

Why Do Women Fly?

By Mary C. Alexander

AVIATION within the past four or five years has brought this old world of ours closer together, and as we thumb the 365 pages of 1931's story we find the world quite a bit smaller. Two young men in a hurry, Wiley Post and Harold Gatty, demonstrated that the world is a small place to live in after all.

The historian finds that for 1932 London and Paris and Washington and Tokyo and all the great capitals are our neighbors. Scheduled air transportation has brought the far distant cities of America within a few hours of each other. Likewise South and Central America can be reached in from one to three days of flying. Aviation has ceased to be a plaything and has become a most important factor in transportation.

You ask, "Why do women fly?" Because of their pioneering instinct. Some women have it, others do not. They may have inherited it from the pioneers who came over in the Mayflower. Or they may have caught the pioneering spirit of the man back in 1870 when they, with almost superhuman efforts, tried to awaken the cities and towns to the fact that they must have railroads.

How often have you heard someone say, and with much pride: "I owned an automobile in 1905"; or "I was the first to drive a car in my town." He was really a pioneer!

Aviation has attracted mostly the substantial type of women. Many of them are mothers, and many say they received their inspiration from their children's interest in aviation. It has not attracted the flapper type of girl, which may be attributed to parental objection.

A woman's first step in aviation is not an easy one. I think it is not unlike the experience of the woman who first drove an automobile years ago. Learning to fly is not easy. There are many things a woman has to combat. Even the people in her home town, her friends, jump to the conclusion she is out for publicity or notoriety, or for stunts, records, etc. To combat this stigma, she must have determination, she must be a good sport, she must be able to use practical common sense; and last but not least, she should have a sense of humor. Because strange as it may seem, after all the remarkable records and accomplishments women have made in flying, there are still a few men who think we are more or less interlopers in their field of activity. I see no reason why woman should not take her place in aviation as she has in other branches of life, or business or art.

My part in aviation has been very small, but I have known many women pilots in all walks of life who have accomplished marvelous things; not only in flying, but they spend long hard hours in the pro-

motion or pioneering of aviation. They fly to meetings, give talks before clubs, and fly in airmeets whenever possible. They are always gracious, willing, and untiring in their efforts. I would say that the greater part in promoting aviation is taken by women. They take a pride in their flying, and other women pilots' accomplishments. They are practical women, do not see any mystery in flying, and wonder at people who do, or who are squeamish about flying. They are the most unassuming people in the world. These women have too much to think about to be otherwise. Aviation will keep your mind on—well, on aviation!

They are the real pioneers in their little world, as there are just a few more than five hundred licensed women pilots today. In January, 1929, there were only 34 licensed women pilots. There are thousands of men pilots.

Yes, women are pioneering aviation for the future, and for the future of their children, and their children's children. Most women pilots keep a scrap book on their accomplishments and activities, not for the personal publicity value, but for their coming generations. Within a few years when airplanes will be used for personal transportation in the ratio common to automobile travel today, when women will be stepping in their luxurious cabin planes dressed in afternoon clothes to attend a bridge, or reception at a neighboring town or city, they can boast of the fact that their mothers or grandmothers flew the first plane in their state or town.

The next big reason why women fly is for sportsmanship. Women who are not interested in aviation commercially, but who can well afford to own their planes, fly for pleasure and for sportsmanship.

It is the greatest sport in the world today. Women and men who have owned fast motor boats, motor cars, who swim, golf, and play tennis, will tell you that they put flying on a par with any athletic activity.

I have a son 18 years old who is a licensed pilot. If I had five sons, I would want them to fly, if they



Mrs. Alexander, whose home is in Lynchburg, Virginia, is a licensed pilot with more than 200 hours of flying to her credit. She is Southeastern Governor of the Ninety-Nines, the well-known women pilots' organization. Mrs. Alexander has an 18-year-old son who is also a licensed pilot

were physically fit. Flying develops co-ordination of mind and muscle, makes you mentally alert, and creates sportsmanship in one as nothing else can. It develops independence in making up your own mind, making your own decisions.

When you are up three thousand feet in the air, and your motor should happen to cut out, your decision has to be made quickly and independently. When you are flying cross-country, you cannot slow up and ask if this is the way to Norfolk or Washington.

