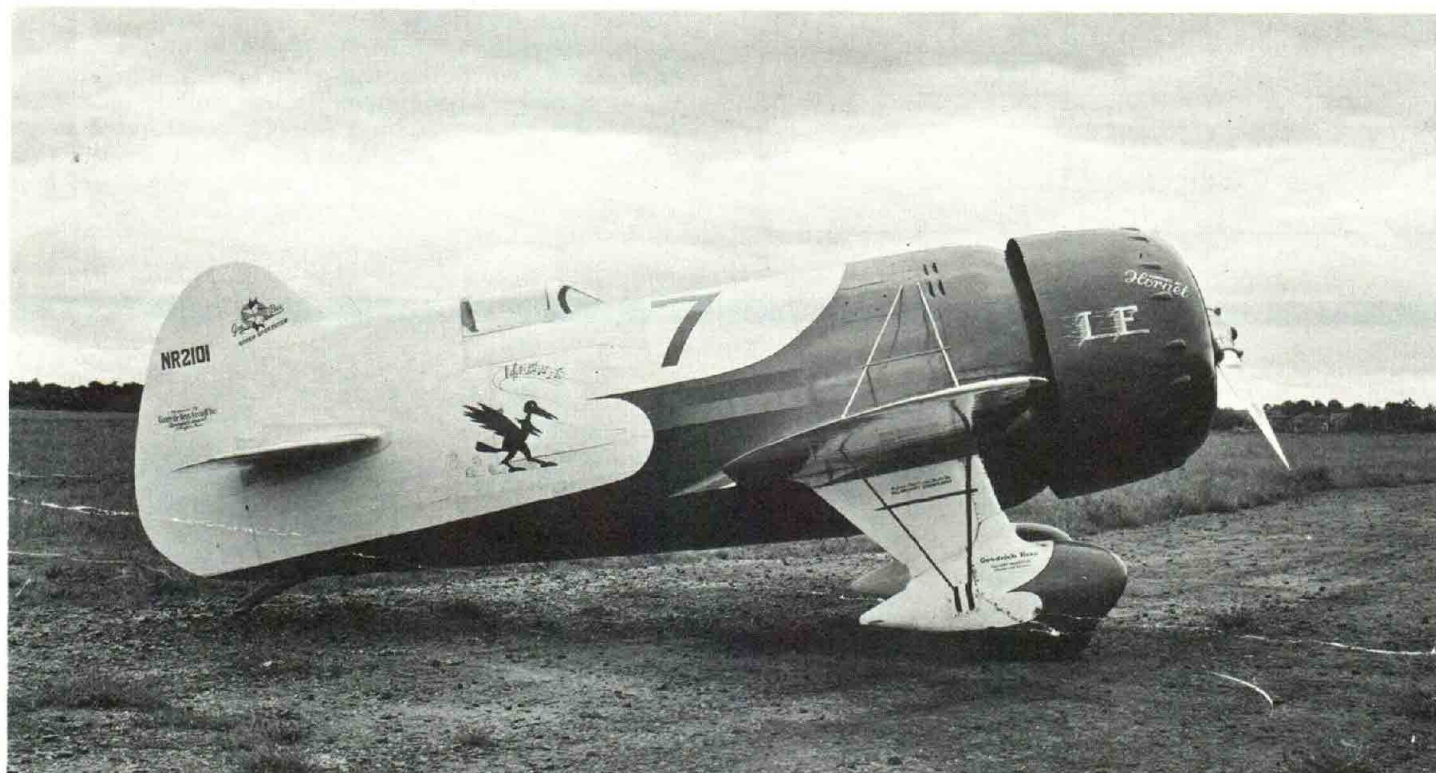


Gee Bee in '33

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(Bob Granville Collection)

The final Gee Bee racer — built up from #11's fuselage and #7's original wings. Number 7's racing and N number were used. A lengthened fuselage and redesigned rudder and fin distinguish it from the R-1 and R-2 in their original configurations. Roy Minor washed out the airplane on landing and ended the days of Granville Brothers Aircraft, Inc.

AFTER THE 1932 National Air Races were over both of the Gee Bee racers commonly referred to as 7 and 11 were back in the hangar at Springfield, Mass. safe and sound. No. 11 had a little tough luck in the Bendix but had taken fifth money in the Thompson at 222 miles per hour. Every one in the aviation world was now familiar with both.

