

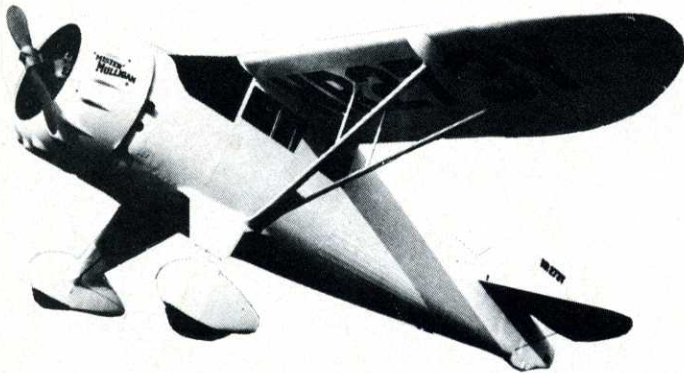
DAMNED GOOD AIRPLANES

Ben Howard's flying Irishmen rode roughshod across the pages of aviation history, like the legendary "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." Never had there been such racing planes as these. Never was there to be again. They were the unique product of intuitive designing skill and tempered by the deliberate analytical genius of one of the greatest aircraft engineers of all time. Ben Howard designed his airplanes. Gordon Israel, his (alter ego), engineered them.

Ben O. Howard was born in Palestine, Texas on February 9, 1904 and spent twenty years of his life in that state. Ben was one of those persons born to fly. He fell in love with airplanes the first time he saw one and from that moment on there was no doubt about what he wanted to do with his life.

Forced by family economic circumstances to quit school after the eighth grade, Ben went to work at the highest paying position a grade school graduate could find in 1919. He became a roustabout on a Texas oil rig. The work involved long grueling hours of hard, sometimes dangerous, labor. It was hot, and a man would finish the day covered head to foot with greasy crude oil. But a man could make twenty dollars a week, and live on ten. The other ten could be put away to buy an airplane.

By the fall of 1922, Ben had saved enough to purchase a World War One Lincoln Standard biplane. He had enough money in the kitty to buy the airplane and feed it gas and oil, but there was nothing left for flying lessons. Ben had to beg a few hours instruction from local pilots, and from there he had to teach himself. It was this lack of flight instruction



Ben Howard and the man he narrowly beat out for the 1935 Bendix, Col. Roscoe Turner.



BEN HOWARD & CO. DESIGNED, BUILT, AND FLEW SOME OF THE FASTEST AIRCRAFT OF THE 1930'S.

Part I

TEXT BY DON PRATT

Sport Flying Magazine, April 1967
Copied courtesy of
Ken Stoltzfus Sr., www.john2031.com

which led indirectly to the creation of the DGA-1, Ben's first "Damned Good Airplane."

"The DGA-1 was the first Damned Good Airplane I built," Ben Howard told me recently. "While I was trying to teach myself to fly, I spun my OX-5 Standard in and spent a long hot Texas summer in a plaster cast. While I was laid up I designed the DGA-1. It had one single wide-back seat because in those days it was always the fellow in the front seat that got killed in a crash. I decided I wouldn't have a front seat. Just to be different, I put the long wing with the ailerons on it on the bottom and the short wing on top. I brought the fuselage to an end at the back with a horizontal rather than a vertical tailpost. It was a real good flyer. I built the whole thing myself using borrowed tools and hanger space. The only thing I bought was a five dollar vise, and I didn't get that until the ship was half done."

The DGA-1 lived up to its name. It was truly a "Damned Good Airplane." It could outperform its contemporaries, the "Jenny" and the "Standard" by a wide margin. Benny Howard was envied by all the local pilots in the Houston area. Many times he was approached with the idea of building another DGA for this person or that; but it wasn't until 1926 that a firm offer with a cash deposit led Ben to design and build the DGA-2.

DGA-2 was essentially a 180 hp. Hissop powered Lincoln Standard biplane with a deepened cargo-type fuselage and an all-new set of high-lift wings. "It could haul a lot of whiskey too," explained Ben, "and that is exactly what it was designed for. There was this bootlegger down in Houston who flew his stuff in from New Orleans. He'd been using any airplane he could find and the payload hadn't been much. I built up this special modified Standard

(please turn page)



Ben Howard and the first plane he ever built, the DGA-1, at Houston, Texas in the early 1920's.

