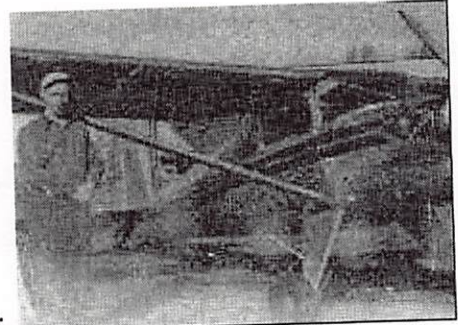


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Our Luscombe Story

From: <http://www.air98.com>

In early 1946, Gerry A. Bilodeau and his associate Roger A. LaBrecque ordered a new Luscombe (two seater) from Roland Maheux at the Maheux's Airport in Minot, Maine. It was a polished Silvaire, registration NC72025, a model 8A "all metal" aircraft with a Continental 65 H.P. engine. Roger flew the plane recreationally and Gerry began to take flying lessons at Maheux's School of Aviation, Inc.



When Gerry acquired his Private Pilot's License, he marketed use of the aircraft with his soft-drink bottling business, Sunset Beverage Company. He coined: "free ride" in a variety of bottle caps and the lucky winners found themselves flying over the Falls in Lewiston and Auburn.

Mrs. Jeanne Bilodeau, Gerry's wife, loved to fly in the Luscombe, especially to Boston to enjoy big city life. She remembers quite well how exciting those days with her husband were and loves to tell the family all the details.



In late 1947, during a family crisis, Gerry decided to fly the Luscombe for a "free ride" winner. His mother had just passed away; she never wanted Gerry to fly. On that day in October, Gerry attempted to takeoff from his gravel runway off Washington Street in Auburn. Before getting safely aloft, the Luscombe flipped on its back in the brush at the end of the strip. At the time, Jeanne and other family members believed that the crash was a curse from Gerry's deceased mother who stole the lift from his wings. Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt. Strangely enough, the authorities and the press never found out Gerry was carrying passengers.

Later it was concluded that pilot error caused the crash. The aircraft was overweight, the air temperature was high, and the pilot was under family stress, all on a runway barely long enough for a normal take-off. Gerry soon gave up flying and decided to market his bottling business and hotel in other ways. He believed his mother would have wanted it that way.

The Luscombe aircraft was severely damaged and the insurance company hauled it off. Gerry kept the original propeller and his logbooks stored away. It was later discovered that Gerry's signature on the bill of sale (what was left of the aircraft) was forged by an unknown party.

In 1985, Gerry's grandson Daniel L. Bilodeau (Dan) attended Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach to learn to fly and receive a degree in Aeronautical Science. Before his graduation in 1989, Gerry had passed away. Dan

had never taken his grandfather flying. A few years after Gerry's death his youngest son Michael found the old propeller and the logbooks from the Luscombe. Dan was quite pleased to receive them in their original condition, but never examined them extensively.

Later in the early 1990's, Dan met a loyal friend, Stephen W. Whitney of Gray, Maine. Dan and Steve began a flying business together named Bethel Air Service, Inc., at the Colonel Dyke Airfield, in Bethel, Maine. Here Dan proudly displayed his grandfather's propeller on a wall in the office and there it remained for many years.

In 1993, Dan became the Sunday River Skiway pilot and Steve became their aircraft mechanic. Business went on as usual. Then, a couple of years later, while waiting for a flight, Dan noticed the Luscombe propeller had an engraved serial number adjacent to the hub. After closely examining the logbooks, Dan found the numbers on the propeller and in the logbooks matched exactly. The excitement generated from this correlation prompted Dan to call the Federal Aviation Administration, Aircraft Registration Division, in Oklahoma City. With the tail number (N72025) it was easy to find out the status of the airframe and who the present owner was. No one since the accident had ever questioned the whereabouts of the Luscombe, all involved assumed the crash had been a total loss and that the plane was no longer in existence.

Sid Mason's Airport, Maynard, Massachusetts, had been the home of N72025 since the early 1950's. At the time of the crash the insurance company sold the aircraft to Turner Aviation Company in Turner, Maine (Twitchell's). It was one of Ron Twitchell's first salvage projects. He successfully repaired and restored the Luscombe to FAA standards, flew it for about a year and then sold it to Don's Flying Service in Marlboro, Massachusetts. Sidney H. Mason (Sid) had been the proud owner for most of the Luscombe's life, he was very surprised to hear from Dan that afternoon. Sid and his wife Susan were excited to talk to somebody who actually had information on their aircraft's past. During the telephone conversation, it was revealed that Sid would someday lay under a tombstone that was engraved "N72025".