Springfield Air Racing Association (S.A.R.A.) owner of both ships, had paid a good dividend to all its stock holders. They had enough funds left over to make what ever changes seemed necessary to stay on top for another year.

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On the other hand, Granville Brothers Aircraft, the builder, had little except the fame. We had worked all summer on those ships charging only actual cost.

It was hoped that these ships would bring in a lot of new business. However in the depths of a great depression, airplanes were not selling and no new orders were obtained. It was getting to be a problem to get enough money to hold our little group together.

Jimmie Doolittle, who was and still is looked up to very highly in the industry had called No. 11 "The sweetest ship I ever flew". Lee Gel-

bach, another really great pilot had spoken just as highly of No. 7. In ordinary times, these words would have brought in some prospects but such was not the case.

Russell N. Boardman, famed long distance flyer who with John Polando had flown the Bellanca "Cape Cod" non-stop to Istanbul, owned a controlling interest in S.A.R.A. He was its chief pilot and had made the first test flight in No. 11 out of Springfield Airport. He was very pleased with the ship but lost his chance to fly it in the Thompson because of a crash which had happened in another ship, two days after the test flight.



(Bob Granville Collection)

Russell Boardman with the Hornet powered Gee Bee R-1, NR2100 — racing number 11 as flown in the 1933 Bendix Races.

Now he was recovering and anxious to get going again.

It is a well known fact that no airplane was ever designed and built that couldn't be improved upon and the Gee Bee racers were no exception. Conferences were held between Boardman, Grannie Granville and assistant chief engineer of our company, Howell W. "Pete" Miller. One problem which needed to be licked was the fact that both ships even with their heavy wing loading would float when close to the ground and runways were just not long enough for safety. Flaps were beginning to be used and were just what was needed on these ships. Grannie had often spoken of some kind of a spoiler to help them sit down some what shorter.

Finally it was decided. No. 7 being the cross country ship would have a new set of wing panels. They would be a little thicker and have 132 sq. ft. of area instead of 100. Grannie had some ideas on a new flap design and they would be incorporated into the new wings. These were two piece and double hinged and when closed were flush with the bottom of the wing inboard from the aileron. When

fully extended, the front half of the flap would descend to an angle of 60 degrees and the rear portion to an angle of 120 degrees from the chord line. They later proved to work very well and Grannie applied for a patent. On No. 7 they cut the landing speed from over 100 miles an hour to around 65. The Wasp engine, which had made the world record in No. 11 was transferred to No. 7. The only other major change was an addition to the rudder. This was made of aluminum sheet.

This work kept our shop crew busy for quite a while. At the same time our engineering staff, which consisted, I think, only of Grannie, Pete Miller and Don DeLackner were very busy designing a brand new line of Gee Bee airplanes called the "C" series. These were to be beautiful low wing cabin monoplanes in three sizes and with three different power plants. These were the C-4, C-6 and C-8. The number referred to the number of people hauled. All that had been learned about speed from streamlining on 7 and 11 was to be utilized. Originally they were to be wire braced but this was changed to a full cantilever wing. Construction would be typical Gee Bee, steel

tube fuselage, spruce and mahogany wings and tail group. The same tear drop idea of streamlining radial engines would be used, making roomy cabins and good looks. Engines would be 400 hp Wasp Jr. on the C-4, Wasp would power the C-6 and the C-8 would have a Hornet.

No. 7 was ready to fly in March of 1933 and on March 25th, Russ flew it out of the mud and snow of Springfield Airport. I remember the date well as it was my wedding day and I was not there to witness the flight. It was, however, a success and the new flaps worked very well. After a few landings at Bowles Airport which is about five miles from Springfield Airport, he landed back in Springfield. Neither 7 nor 11 had ever been landed here before as the field was small and rough.

Russ was still not fully recovered from his accident and he had had a problem in getting his license renewed. However he had a lot of prestige and finally got it by going directly to president Hoover, but he never again seemed to be the cool, cheerful man he had been before his accident.

Between March and July, Boardman was in and out of Springfield Airport frequently. Once in early spring he came in with the wheel pants full of mud and frozen so hard that the wheels would not turn. He made a good landing but couldn't quite keep the tail down. Just as he was coming to a full stop, he went slowly and gently over on his back. However little damage was done and he was flying again in a few days. Russ got so good at short field landings that he was soon slipping it in like the Navy used to land biplanes on the carriers. Grannie did not approve of this, but Russ insisted that it felt fine and he could land it very short indeed this way.

