

# John Miller

## 2002 VAA Hall of Fame Inductee

*Johnny Miller has lived the century of flight. Early aviation started near his front door, when Glenn Curtiss landed across the street from his father's farm near Poughkeepsie, New York, to refuel during his epic Albany to New York flight on May 29, 1910. Four-year-old Johnny became devoted to flying, absorbing everything he could read about early aviation. Here are a few highlights of the accomplishments of VAA's 2002 Hall of Fame inductee.*



**1** By 1923, 18-year-old Johnny Miller assisted a barnstorming pilot who later gave Miller his first airplane, a decrepit Curtiss Jenny destined for the scrap heap. He rebuilt the Jenny and learned to fly it, often referring to World War I pilot Horatio Barber's book *Aerobatics*. After soloing on his 18th birthday, he sold the Jenny and headed off to college at the Pratt Institute for Mechanical Engineering, graduating in June 1927. The month before, he'd skipped school one morning to watch Charles Lindbergh take off from Roosevelt Field on his way to Paris via the North Atlantic.

**2** With new regulations coming into effect in 1928, pilots and mechanics were being certificated by the Department of Commerce. Johnny took the mechanic's exam and was issued Aircraft and Engine Certificate No. 2906. Working as a mechanic for the Gates Flying Service, he also rebuilt and flew a variety of aircraft, including this J-1 Standard, which still exists.

**3** 1932. Miller also flew the New Standard D-25, barnstorming it successfully and profitably. This one is serial number 2 D-25, converted from a D-24 by replacing the Hispano engine with a 225-hp Wright J-5.

**3** In 1930 he was commissioned as a transport pilot in the Marine Corps Reserve, and he qualified as Naval Aviator No. 4821.

**4** In 1931, he was the first person to buy the revolutionary Pitcairn autogiro, the PCA-2. With it he became the first to fly a rotary-wing aircraft across the United States, from May 14 through May 28, 1931.

**5** He was actively involved in autogiro flight, including the test flying of the first wingless autogiro, the Kellett KD-1B, and the Army's YG-1B, shown here with Miller on January 20, 1938.

**6** His deep involvement in rotary-wing flight continued during the 1930s, including the first true aerobatic demonstrations flown during the 1933 National Air Races. John's interest culminated in 1939, when he convinced Eastern Airlines (EAL) management to take over operation of the scheduled airmail flights originating from the roof of the Philadelphia Post Office. Ten times each day a trip was flown by John or his backup pilot, John Lukens.







*Throughout his career, John has been a prolific writer, and is a current magazine column contributor to the American Bonanza Society's publication as well as this magazine. He's always enthusiastic to share his experiences to educate the next generation of aviators, and John's willingness to share his firsthand familiarity with the century of flight has been enthralling aviators for decades.*



**8** EAL President Eddie Rickenbacker (center) helps load the first bag of airmail on July 6, 1939. The other two gentlemen pictured on the left are most likely Postmaster General W.W. Howes and Philadelphia Postmaster Joseph F. Gallagher. Over the course of a year, more than 2,500 flights were made safely from the downtown location, the first scheduled operations of an aircraft from a rooftop base and the first scheduled rotary-wing aircraft operation.

**9** Demonstrations of the autogiro airmail were made at the New York World's Fair in 1939. Here's John accepting a letter from New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia.

**10** While flying for the EAL, during World War II he was the chief engineering test pilot for Columbia Aircraft Corp., testing amphibians being built for the U.S. Navy. He flew Grumman J2F-6s and an entirely new amphibian, the XJL-1 monoplane. The war ended before a production contract was issued. Both prototypes still exist, one at the Pima Air museum.

**11** John continued to fly for EAL until 1963, when he retired with 22,000 hours in his logbook at age 58. He flew the airline's evolving inventory, from the DC-2 through the Lockheed Constellation and Electra, ending with the jet-age Douglas DC-8.

**12** It's a bit big, but he still fits in his Eastern Airlines uniform!

**13** He's enjoyed personal aircraft as well, flying his own Taylorcraft, Stinson, and a few Beech Bonanzas. He flew a Beech Baron for more than 30 years. He owns and flies the Beechcraft Bonanza shown here, is still fully qualified as a flight instructor, and maintains his IFR currency. He continues to make annual trips to California to visit his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.