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# Passengers take flight on 1929 'Tin Goose' plane

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Kim Meyer of Cedar Rapids looks out the window of a 1929 Ford Tri-Motor during a media flight Thursday in Iowa City. To see more photos from the flight, go to www.press-citizen.com. Matthew holst / Iowa City Press-Citizen

Written by  
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Iowa City Press-  
Citizen

As a boy, the planes that criss-crossed the skies during aviation's Golden Age captured John Hunter's imagination.

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So when he strapped himself into the cockpit of one of the of the era's pioneering aircraft, a 1929 Ford Tri-Motor airliner nicknamed the "Tin Goose," it was a thrilling experience for the 69-year-old Cedar Rapids man.

Hunter was among the passengers who soared as high as 1,100 feet over Iowa City, able to look down from his vantage point in the co-pilot's seat on the town laid out in miniature during a 15-minute flight out of the Iowa City Municipal Airport.

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"It was very much worthwhile," Hunter said afterward. "I'd recommend it to anybody. It wasn't scary, and you don't have to be a thrill-seeker to do it."

#### FORD TRI-MOTOR PLANE RIDES

» When: The plane will be making 15 to 20 trips per day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Monday at the Iowa City Municipal Airport. The rides are about 15 minutes.

» Cost: \$70 a person.

» Reserve a flight: Visit EAA's Tri-Motor tour website at [www.flytheford.org](http://www.flytheford.org). You also can pre-book a flight by calling 877-952-5395.

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The antique plane, the world's first mass-produced airliner, is making flights out of Iowa City through Monday. The Experimental Aircraft Association is offering rides to the public at a cost of \$70 as part of the organization's fall tour with the Tin Goose, which has carried tens of thousands of passengers nationally since the EAA restored it in 1985.

The EAA Tri-Motor, with its distinctive thick wing, corrugated metal body and trio of radial engines, has a storied history. Its original owner was Eastern Air Transport, which later became Eastern Airlines, and initially was used for hauling both airmail and passengers as the company's first plane.

It spent much of the 1930s and 1940s outside the U.S. in the service of a Cuban airline and the Dominican Republic government, then returned stateside in 1949, when it was refitted with more powerful engines to be used as a barnstormer. Over the course of the next

decade, the plane crossed the nation dusting crops and dousing fires, and in 1958, it was modified once more to be used by smoke jumpers.

The plane provided show rides in the early 1970s, but a storm battered and nearly destroyed it while it was on the ground in 1973. The EAA, which is based out of Oshkosh, Wis., took ownership, and after 12 years of restoration work, coaxed it back into the air.

The plane's pilot on Thursday, retired Northwest Airlines captain Cody Welch, said his job and that of his fellow EAA volunteers is "to take people back in time."

"Everybody gets off the airplane with a smile," Welch said. "It's really cool to step back into 1929, and along the way have one of the nicest airplane rides you could ever get."

Welch said piloting the Tin Goose was akin to flying a "winged Winnebago." On turbulent days, it's a workout to maneuver the plane, while on smoother days, it's fingertip flying, he said.

"The antique airplanes have some unique ways that they fly, but

basically, they got it right in terms of engineering," he said.

The EAA's plane has entertained more than just its passengers over the years. It's appeared in two movies, "The Family Jewels" with Jerry Lewis in 1965 and "Public Enemies" with Johnny Depp in 2009.

Denny Hodge, president of the Eastern Iowa EAA chapter, is helping coordinate rides this weekend at the airport. He said events like this are designed by his organization to foster enthusiasm for aviation.

"It's making a piece of history available for the public not only to see, but to touch and experience," Hodge said.

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