During the fall of 1932, Grannie had been hunting for financing and in early winter matters looked very good. A New York group which had financed Bellanca, agreed to do the same for us. The name of our company was changed to Granville Aircraft Corp., Inc. and Grannie remained in the presidency, and also retained the title of chief engineer. Pete Miller was assistant chief, Bob Granville, purchasing agent and Tom, Mark and Ed, foremen of various shop departments.

A few thousand dollars were found to work with and many people had agreed to purchase stock. It looked like a sure bet this time, and Grannie decided to start on the first C-8 at once.

Everything went beautifully for a while. The large one piece full

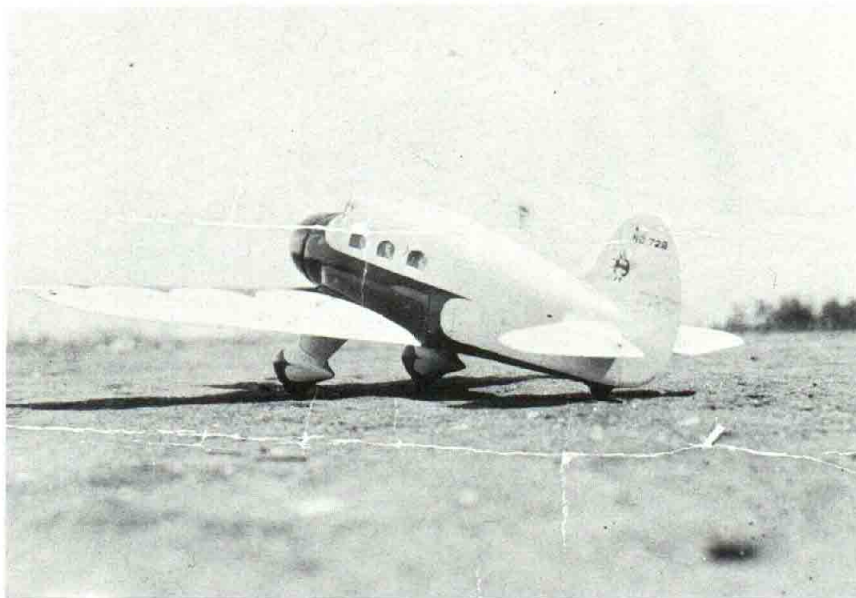
cantilever wing was soon complete except for fabric on the mahogany plywood skin. Balloon fabric was to be applied directly over plywood exactly the same as on 7 and 11. The tail group was nearly complete and the fuselage was all set up, tack welded and partially welded. About \$15,000 had been expended when the blow fell. President Roosevelt closed the banks in March stopping our capital completely. Mr. Chandler who headed the New York group flew in at once and requested every one to meet with him in Grannie's office. The message was very brief "I'm sorry boys, but there is no more money in the bucket." We never saw him again. We worked another week without pay, hoping for a miracle which never came and so ended the "C series" program.

To get back to the racers, everything was fine with No. 7 and she was ready for the Bendix. Russ Boardman now turned his attention to No. 11. Jimmie Doolittle had declared he had never opened her up to top speed while making his speed run and said there was enough left to give Russ a new record. He was eager to try it but felt that a few more miles per hour would be a great asset. The ship had been stress analyzed to handle more power, so he asked Pratt & Whitney for the loan of a Hornet engine and got it. This was installed and an aluminum addi-

tion was added to the rudder to care for the larger amount of torque. This added about ten inches to the length of the ship. It had a welded trailing edge which could be bent to act as a trim tab.

