



# Pace Setter

**D. U. HOWARD:**

**"Best Aircraft Re-Designer"**

**"W**HEN I was a little kid," says D. U. Howard, "I built my own toys and worked on all the bicycles in the neighborhood.

"I quit school in the eighth grade to go to work as an auto mechanic. My father was ill and that was in the middle of the depression. I married at 18 and supported mother, dad, and my wife."

Dee, now president of Howard Aero, Inc., San Antonio (Texas) International Airport, soon quit his garage job to become a ship cleaner for Braniff. To short-cut the way up, he cleaned airplanes less than a year, switching over to Western Airlines in Los Angeles. In one year, he rose from apprentice to junior mechanic to full A&E mechanic.

But Dee went back to Braniff and, after Pearl Harbor, was drafted and assigned to the airline for the duration, doing airframe overhaul and engine work. He put in eight hours a day at Braniff and spent another eight hours as a free-lance A&E, cutting camera holes in private aircraft, installing extra gas tanks, etc. "It kind of busted up the monotony. I used to average three to four hours sleep a night. When you're young, you can get by with that."

With the extra money, Dee bought flight training and earned his private pilot's certificate. After the war, the young A&E decided "to break the shackles of the Braniff seniority system. It was like having a teacher say your kid couldn't advance to the second grade because all the other kids in second wanted to stay on." Slick Airways was organized and hired him as its first A&E. In 30 days, he was promoted to foreman. Dee and a CAA rep licensed the first 10 C-46s ever put into commercial service.

"But in '47, Slick decided to move its maintenance base to California ('Cal-a-phone-yah' in Dee's fast Western drawl) so I decided to settle down in San Antonio and start the business I'm in now. My total assets were a box of mechanic's hand tools, \$300 in cash, and a slightly-used A&E license."

He and a helper built a sort of squatter's tool shack right on the ramp (they couldn't get any hangar space at first) and found plenty of business on the same private planes that had come in during the war. Today that business has become the world's largest conversion center for Lodestars and Venturas, and its aircraft servicing branch also is thriving. Howard Aero's latest project, a pressurized Ventura,



is designed to outspeed the Convairs and turboprops at the highest altitude at which sea level cabin can be maintained in each of these aircraft (*B/CA*, July '59, p.31).

Dee has black, wavy hair, grey eyes, large cuff links, and wins our 1959 award for "The Best Dressed Mechanic". A fast talker, he's a top salesman and travels all over the country in his Lodestars and Venturas. But he's most at home building his organization, poring over blueprints, and clambering about the aircraft in his shop.

Says one of his DERs': "I've never encountered one individual, basically a mechanic, who has such a total grasp of the business plane. If the blueprint calls for an AN-4 bolt, he wants to know why. When he doesn't like a spec, he'll tell you, 'We're not trying to fly the paper, we're trying to fly the airplane.' He's the best aircraft re-designer in the business."

Dee has spent so many years fixing Lockheeds that "he has a big backlog of hindsight and can second-guess the best engineers," says Tommy Carmichael, his right-hand v-p.

"He's developed an uncanny feel as to how something should be built. Then he has to convince the engineers it was really their idea to begin with. That takes real people-handling. Howard is terrific in instilling confidence in others."—END