

All the Planes, in Brief

by *Bill Curtis*

A Field Guide to the Makers of American Wooden Planes by Thomas Elliott. Mendham, N.J.: Astragal Press, 2003. 288 pp., \$24.95.

I recall that when I received my copy of Tom Elliott's revision of *A Guide to the Makers of American Wooden Planes* (fourth edition) in September 2001, I kidded him about it. I asked how it felt to be releasing a book which was already out of date. But, he was already ahead of me and proceeded to show me the outline for the next edition for which he was collecting names and information not contained in fourth edition.

Two years later, the next volume in the series, *A Field Guide to the Makers of American Wooden Planes*, contains over 550 new planemaker imprints, plus some corrections reported since the publishing of the fourth edition. This volume was designed to be easily carried in one's pocket at flea markets, parking lots, and floor shows. The 5,380 entries contain full-sized imprints, names, places, working dates, and a rating system. The *Field Guide* is not designed to replace the larger volume with its extensive biographical information, glossary, and bibliography.

Elliott's artistic eye and use of space allows for a great deal of information on each page. This arrangement does take a bit of getting used to, but without it the number of pages would have been expanded beyond its 288 pages, making it unwieldy. The limitation is that without white space in margins, it is difficult to make notes, but trade-offs had to be made.

Approximately 370 individuals contributed one or more bits of information that are included in this volume. In the year since the publication of the *Field Guide*, new information continues to be supplied to the author. For example, at a recent auction he told me that just at that event he received some twenty-five rubbings of new marks, variations, and corrections. It is this collective body of information, submitted to one knowledgeable source, which will result in a fifth edition of the *Guide* or the next edition of the *Field Guide*, either of which will also be outdated by the time it is published.

Plane collector Bill Curtis currently serves on the EALA Board of Directors as second vice president.