



Silverbird: The American Airlines Story

Don Bedwell

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Seventy years after predecessor American Airways was fashioned from a hodgepodge of struggling, independent air-mail contractors, American Airlines enters the new century as one of the world's leading air carriers. With a modern fleet of distinctive "silverbirds" serving cities across the United States and overseas, American is a giant in every sense of the word -- in people, equipment and routes. It enters the 21st century bolstered by solid profitability, a far-ranging route network and a long-term agreement with Boeing to keep its fleet updated with the most advanced jetliners. American Eagle, a commuter affiliate grown into a huge airline in its own right, helps extend the company's reach. So do oneworld and other alliances that permit AA agents to ticket travelers to destinations around the planet. The story of American's evolution is told in a colorfully illustrated, large-format book with 440 rare photos, classic advertisements and memorabilia on nearly 300 pages. It celebrates the men and women -- pilots, mechanics, dispatchers, flight attendants, agents, ramp workers and managers -- who through the years have defied the odds to make AA not only a survivors, but a leader. As the book explains, today's success is a far cry from the outlook in the early 1930s. Assembled under the banner of an opportunistic holding company called the Aviation Corporation, American was handicapped by a duke's mixture of aircraft flying routes that never quite linked up. As losses soared faster than its underpowered flying machines, AA's very survival seemed in doubt. Happily, the company was blessed with visionary leaders and with dedicated employees who shared their dream of transforming the unwieldy organization into a proud giant. They could see beyond their slow, unreliable flying machines to an era when jetliners would span the oceans. Steadily, they built the company's reputation for safety and service until it became a model for the industry. Through the imagination, hard work and even heroism of its people, the company survived a Depression, wars, and the turmoil of industry deregulation that doomed many traditional airlines. Tempered by hard times and tough leaders, AA has emerged as one of the most successful, and most competitive, airlines in the world.

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