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LOCKHEED VEGA H183

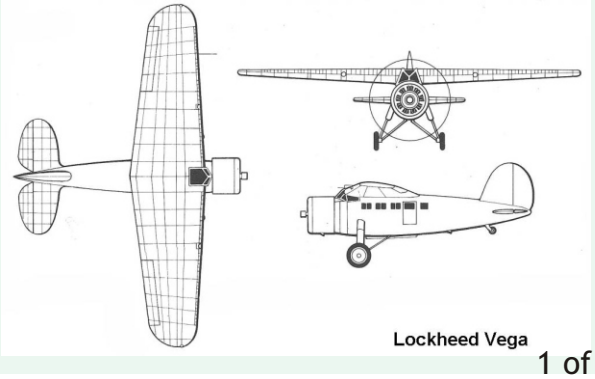


The Lockheed Vega was a six-passenger monoplane built by the American Lockheed company. The plane is famous because it was used by a number of celebrity pilots in the 1930s. Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly the Atlantic single handed in one and Wiley Post flew his (nicknamed *Winnie Mae*) around the world twice.



The first Vega 1, named the *Golden Eagle*, flew from Lockheed's Los Angeles plant on 4 July 1927. It could cruise at a then-fast 120 mph (193 km/h) and had a top speed of 135 mph (217 km/h). This first version could carry four-passengers (plus one pilot) and was largely sold to private individuals. However, its speed made it widely known. In the 1928 National Air Races in Cleveland, Ohio, Vegas won every speed award.

The Vega 5 was first produced in 1929. It had a Pratt & Whitney R-1340 Wasp engine of 450 hp (336 kw) and two extra passenger seats. It could cruise at 155 mph (249 km/h) and had a top speed to 165 mph (266 km/h). Sixty-four Vega 5s were built. Both Amelia Earhart and Wiley Post flew Vega 5s.



Lockheed Vega

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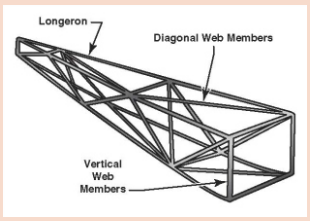
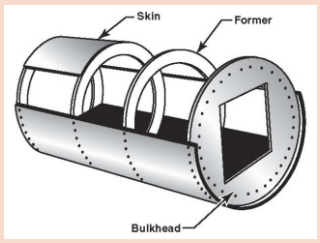
Lockheed Vegas made use of the monocoque construction technique. This was a radical new approach to aircraft building, which came to be widely used in the 1930s.

Early aircraft were constructed using a rectangular frame, such as the one shown in the illustration on the right. This was then covered with a canvas skin.





Monocoque construction (left), on the other hand, gets rid of the frame . The skin itself is strong enough to support any loads that are attached to it.



The first monocoque plane was made in 1916 by the German firm Luft-Fahrzeug-Gesellschaft. Their Roland C.II plane (right) used a body (fuselage) made of bent plywood, forming both the external skin as well as the main load bearing surface. This made the plane immensely strong, although it was also quite heavy.

The Lockheed Vega fuselage was built from sheets of plywood skinned over wooden ribs. Using a large concrete mould, a single half of the fuselage shell was laminated in sections with glue and then a rubber bladder was put into the mould and inflated with air to compress the lamination into shape. Two fuselage halves were then nailed and glued over a previously made rib framework.



The 1920s and 30s was a period in which flying was seen as an exciting adventure. The Lockheed Vega was used by several famous pilots from this period. The advertisement on the left, for example, commemorates the first non-stop crossing of the United States from west to east by Arthur Goebel and Harry J. Tucker, a millionaire playboy from California (flying was often the hobby of thrill-seeking rich men). The Vega which they used had not been modified for the flight. It had a cruising speed of 135 mph, with a top speed of 170. This flight took place in August 1928; in November Tucker was killed in his plane *Yankee Doodle*, attempting to break his own record.

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Wiley Hardeman Post (1898 1935)



The two most famous aviators to fly Lockheed Vegas were Wiley Post and Amelia Earhart. Wiley Post (right - wearing a pressure suit for high altitude flying) was born in Texas. His flying career began at age 26 as a parachutist for a flying circus, *Burrell Tibbs and His Texas Topnotch Fliers*. On 1 October 1926, an oilfield accident cost him his left eye, but he used the insurance money to buy his first aircraft.

Post became the pilot of wealthy Oklahoma oilmen Powell Briscoe and F.C. Hall in 1930. Hall bought a Lockheed Vega which he nicknamed *Winnie Mae*, after his daughter. In 1930 Post used this plane to win the National Air Race Derby, from Los Angeles to Chicago.



On 23 June 1931, Post and his navigator, Harold Gatty, left New York in the *Winnie Mae* with a flight plan that would take them around the world, making fourteen stops along the way in Newfoundland, England, Germany, the Soviet Union, Alaska, Alberta, Canada and Cleveland, Ohio before returning to New York. They arrived back on 1 July after travelling 15,474 miles in the record time of 8 days, 15 hours and 51 minutes. They received a tumultuous reception and rode in a ticker-tape parade through New York. After the flight, Post bought the *Winnie Mae* (left, with Post) from F.C. Hall, and he and Gatty published an account of their journey titled, *Around the World in Eight Days*, with an introduction by his friend the celebrity cowboy Will Rogers (right).



In 1933, he repeated his flight around the world, this time using the auto-pilot and compass in place of his navigator and becoming the first to accomplish the feat alone. 50,000 people greeted him on his return after 7 days, 19 hours and he was given a second ticker-tape parade in New York.

In 1935 Wiley and Will Rogers were killed when their plane crashed in Alaska. Post was famous and Rogers was a huge celebrity in America at this time - his death was marked by national mourning.

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Amelia Mary Earhart (1897 1937)



Amelia Earhart was another famous pioneer pilot. She was the first woman to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross, which she was awarded as the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.



Amelia Earhart was born in Kansas. In her mid-20s she worked at a variety of jobs to save $1,000 for flying lessons. In 1927 Charles Lindbergh made the first solo flight across the Atlantic. In the following year Amelia was passenger in a plane with a two-man crew which made the same journey. The photograph on the left shows her being greeted in Southampton by the mayoress.

This flight made her famous. The fact that she looked very similar to Charles Lindburgh added to her fame. Like many modern 'celebrities' she endorsed a variety of products, including Lucky Strike cigarettes and a variety of women's fashions. She was also an advocate for women's rights and a member of an organisation of women pilots promoting the cause of women in aviation.



In 1928, she became the first woman to fly solo across the North American continent and back, but perhaps her most famous flight took place in 1932. Flying a red Lockheed Vega 5b (right, in the National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC) she set off on 20 May from Newfoundland to cross the Atlantic alone. After a flight lasting 14 hours, 56 minutes during which she battled with strong northerly winds, icy conditions and mechanical problems, she landed in a pasture at Culmore, Northern Ireland. When a farm hand asked, 'Have you flown far?' she replied, 'From America.'



On 11 January 1935, Earhart became the first person to fly solo from Hawaii to California. Again, she used a Lockheed Vega. The photograph on the left shows her being mobbed after this flight. In 1937, the plane she was flying in disappeared off the coast of New Guinea. Her body was never found.