

Will Rogers Used Stamps for Bi-Plane Flight

By FRANK LESLIE

World Business-Oil Writer

A Douglas-built, open cockpit biplane which helped Oklahoma humorist Will Rogers write an initial chapter in aviation history paid Tulsa a visit Tuesday.

The M2 was purchased new in 1926 from Douglas by Western Air Express — now Western Airlines — to haul mail between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City.

The M2 is being flown in 1977 by Don Lykins, a Western 727 captain, on a trip which will finally place the plane on display in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Rogers' role with the plane came shortly after Western started mail hauling flights in April, 1926, between Las Vegas and Salt Lake City with daily one-way trips.

PASSENGERS COULDN'T BE flown at the outset.

But Rogers wanted to fly in the M2. So he weighed himself, purchased enough stamps to cover his weight and made a flight as probably the first paying passenger in airline history. In those days, postage stamp payments paid for operations of mail-carrying airlines.

Within five weeks of Western's first flight between the West Coast and Salt Lake City, however, passengers were included and paid a one-way fare of \$90. They generally had to ride with mail sacks stuffed around them.

It's taken employees and retired employees of Western and the Douglas Aircraft Co.'s Long Beach division more than two years of restoration work to get the M2 in airworthy condition for the trip to the Smithsonian.

THE AIRLINE HOPES TO DELIVER the plane to Andrews Air Force Base around May 2, if flight plans are on schedule. It will represent the first aircraft destined for the Smithsonian to be flown to the nation's capital.

Lykins told a breakfast gathering Tuesday morning at Tulsa International Airport that piloting the M2 is a far cry from sitting in the comfortable surroundings of a 727 trijet flight deck.

Retired Western and McDonnell Douglas employees and airline personnel traveling with the plane said this trip really has given them an appreciation of what barn storming pilots of the 1900s went through.

The flight hasn't been without incidents, Lykins explained. He left Long Beach Airport April 16 destined for Salt Lake City, then Denver via a route over Wyoming.



Parachute-laden Don Lykins boards the M2 in Tulsa.

BUT BAD WEATHER FORCED Lykins and the two "chase" planes with the group to a southern route into Albuquerque and then a stop at Santa Fe.

That stop later paid big dividends. There, they visited Wings of Yesterday Aircraft Museum. They saw an unused, World War I Liberty engine. The M2 was powered by a rebuilt Liberty.

At Amarillo, the next stop after Santa Fe, the M2's Liberty blew rods shortly after takeoff on the flight to Tulsa. The plane had been scheduled here last Thursday.

"So we called the Santa Fe museum and took them up on an offer they made," Lykins said. "They told us

their Liberty was available if we had any trouble with this one."

The new engine was flown to Amarillo and the M2 was back in the air inside a three-day span.

LYKINS, THE M2 AND THE WESTERN-DOUGLAS traveling party left Tulsa Tuesday afternoon for St. Louis. The plane will be displayed there a few days since directors of McDonnell Douglas Corp. are holding their annual meeting.

"But we'll stop first at Springfield," said Lykins. "We like to set it down every two hours or so just to make sure things are operating properly."

AVIATION WEEK MAY 23 1977

British Ministry of Defense has accelerated its development schedule for a new short takeoff-vertical landing (STOVL) strike fighter to replace the present Jaguar and Harrier aircraft. Under the new Ministry of Defense schedule, first flight of the aircraft, currently designated the AST-403, could be as early as 1983.