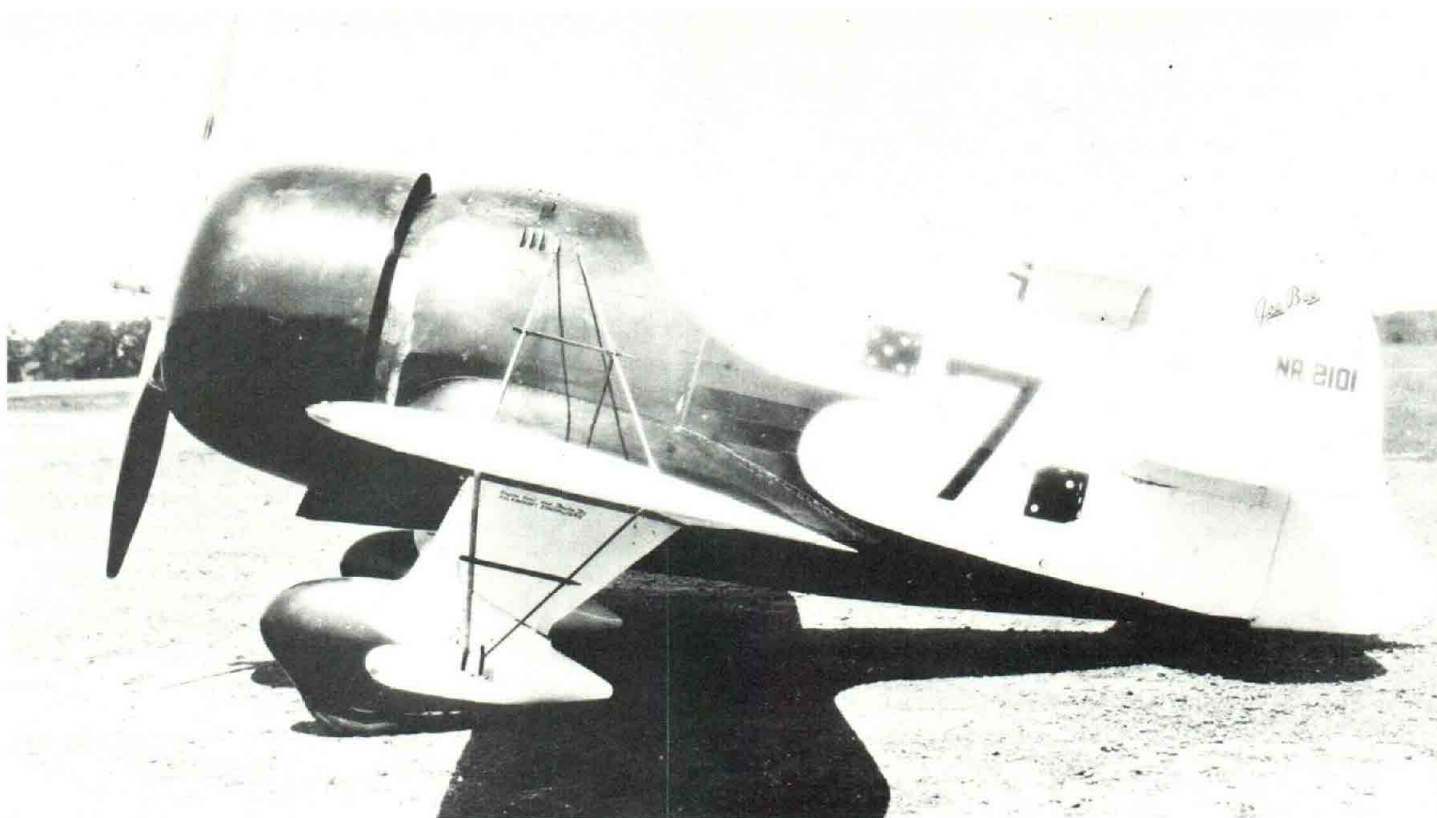
Sometime after mid-June, Russ

was roaring around the sky in a ship capable of well over 300 miles per hour. He did not attempt landings at Springfield Airport but kept the ship at Bowles Airport. He flew both ships many times making sure they were both ready for the Bendix



(Bob Granville Collection)

Age has not been kind to this picture of the wind tunnel model of the C-6 of 1933.



(Bob Granville Collection)

Wasp powered Gee Bee R-2, NR2101, as flown in the 1933 Bendix by Russell Thaw. It is fitted with the larger wing and flaps.

which would leave Floyd Bennett Airport on July 4th. This year he aimed to take both first and second money in both races.

Elaborate plans were made for the Bendix race. Russell Thaw had been chosen to fly No. 7 although Boardman preferred his old partner John Polando. The Granvilles would have chosen Lee Gelbach again but it was too late anyhow. He had already agreed to fly No. 92 Wedell-Williams. 7 was to push hard, with gas stops at Kansas City and Amarillo. Boardman, with larger engine and less gas tankage would stop at Indianapolis, Wichita and Amarillo. He would cruise and save his engine for the Thompson race.

Grannie and Mark went ahead in old No. 54 Gee Bee Senior Sportster and would be waiting for the racers in Los Angeles. Earl Boardman, flying a cabin Travelair, also went ahead making gas arrangements and would wait in Amarillo.

