

Northeast Airlines History

Northeast Airlines began in 1933 as Central Vermont Airways (owned by the Central Vermont Railroad Company) and flights began that year in close association with National Airways, the two airlines operating as a joint airline. Scheduled routes and air mail routes were flown initially in the northeastern USA with two Stinson SM6000 Tri-Motor aircraft.

In 1936 Central Vermont Airways bought Lockheed 10A Electra twins and the following year National Airways ended its association with Central Vermont Airways. The Electras flew routes to Bangor and Burlington out of Boston while the older Tri-Motors flew to Caribou to the north of Boston.

The modern name of Northeast Airlines was introduced in November 1940 as the airline moved away from its railroad-based image. A more traditional logo was used for this new livery with a smiling pilgrim logo. By 1941 the aging Stinson Tri-Motors were replaced by three new Douglas DC-3s. These were replaced by five ex-TWA DC-2 aircraft in 1942 due to financial concerns but the aircraft were requisitioned, (as C-32A planes) by the U.S. Army Air Force where they were flown under contract to Northeast in support of the war effort, opening new routes to Europe via Labrador, Greenland and Iceland.

This oceanic route extended with the introduction of USAAF Douglas C-54 aircraft (DC4s) to Prestwick in Scotland via Greenland, Iceland and Stornoway often in dangerous North Atlantic winter conditions. Canadian routes were also pioneered.

With the success of these pioneering trans-Atlantic routes Northeast Airlines applied to the US Civil Aeronautics Board for routes to Europe including Moscow and London but these were rejected. Instead Northeast was awarded the route from Boston to New York after the failure of the Airline Feeder System. Northeast had already purchased Mayflower Airlines who had flown parts of this route.

Northeast Airlines struggled to compete with the larger American Airlines and Eastern Airlines on the short-haul New York route and had introduced Douglas C54s (DC4s) by on the route from 1946. This large aircraft was sensibly replaced three years later with Convair 240 twins. Curtiss C-46 Commando twins were introduced on the Boston to Montreal route.

In 1959 Northeast was finally awarded legged long-haul routes to Miami and Tampa, Florida and this gave the airline a new lease of life. The new Boston-Miami route began in 1957 using a leased Flying Tiger Line DC6, converted from freight to passenger use, which was joined by another ten new DC6 aircraft.

In 1965 the Storer Broadcasting Company of Miami took over 55 percent of the airline's stock and shortly afterward came a large equipment order for 14 Douglas DC-9s, 6 Boeing 727-100s,

6 stretched Boeing 727-200s , and seven Fairchild-Hiller FH-227B twin-engine turboprop feederliners.

In mid-1966 the colorful 'Yellowbird' livery was introduced to move Northeast away from its old and conservative corporate image. A first: Boeing's first 727-200 "stretch" model made its inaugural scheduled flight on December 14, 1967, from Miami to New York's JFK International - as a Northeast Yellowbird.

1968, new routes were opened from Boston and New York direct to Nassau and Freeport, resort cities in the Bahamas, and beginning March 14, 1969, Bostonians could fly Yellowbirds straight to Bermuda. On April 28, 1969, Portland-Manchester-Detroit-Chicago service opened, quickly followed by Bangor-Burlington-Cleveland-Chicago on May 31, 1969. Then, on September 23rd of the same year, the CAB awarded a route certificate for the southern transcontinental route, nonstop from Miami to Los Angeles.

After problems with route structures and finance the airline looked for a merger with another carrier. The Tri-Star jets that were ordered in 1969 were cancelled before delivery when a possible merger with Northwest Orient Airlines was considered but finally on August the first of 1972 Northeast Airlines merged with Delta Airlines and the wonderful livery of Northeast Airlines disappeared from Boston Airport forever.

FLEET HISTORY: Stinson Tri-Motor, Lockheed 10A Electra, DC2 (C-32), DC3, Curtiss C-46, DC4 (C-54), DC6, Convair 240, Viscount 800, Boeing 707, Convair 880, Convair 990, FH-227, Douglas DC9-15, DC9-31, Boeing 727-100, 727-200.

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