



N136PB

WORLD'S RECORD
HIGHEST FLIGHT TIME DC-3

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PBA'S 'GOOD OLD 36' HOLDS COMMERCIAL FLYING RECORD

It's been stripped and rebuilt eight times, had 268 engines and 120 propellers.

Built in 1937, Provincetown-Boston Airline's trusty, lumbering DC-3 N136PB is believed to hold the world's record for the most hours in flight of any aircraft still in commercial service. It had more than 88,400 hours in the air as of Friday. That comes out to about 10 years in flight.

It has more flying hours on it than the snout-nosed DC-3 that's hanging in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., according to a PBA spokeswoman.

N136PB burns a little extra oil after 48 years in service, but PBA entertains no thoughts of retiring the plane just yet.

" 'Good Old 36.' That's what everybody calls it," said Capt. Nick Klein after taxiing up to Miami International Airport. "They baby this one," said Klein. "It doesn't fly real fast (cruising speed is about 175 miles per hour), but it's been a lot of places and carried a lot of people. It's rugged."

The workhorse DC-3 -- also nicknamed "The Gooney Bird" and "Tail Dragger" -- is said to have revolutionized modern aviation when it was introduced in 1935.

The DC-3s marked their 50th anniversary last week. The first test flight of a DC-3 was over Santa Monica, Calif., on Dec. 17, 1937.

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower once singled out the DC-3 as one of the factors that helped the Allied forces win World War II. Douglas Aircraft Co. built more than 10,000 of the planes and says about 2,000 are still flying.

PBA began buying its DC-3s in the late 1960s, and bought "Old 36" from a Texas airplane broker for \$16,000 in 1974. The airline was given new engines and an overhaul at a cost of about \$140,000. PBA, the 35-year-old Naples-based regional airline that flies in Florida and the Northeast, has had its problems in the past year, but its fleet of 11 DC-3s isn't among them.

"I can't tell you that we're ever going to retire it," said PBA Marketing Vice President Donna Fiala. "The DC-3s are so maintenance-free. They built things so well in those days. They cost very little to operate and maintain. They're safe. With that great big wing span, they can just glide in and land anywhere."

That feature has also not been lost on drug smugglers, who now use old DC-3s to bring their illicit cargo to remote landing strips in the Everglades.

"Old 36" has had 10 title owners in its history, spending most of its time as a commercial carrier. For two years ending in 1944, it served the government as a military transport. The military version of the plane, the C-47, was outfitted with a rotating gun and called the Dakota.