Ed Granville was official mechanic for our ships at Floyd Bennett but Tom and I and other family members were also there nearly all night of July 3rd. Pete and Mrs. Miller were there also.

The hangar at Floyd Bennett was a scene to remember that night. There were six beautiful ships. Roscoe Turner in his natty uniform was watching over his gold Wedell-Williams, Jimmie Wedell was with his faithful No. 44 racer and Lee Gelbach with the black and white No. 92. Amelia Earhart had her bright red Lockheed Vega and there were the two red and white Gee Bees.

No. 7 was having some shock strut trouble and Ed was very busy trying to correct it. Boardman wanted to make a last minute flight check on No. 11 and did so just at daylight. Everything was O.K.

The Wedell ships took off before it was really light as did Amelia Earhart. Then young Russell Thaw taxied out in No. 7. He had never flown it before with over 300 gallons of gas aboard but got off alright after a long run. Neither ship had a controllable propeller in 1933.

Russ Boardman was last to leave and the sun popped up just as he turned out at the ocean edge of the field. No. 11 looked big on the horizon although I couldn't see its colors.

We were standing directly in his flight path and his take off was a thing of beauty. Holding her down to about 10 feet, he had tremendous speed at the end of the field and he pulled up very steeply over the hangars and was gone. It was a thrilling sight and I shall never forget it.

Boardman flew straight to Indianapolis averaging around 275 miles



(Bob Granville Collection)

Mr. Gee Bee himself . . . Z. D. "Grannie" Granville. A great designer, builder and pilot.

an hour. When he taxied in for gas he must have been surprised to find Russ Thaw in ahead of him. Thaw said later that he didn't have enough gas for Kansas City so landed at Indianapolis where he knew a gas truck was waiting for Boardman.

It was reported that Thaw made a bad landing and dragged a wing but such was not the facts. A shock strut went down as he was turning around and he did damage a wing tip slightly. It had to be fixed in order to continue so Boardman found it temporarily grounded.

Anyway a very disappointed and possibly angry Russ Boardman climbed into his ship after a drink of water and a talk with Thaw and started his take off. We will never know what really happened then as we had no Gee Bee mechanic on the field. Apparently he pulled the ship off before it had flying speed and stalled it. It hit the runway di-

rectly on its back and slid. Although the ship was not seriously damaged, the pilot had no chance whatever. He died the next day without regaining consciousness.

Thaw made no attempt to continue. So both S.A.R.A. planes were out of the race. They and we had lost a great pilot and to us he had been a good friend and a great spokesman for Gee Bee design and workmanship.

Grannie was deeply saddened and discouraged by the news but being Grannie he decided to carry on as he knew Boardman would want him to do. He had not intended to race the Senior that year even though it had been in the Thompson before and had also won the Aerol Trophy in 1931. However, he now entered it in the Thompson and flew it himself. His engine did not function well but he managed to take fifth and last money. Marty Bowman also flew No. 54 in the Aerol race aver-



(Bob Granville Collection)

Wind tunnel model of the Gee Bee C-6 of 1933.

aging 167.7 miles per hour to take second money. Mae Haizlip flying one of the fast Wedell-Williams was the winner.

Earl Boardman flew his brother's body back to Connecticut and he was buried in his old home town of Westfield, Conn. There were a great many old friends from the aviation world at the funeral including most of the Gee Bee organization. However Grannie and Mark did not make it. When they landed the Senior at Indianapolis, they found a lot of hostile people. One Gee Bee had cracked up and killed the pilot, another had dragged a wing. Probably this one needed to be grounded, too.

A federal inspector went to work on it and promptly condemned the three year old fabric. Finally he relented and allowed the ship to be flown back to Springfield only.

While at Indianapolis Grannie made arrangements to have Jim Haizlip fly No. 7 home. Thaw did not wish to come back. Haizlip agreed to fly the ship in the Chicago races which would be coming up later and immediately started practice flights at Bowles Airport. A few days, later, fate intervened again. As he was making a first landing attempt without the use of flaps, he hooked a wing to the runway and cart wheeled three or four times. Due to the rugged construction of the ship. Haizlip stepped out unhurt but the airplane was beyond repair.

It was an unhappy time at Springfield Airport with no racers, no business, the Senior grounded and debt staring the company in the face.