Many of you know what it is to have that exalted feeling in obtaining a beautiful golf shot; but to be master of an airplane in the air, to take off, and then to make a perfect three-point landing, that word exalted cannot describe it. Flying gives you a different perspective of things in the air and on the ground. It is marvelous to be on speaking terms with the sky, clouds, wind, and away from the mad rush of things below. It gives you that detached feeling.

Flying is good for the old as well as for the young. I feel that anyone who can pass the physical examination can learn to fly. A little over a year ago the Duchess of Bedford in England made her first solo flight at the age of 64, and shortly thereafter took off with a pilot for an 18,500 mile flight to Cape Town and return. She shared the controls. Last summer a couple past 50 obtained their licenses, and they toured the country in their ship. Recently I saw a gray-haired man who had just passed his test successfully for a pilot's license. His face was glowing, and the sparkle in his eye indicated that he had taken a new lease on life.

Many Types of Women Fly

Many types of women in all walks of life are learning to fly. At Alameda, California, Mrs. A. M. Kleavland, who is fifty-six years old, learned to fly; and she was the first to drive an automobile in her family. Miss Lincoln Beckwith, granddaughter of Abraham Lincoln, has a pilot's license. Many society matrons and Junior League girls are learning to fly.

Miss Bulah Unruh paid for her flying lessons from tips while she was working at a restaurant in New York. She is now promoting aviation as hostess on the ships of Eastern Air Transport. Many school teachers learn to fly during the summer. Eighty-three per cent of college girls in America want to fly, according to information given by deans of universities, colleges and finishing schools.

More women are traveling by air than ever before in the history of air transportation, for several reasons. Facilities for air travel are better; there are more airlines, covering a wider territory, and having more extensive schedules, and the rates are lower.

Another reason women fly is because of the commercial possibilities of aviation. However, a girl in commercial aviation must have a background of business experience, and should have a pleasing personality, coupled with a knowledge of aviation which will enable her to contact the public on all things

aeronautical. A girl going into commercial aviation should have qualifications other than just her flying ability.

As I have said before I do not see any reason why a woman should not take her place in aviation the same as she does in other pursuits of life. However, some women pilots let their enthusiasm run away with their better judgment in trying to fly equipment suitable only for the man pilot. Some women pilots have as good a scientific mind and nerve as any man, but from a physical and endurance point of view they are handicapped.

Woman as a whole are better navigators than most men pilots. This was proven in last year's National Air Races by Phoebe Omlie when she won the cross-continent derby against some of the most experienced men pilots. This may be attributed to the fact that men are too sure, while the women give navigation more thought and study.

I cannot make myself believe that any woman can take a heavy, fast ship, loaded with five or six hundred gallons of gas, off the field and fly across the Atlantic by herself. She may have the scientific mind, knowledge of celestial navigation, and be able to fly blind, but she will not have the physical endurance to combat the long hours, some of which will be blind flying, and meeting the different weather conditions.

At the present time women can do more for aviation and for themselves by sticking to equipment suitable for their strength and ability; flying cross-country commercially or for pleasure whenever possible, and landing at airports looking fresh and clean. When the spectators will see this, they will say: "There is nothing to it, I'll learn to fly"; or, "If she can fly alone, I should take a chance in flying over air transport lines."

A few years ago women would land at airports looking as though they had been through a war to get there, or as though it had been a great achievement over hardship. Such arrivals will not sell the public on flying.

Women are more careful pilots than men. There are relatively fewer accidents and fatalities among women pilots. This is even true with the automobile drivers. Women are more conservative; they take fewer chances.

I have heard it said women fly because they want to get away from some hidden sorrow! That they are high strung, temperamental, eccentric. They want to get into a man's world, it is said, to compete with men, to be with men, to get away from some other man! I have heard it said that woman pilots are mannish; that freaks fly.

I know of some of the happiest married couples, and they both fly. And I know of dainty girls, five feet tall, who are most excellent pilots; honor graduates who prefer flying to bridge parties. Of course, you get the queer personality in all walks of life, but no more so in aviation. A girl might give her reason for flying flippantly; but regardless of the reason they have given and will continue to give with variations, it is mostly that old strong pioneering instinct.