

## General History

### Funny Looking—But Fun

Some pilots explain the *Baby Great Lakes* like this: “Well, it might not be much to look at, but you should feel it fly!” Strapped into this little plane, you can’t see its tiny stature, its “shorty” gear and its oversize vertical tail. You don’t see that you look as silly as a “giraffe in a roller-skate,” as one writer once said. You simply fly!

A scaled down version of the *Great Lakes* 2T-1, and designed in the mid-1950s, the *Baby* is so small it takes only one step from the tarmac into the cockpit. Built by pilots and enthusiasts for aerobatics and Sunday cruising, the *Baby Great Lakes* has an unexpected high performance.

The little speedster can be airborne in 5 seconds from a dead stop, and has a climb rate of 2,000 feet per minute! For aerobatics, the *Baby* is stressed for 9 Gs. That’s more than a World War II fighter. The plane is loads of fun...but some say you don’t look good flying in it!



### Homemade Concoction

The *Baby Great Lakes* is a homebuilt aircraft, meaning that a pilot or enthusiast purchases plans (and often a kit) and constructs the airplane in a garage or shop. A *Baby Great Lakes* takes about 1,600 hours to build, and materials (without an engine) cost about \$750 to \$1,000 in 1969.

A *Baby* builder becomes a skilled craftsman in many fields as he creates his small flying machine. The fuselage is welded steel tubing and the wings are made from wooden spars and ribs. The entire plane is covered with doped fabric except for the leading edges, which are sheet aluminum, and the engine cowling, which is usually made of fiberglass. A *Baby* builder learns all these crafts, and presumably, he can fly too!

*The little speedster can be airborne in 5 seconds from a dead stop, and has a climb rate of 2,000 feet per minute!*

## About This Aircraft

The Museum’s *Baby Great Lakes* was built over a span of 27 years by Earl Thorp of Moses Lake, Washington. Interested in flying since he took lessons in 1947, Thorp started building his own plane in 1970. It took many different skills, and when he ran into problems, he turned to the staff at Big Bend Community College. Sometimes, the project lingered, untouched for months or even years before he returned to his task.

As his creation neared completion in the fall of 1996, Earl Thorp was injured in a car accident that left him unable to fly his homemade machine. Undaunted, he continued building. Upon completion in 1997, Thorpe asked his friend and former Big Bend Community College flight instructor, Buck Wheat, to take his *Baby* aloft. On the morning of August 12, 1997, this plane made its first and only flight. Thorp’s entry in the plane’s log book says, “First Flight. 5:35 A.M.” Then, he notes a trait that is characteristic of the speedy *Baby Lakes* airplanes. “Good but a little quick.” Thorp donated the plane to the Museum in 1999.



## Specifications

Type:	Homebuilt Aircraft
First Flight:	1954
Wingspan:	16 feet 8 inches
Length:	13 feet 9 inches
Height:	4 feet 6 inches
Wing Area:	86 square feet
Weight, Empty:	475 pounds
Weight, Loaded:	850 pounds
Power:	One Continental A-75 80 horsepower engine
Capacity:	One
Typical Armament:	None

## Performance

Cruise Speed:	118 miles per hour
Top Speed:	135 miles per hour
Range:	250 miles
Service Ceiling:	17,000 feet