

# MIDWEST FLYER

**MAGAZINE**

DECEMBER 2009/JANUARY 2010



*Published For & By The Midwest Aviation Community Since 1978*

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# Amelia's Real Leading Lady... Joe Shepherd's Lockheed 12A Electra Junior

Joseph Shepherd Photo



by Steve Schapiro

If you haven't seen the movie *Amelia* yet, you probably think the star is Hilary Swank playing

the title role. Swank may have the top billing, but the real leading lady of this biopic about Amelia Earhart is the 1936 Lockheed 12A Electra Junior owned and flown by Joe Shepherd of Fayetteville, Georgia. For three weeks in the summer of 2008, all the cameras were focused on the polished aluminum of NC2072, repainted to look like the plane Earhart was attempting to fly around the world when she disappeared over the Pacific in 1937.

It didn't take much work to get the Lockheed ready for filming, but Shepherd required a little more make-up. One morning he showed up on the set and was told they needed to shave his moustache, put him in a blond wig, and have him wear a scarf and leather jacket to look like Earhart.

His copilot, Jay McClure of Atlanta, Ga., required less effort since, "I make a more handsome Fred Noonan," McClure said at the AOPA Aviation Summit luncheon in Tampa, Florida, November 6, 2009. The aircraft was on static display at Peter O. Knight Airport in Tampa.

The flight path to fame for Shepherd's Lockheed wasn't direct. H.E. Talbot, who went on to become the Secretary of the Air Force in 1955, originally owned the airplane. The Gulf Oil Company of South America

then owned it before it was pressed into service by the government during the war for two years. After the war it went back to Gulf Oil and then on to a number of individuals, when Shepherd found it in Texas in 1988.

Shepherd, a retired Northwest Airlines pilot, was looking for a Lockheed after flying a friend's plane and falling in love with it. That's when he saw an ad in Trade-a-Plane from an owner looking to swap his Lockheed 12A for a Cessna 195. Shepherd had a 195, so he gave him a call.

The Lockheed was almost derelict. It had been tied down and sitting for 12 years. There was grass growing around it, and all kinds of insects and animals in it. "We cranked up the engines, they ran and that satisfied me," said Shepherd. "We shook hands and we had a deal."

Shepherd and a group of friends spent the next 19 years restoring the aircraft. He put in a totally new instrument panel, equipped it with dual flight instruments and made it IFR capable. It first flew on "April Fool's Day" in 2007, but owning the aircraft has been far from a foolish endeavor.

A few months later, the glistening Lockheed won the "Antique Outstanding Transport Award" at EAA AirVenture in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. It was the first of 10 awards the airplane has won, including the 2007 Grand Champion - Classic at the Antique Airplane Association (AAA) Fly-in in Blakesburg, Iowa; the Midwest Antique Aero Club MAAC Lyle Hoselton Memorial Award in 2007; and the Midwest AAA MACC Antique Project of The Year, also in 2007.

And then came the call that made the plane a movie star. Shepherd's Lockheed landed the role in *Amelia* after the filmmakers contacted Peter Ramm, another Lockheed 12A owner, when they couldn't find a Lockheed 10E like Earhart flew. Ramm's aircraft was under restoration, so he called Shepherd, the flight instructor who checked him out in the Lockheed.

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Joe Shepherd with his 1936 Lockheed 12A Electra Junior.



(L/R) Michelle Shepherd, Hilary Swank, Joe Shepherd, and the Shepherds' daughter, Laura Shepherd.

Shepherd took his role in the movie seriously. Like most actors preparing for a film, he researched his topic.

*"I read four or five books about Amelia before filming to get up to speed."*

Even with his research, filming was a learning experience. *"I had never been around a movie production before. I had no clue how many scenes had to be shot just to get 5 seconds of usable film."* Shepherd estimated that he might have flown 10 hours just to get a minute or less of footage that actually ended up in the movie.

A typical day started at 6 a.m. and often lasted until midnight. Although Shepherd did not have to be on the set the entire time, he didn't want to be away from the aircraft. The crew *"was very good and careful, but a lot of the people were not used to being around airplanes."*

On one occasion a crewmember showed up with long screws and something to cover a window. He was told to black out the window so the plane would resemble the larger Lockheed 10E, the model Earhart flew. A surprised Shepherd had to tell him that you don't just screw things into an airplane.

Another challenge was dealing with where the cinematographers wanted to position cameras to film some of the sequences.

*"We were nervous about where the cameras were moving,"* Shepherd said. *"For one scene they had a*

*Mercedes with a boom camera cross the runway during takeoff."*

While Shepherd was learning how Hollywood works, he also had to teach the filmmakers something about proper aircraft operation. Filming took place in Toronto and St. Catherine's, Ontario during the summer of 2008 with afternoon highs in the mid-80s.

For many of the scenes of the Lockheed taxiing, Shepherd had to be vigilant to keep the oil temperatures in the green. He insisted on shutting the engines down after each shoot

and letting the plane sit for 30 minutes to cool down – something the filmmakers weren't too happy about.

However, as they would do on any other set, the filmmakers made sure to take care of the film's star. Besides, how can you argue with a man who's spent *"two to three hours in the aircraft in a wig"* and leather jacket under a blazing summer sun doing his best imitation of Amelia Earhart?

For additional information on Joe Shepherd's Lockheed 12A, go to [www.electrajr.com](http://www.electrajr.com). □

## Air Show Performer To Finance Aviation Films

SANTA MONICA, CALIF. – Paramount Pictures has negotiated a four-year contract with David Ellison and his Skydance Productions to co-finance four to six pictures per year for the studio. Some of the films will be based on flying stories. Nothing



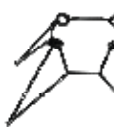

is expected to happen until Skydance completes raising funds for the projects.

Ellison, 27, is the son of Oracle Corporation founder/CEO Larry Ellison, and a member of air show

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