Grannie, backed by S.A.R.A. doggedly decided to make one more try. No. 11 was now back and was little damaged except above the longerons. The landing gear, stabilizer and elevators and also the wires were unhurt. We had the original wings from No. 7 on hand also. Pete and Grannie went to work to design a length change in the fuselage, and a totally new rudder and fin were designed plus an adjustable trim tab. About 18 inches were added to the fuselage aft of the cabin and when finished it looked more streamlined than ever. Painted on the side was the "Filalolo Bird" same as the one that had ridden many happy miles on the No. 54 Senior. Also this time the ship carried a name, "Intestinal Fortitude", plus racing number 7. Registered number was now NR2101 instead of NR2100.

Grannie wanted very much to fly this one himself.

He was an excellent test pilot but he was over ruled which was probably a mistake. We argued that he had a wife and two kids to think of and should leave this kind of work to professionals. Finally and reluctantly he turned the job over to Roy Minor.

Roy had done a fine job racing small ships and he had flown the Howard "Mike" in the 1933 Thompson. However, he had never had a chance to fly a speed job behind a Pratt and Whitney Hornet before. As usual, there was only a couple of days to get the ship flying before it must leave for Chicago. The so called hybrid No. 7 was an improved ship over No. 11 and probably a little

faster. It no doubt was the fastest land plane in the world at that time. It performed well and Minor and all concerned were elated. He had to try a couple of times to get it down as the old floating bugaboo still persisted and he no doubt came in a little too fast.

There was some wing heaviness to adjust and before a second flight could be accomplished a heavy thunder shower passed over, drowning the field. It was nice again after lunch and Roy decided to fly again. If everything was o.k. this time he would leave for Chicago the next morning. Again he had a problem in getting it down and went around a couple of times. The third attempt was a perfect landing except he had used up too much runway. We, on the crash truck saw that he was going off the end of the runway and took off after him.

Roy went off into very wet grass and his brakes were of no help what so ever. No. 7 kept sliding until it hit a drainage ditch close to the chain link fence. It stood up on the prop for a moment, then suddenly leaped completely over the fence and landed right side up on its gear and in a black top road. We had the cockpit cover off in seconds. Roy stood up in the cockpit, pulled off his helmet and goggles and threw them as far as possible. His one comment was —!

Both wing tips were wrecked back to the wire pulls but every wire was tight as ever. The front end and of course, propeller and engine were damaged. For the second time in a few weeks a pilot had gotten out of a wrecked Gee Bee racer unhurt.



(Bob Granville Collection)

Gee Bee Senior Sportster Model Y, racing number 54. Very successful as a racer, the aircraft was also used to carry pictures of the 1932 Democratic Convention from Chicago to Newark — in 3 hours and 37 minutes. A truly great airplane, in the opinion of the author.

Soon after this crack up, we came to the sober realization that there was no way out for Gee Bee this time. Although No. 7 was repairable, S.A.R.A. had had enough and had no intention of continuing. The depression was at its extreme depth. The only work we had on hand was Boardman's wonderful old "Cape Cod". We were readying it for a proposed flight to Rome as soon as the races were over. Now it would not be needed.

All Gee Bee assets including the faithful old Senior, one Model P biplane and the remains for No. 7 went on the block at a Sheriff's sale. All our struggle seemed to have been in vain. It was a sad day for hun-

dreds of people who had cheered for us and not one of us attended the sale.

Grannie gave everyone a written recommendation and we broke up each to find what he could. Ed went with Pratt & Whitney and Tom and I got jobs at Fairchild in Hagerstown, Md. Mark decided to stay in Springfield and do what ever he could.

Grannie, Pete Miller and Don DeLackner opened a consulting engineering office in New York City. Here they hoped to get enough business for eating money and at the same time to design three new jobs. It was hoped that we might all be back together in Springfield by spring. The first job was a long dis-

tance racing craft designed for the McRobertson Race and hopefully to be sold to Clyde Pangborn. Second, was a front wheel drive racing car to compete in the Indianapolis "500". Third was a project dear to Grannie's heart, a roadable two place airplane called a Gee Bee "Ascander". Such was not to be.

Although most of us were destined to get back together and build a few more fast and famous airplanes, such as the "Q.E.D.", Frank Hawks' "Time Flies" and the Military Aircraft M.A.C., the No. 7 and 11 racers were the last airplanes to carry the trademark Gee Bee by Granville Brothers Aircraft Inc., Springfield, Massachusetts.