AAHS archives, AAHS-S033085)

F - A number of after-market conversions to Allison and Pratt & Whitney turboprops, such as the Tradewinds version, were made using the A36 airframe. (Mark Nankivil photo)

F

