COMING SOON

Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing

Brilon, Germany



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DESCRIPTION

There's a reason the Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing still stops foot traffic on the ramp nearly nine decades after it left the Wichita factory floor. With its unmistakable negative-stagger wing layout — the top wing set behind the bottom one, backwards from almost every other biplane ever built — the D17S was never designed to blend in.

Quick Facts: Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing

Spec

Detail

Model

Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing

Type

Single-engine cabin biplane, taildragger

Engine

Pratt & Whitney R-985 Wasp Junior — 450 hp

Max Speed

approx. 202 mph (325 km/h)

Range

approx. 700 statute miles

Seating

Pilot + up to 4 passengers

Airframe

Welded steel-tube fuselage, wood-framed fabric-covered wings

Beech Aircraft Corporation built the Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing for a very specific customer: the businessperson who wanted a fast, private, all-weather airplane and had no interest in waiting on an airliner schedule. Designed by engineer Ted Wells for the Wichita, Kansas company founded by Walter and Olive Ann Beech, the Staggerwing family first flew in 1932, with the D17S arriving later in the decade as one of the most powerful and refined versions of the line.

- Manufacturer: Beech Aircraft Corporation, Wichita, Kansas
- Designer: Ted Wells
- Lineage: Part of the Model 17 Staggerwing family, first flown in 1932
- Military service: Many airframes flew as the U.S. Army's UC-43 Traveler and the U.S. Navy/Marine Corps' GB-2 during WWII
- Postwar life: Surplus and civilian D17S airframes returned to private hands after the war, reinforcing its status as a true golden age classic

What is a Staggerwing, and why does the top wing sit behind the bottom one?

Most biplanes use "positive stagger," where the upper wing sits ahead of the lower one. Ted Wells flipped that convention on the Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing , moving the upper wing aft instead. The payoff was real: better forward and upward visibility for the pilot, gentler stall manners, and a wing arrangement that let Beech fit a shorter, lighter main gear leg — which mattered once that gear was made to retract.

For collectors and pilots searching for a tube-and-fabric , taildragger aircraft with genuine wartime and business-aviation pedigree, the D17S remains one of the most historically significant classic aircraft in the general aviation world — a design that still out-charms nearly everything built after it.

Powerplant, Systems & Technical Highlights

The Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing earned its reputation on performance, not just looks. Under that graceful cowling sits a genuinely potent powerplant for a 1930s cabin airplane, paired with systems that were ahead of their time.

- Engine: Pratt & Whitney R-985 Wasp Junior, a 9-cylinder radial rated at 450 hp
- Propeller: Constant-speed, two-blade metal propeller
- Max speed: approx. 202 mph — exceptional for a fabric-covered biplane of its era
- Cruise speed: approx. 180 mph
- Range: approx. 700 statute miles, depending on fuel load and equipment
- Service ceiling: approx. 20,000 feet
- Gross weight: approx. 4,250 lb
- Empty weight: roughly 2,650–2,800 lb depending on equipment fit
- Landing gear: Fully retractable main gear — a rarity among cabin biplanes and a key reason the D17S could out-run fixed-gear rivals of its day

Retractable gear on a biplane sounds unremarkable now, but in the 1930s it was a genuine engineering flex. Combined with the 450 hp Wasp Junior, it's what let the Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing cruise comfortably ahead of most contemporaries built for the same "executive transport" mission.

How does the D17S compare to other classic cabin biplanes of its era?

Feature

Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing

Typical Contemporary Cabin Biplane*

Landing gear

Retractable

Fixed

Engine power

450 hp (P&W R-985)

~225–330 hp, depending on model

Cruise speed

approx. 180 mph

approx. 140–160 mph

Wing stagger

Negative (upper wing aft)

Positive (upper wing forward)

Market position

Premium executive transport

Mid-market business/utility biplane

*Representative of period rivals such as Waco's custom cabin biplane series; specific figures vary by model and engine fitted.

Honest ownership note: Like any post-war -surviving round-engine classic, the D17S rewards owners who budget for radial-engine maintenance and stay current with the type's retractable-gear systems. Parts support benefits from an active type club and warbird/vintage restoration community, but a thorough pre-purchase inspection by a Staggerwing-experienced mechanic is essential before any acquisition.

Exterior & Cockpit

Even parked, the Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing looks like it's leaning into a turn. The negative-stagger silhouette is instantly recognizable across any ramp full of classic aircraft , and the fit and finish reflects an airplane originally sold to buyers who could have bought anything.

Exterior highlights:

- Fabric-covered biplane wings over a welded steel-tube fuselage — genuine tube-and-fabric construction
- Distinctive negative-stagger wing arrangement, unlike any other production biplane family
- Clean, polished engine cowling wrapped around the Wasp Junior radial
- Retractable main gear that tucks away in flight, leaving an uncluttered, purposeful profile
- Period-correct two-tone paint schemes typical of golden age executive aircraft

Cockpit highlights:

- Cabin-class comfort with real doors and upholstered seating — a deliberate departure from open-cockpit trainers of the same decade
- Control yoke layout suited to the aircraft's role as an owner-flown business transport
- Seating for the pilot plus up to four passengers
- Analog, period-style instrumentation that rewards pilots who appreciate flying the old-fashioned way
- A cabin that still feels warm, close, and unmistakably 1930s the moment you climb in

Every panel, seam, and rivet on a well-kept D17S tells the story of an aircraft built to impress a passenger before the engine ever turned over.

The Perfect Airplane For

The Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing isn't a first airplane, and it was never meant to be one. It's a reward — for pilots and collectors who understand exactly what they're taking on and want the history, the presence, and the performance that come with it.

- Experienced taildragger pilots who already hold, or are actively working toward, a tailwheel endorsement
- Warbird and vintage aircraft collectors looking for a WWII-adjacent airframe with genuine UC-43 Traveler / GB-2 military lineage
- Fly-in and airshow enthusiasts who want an aircraft that draws a crowd every time it taxis in
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Investment-minded collectors seeking a blue-chip classic aircraft with a strong, established type-club and restoration community

- Aviation history buffs drawn to hand-built, tube-and-fabric golden-age craftsmanship

Good fit if...

Worth a second thought if...

You have tailwheel and/or radial-engine experience (or a solid transition plan)

You're a low-time pilot with no complex/tailwheel time

You want a general aviation classic with real wartime history

You need a simple, low-maintenance daily flyer

You value hangar presence and show-quality restoration

You're not prepared to budget for radial-engine upkeep

You're buying for the long-term collector market

You want the lowest possible acquisition and running cost

Few aircraft reward patience and stick-and-rudder skill the way a well-sorted Beechcraft D17S Staggerwing does. For the right owner, it isn't just a classic — it's a genuine piece of aviation history, still flying.

SPECIFICATIONS

General Information

Gross Weight	**4,250 lb (1,928 kg)**
Empty Weight	**2,540 lb (1,152 kg)**

Engine & Power Systems

Engine Type	**1 × Pratt & Whitney R-985-AN-1 "Wasp Junior" radial engine**
Horsepower	**450 hp (340 kW) at 2,300 rpm**

Airframe & Exterior

Length	**26 ft 10 in (8.18 m)**
Wingspan	**32 ft (9.8 m)**
Height	**8 ft (2.4 m)**

Performance & Specifications

Cruise Speed	**202 mph (325 km/h, 176 kn)**
Range	**670 mi (1,078 km, 582 nmi)**
Passengers	**Up to 4**

PHOTOGRAPHS

7 of 8 photographs reproduced here. The complete gallery is on the listing page.

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INTERIOR


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