Wright Flyer III becomes 1st practical aircraft, October 5, 1905

Suzanne Deffree - October 05, 2019

On October 5, 1905, Wilbur Wright piloted the Wright Flyer III in a flight that stood as a world record until 1908. The achievement proved the Wright Brothers’ Flyer was practical for fixed-wing aircrafts and would not have been possible had a severe crash not occurred months before, encouraging the Wright brothers to change the plane’s design.

The circling flight of 24 miles in 39 minutes and 23 seconds was made over Huffman Prairie in Ohio and was longer than the total duration of all the team's flights of 1903 and 1904 (see photo at right of the Flyer making this historic flight).

Four days after setting this record, the brothers wrote to the United States Secretary of War William Howard Taft, offering to sell the world's first practical fixed-wing aircraft. The brothers soon won both American and French contracts to sell their airplane.

The design of the Wright Flyer III was altered after Orville Wright suffered a serious nose-dive crash in it on July 14, 1905. When rebuilding the airplane, the duo almost doubled the size of the elevator and rudder, and moved them about twice the distance from the wings. They widened the skid-undercarriage, which helped give the wings a slight dihedral.

The brothers disconnected the rudder from the wing-warping control, and, as in most future aircraft, placed it on a separate control handle. They also installed a larger fuel tank and mounted two radiators on front and back struts for extra coolant in anticipation of longer flights.

When testing of Flyer III resumed in September, the improvements on its design were obvious. The plane became practical and dependable, flying reliably for significant durations and bringing its pilot back to the starting point safely and landing without damage.

The 1905 Wright Flyer III is on display at the Wright Brothers National Museum at Carillon Historical Park, which is part of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. The flight was depicted on Ohio's commemorative state quarter.
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