

EAA's Attic



Flying Under Pitot Pressure *Early airspeed indicators*

In the early days of powered flight methods of measuring airspeed were often crude and subjective. For example, the Wrights mounted a Richard Co. anemometer to a strut on the 1903 Wright *Flyer*. Pilots later adapted automotive or marine instruments for their needs or simply tied a piece of string to a strut. If it flew straight to the rear, there was enough speed to keep from stalling. Most pilots just relied on the wind hitting their face and the sound of the wind in the external wires that braced their wings.

By the end of World War I, Americans began using airspeed instruments. This Sperry pitot-static type, among the collection in EAA's Attic, is an example of a World War I aircraft airspeed

indicator. Instrumentation really took off after Lindbergh's 1927 trans-Atlantic journey. By 1928 pitot-static airspeed indicators like this Foxboro, which came from a Ford Tri-Motor, were standard on most instrument panels.

Jenny or Waco fliers typically mounted this 1920s strut-type Johnson airspeed indicator on a right-wing strut. Aircraft parts supplier Nicholas Beazley Airplane Co. advertised it in its 1928 catalog as "a low-priced, self-contained Indicator for strut mounting, easily visible," for \$7.50. It's interesting to note that these indicators gauged speed in miles—160 max—rather than knots.

—Kathleen L. Witman