

A Travel Air Comes Home

Sw Aviator

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Arizona's Valle Airport, located midway between Williams and the Grand Canyon, is home to a large collection of historic aircraft. The most recent addition is a rare Travel Air SA-6000-A. This beautifully restored aircraft now serves as an example of the conveyance aerial sightseers used to marvel at the Grand Canyon during the 1930s, and is a tangible link to the long, distinguished history of aviation in northern Arizona.

When the young team of Stearman, Beech, and Cessna set out to create the Travel Air 6000, they quickly dubbed it the "Limousine of the Air." From the standpoint of passenger hauling, it made sense. There were six seats in an ample cabin space with a clear view into the cockpit and an even better view of the countryside below. Cabin insulation did away with the need to shout during a conversation.

Between January 1929 and May of that same year, the configuration and powerplant for the new Travel Air 6000 line went through several iterations. By May, four A-6000-A's had been shipped to Montreal, where they were turned around sent back to the factory to become SA-6000-A's, or float equipped versions. These four models departed from the standard paint scheme of blue wings and orange fuselage in favor of yellow wings and an orange fuselage, making them more visible if they went down in the bush.

As floatplanes in Canada, the Travel Airs were used for moving personnel to gold mines in the northern reaches of the country. When not hauling passengers, the seats were removed so they could fly cargo from the cities to the mines. After a little over 25 years in that type of service, one of the planes was sold to an Alaskan bush pilot operation after being flown to

Seattle for conversion to wheels and application of an "N" number. Alas, shortly thereafter, it was flipped over on its back on a sandbar in an Alaskan river.

Valle Airport IS Now Home To A Rare Travel Air A-6000-A

The "bones" of the SA6000A changed hands a number of times over the years until 1999 when the aircraft remnants were purchased by John Seibold and trucked to Las Vegas. Seibold's interest was in owning one more of the various types of aircraft that had been used by Grand Canyon Airlines at some point to fly passengers over the canyon. The Travel Air, now re-designated an A-6000-A, was one of these aircraft, and was also used to move equipment for a mining operation inside a bat cave down in the canyon.

For four years N4942V occupied the shops at Twin Otter in Las Vegas, where Jim Helfrich devoted his full time efforts to bringing the A-6000-A back to its original shine. This past month, Helfrich attached the final fairings and signed off the restoration as complete. Now he can begin work on a Stinson SM-1B, which was another type of aircraft that flew for Grand Canyon Airlines.

As a Travel Air SA-6000-A, the aircraft was initially powered by a 420 hp "Wasp" engine. Today it has the R-1340, 450 hp Pratt & Whitney. It has a wingspan of 54'5", a length of 33'9" and, with the seats removed, it offers space for about 90 cubic feet of cargo distributed along 8' of clear floor space. As restored, it has its original seating plan with wicker seats for six, in addition to the pilot and co-pilot.

The aircraft, the only remaining example of a SA-6000-A, is hangared at Valle Airport (40G). The staff at the terminal building would be pleased to show the aircraft to any pilots landing at Valle.



Looking like it just came out of the showroom, this Travel Air SA-6000-A is now one of the many restored antique and classic aircraft calling Valle Airport home.