Dan journeyed south to meet with Sid and to see a piece of his grandfather's past. Upon arrival Dan was well received despite the fact that Sid had owned the aircraft so long, he could not realize that a man named Gerry Bilodeau had once owned and crashed the little Luscombe. After a brief inspection of the original logbooks it was quite evident that Dan was who he said he was. That day Dan and Sid enjoyed an afternoon of "hanger flying" and before leaving they had come to an agreement. If Sid ever intended to sell the Luscombe he would give, Dan first option to buy. In exchange for this, Dan would forward the original logbooks if for any reason he could not buy the aircraft. After a brief ride (taxi) in the Luscombe, Dan said goodbye to his new friend(s).

In 1996, Sid and Susan telephoned Dan. It appeared he was interested in selling N72025. Steve promptly arranged for a pre-purchase inspection and an offer was made and accepted with two conditions. One that Sid would deliver the aircraft to Maine, and two that he would return at his leisure to fly it whenever he wanted to. Steve, assisted by the Portland FAA, acquired the necessary "ferry" permit that Sid would need for the flight to Maine. It was a beautiful day when Sid touched down in Bethel in September of 1997. As expected, Sid was practically in tears as he handed the keys over.

A great deal of maintenance was immediately put into the Luscombe so Dan could prepare for a very important, very exciting first flight. Approximately one week after

the delivery, September 23, 1996, exactly fifty years to the day that his grandfather Gerry had had his first flight in the Luscombe, Dan took to the skies. It was also Dan's first flight in the Luscombe. He had been diligently preparing all week long getting flight training in numerous conventional gear (tail-draggers) aircraft similar to the Luscombe.

Dan flew the plane from the western mountains of Maine to Minot, where his grandfather first flew. The airport was still in operation and the owner was still Roland Maheux who was now in his eighties and still flying! As the morning fog dissipated Dan touched down on the grass strip and there awaited Jeanne and a special guest, along with Roland and Gerry's former associate Roger LaBrecque. Dan's father and mother, Leo and Cecile Bilodeau along with other relatives were also present for his arrival.

A few days before Steve had finished the maintenance on the plane, Jeanne had called Dan with exciting news. She had spoken with a man named Marcel P. Toutain, now in his seventies who was the man, the flight instructor that Gerry first flew with. He was the special guest that morning and had agreed to meet Dan and fly in the Luscombe! Therefore, as fate would have it, Dan and Marcel flew that morning in the same aircraft, with the same pilot, at the same airport as his grandfather did exactly fifty years prior.

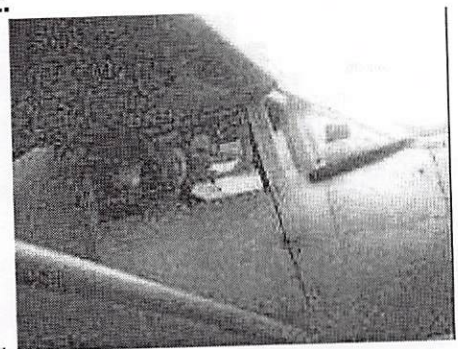
The flight began with a valuable lesson. Marcel explained with great caution how to safely hand-prop the Luscombe. Marcel had turned out to be a wonderful instructor and it was incredible that he could pick up where he had left off so many years ago. When they were ready for engine start, Dan shouted "contact" and Roland hand-propped the Luscombe just as he did fifty years earlier when Gerry had purchased the plane.

Once the operational checks were performed, N72025 departed and when safely airborne, Marcel instinctively took the controls and began to fly! What lasted only twenty minutes seemed like a lifetime for Dan and Marcel, both exited to be there in the sky in there own way. With a text book three-point landing all the hard work and preparation was over. And like that day in September 1946, Marcel signed Dan's pilot logbook "RFI", for registered flight instructor, just as he did his grandfather's. The flight lesson was finished, and a job well done.

As Of December 1998, Steve Whitney is in Fredonia, Wisconsin where he is completing his training to be a New Tribes Mission pilot.

Dan Bilodeau is living in Bryant Pond, Maine with his wife Stacey. He is a DC-10 pilot for Continental Airlines and plans to go "air camping" this summer in Maine with the Luscombe. The old propeller now hangs in his home.

Jeanne Bilodeau a terrific and loving grandmother is residing in Lewiston, Maine as well as Marcel Toutain and Roger LaBrecque who both await rides with Dan. Sid Mason visits his old airplane bi-yearly to fly it as he did for many years and Maheau Airport is



**still operating in Minot.
The Luscombe is
hanged there, its
original home.**



One last note, if anyone has a crown (bottle-cap) manufactured between 1946 and 1947 from Sunset Beverage Company with the words "free ride", please contact Dan to arrange for your flight!!!