Editor's Note: "Lightning never strikes twice in the same place" . . . so they say. Our cover story for this issue contains ample evidence that it does. Several times, in fact.

It's rare that we have had the same airplane on the cover of SPORT AVIATION more than once, but this month's beautiful aerial by Ted Koston is of the same American Eagle that graced our cover in March of 1970. It's rare that the same kind of airplane wins a Grand Champion Antique award two years in a row . . . yet last November we also featured a beautifully restored Eagle. Both are all silver and if some of the background in the photos looks the same, then you get an A+ for observation because our stills were taken of both aircraft at the same private strip just north of Milwaukee.

Last year's EAA Grand Champion Antique trophy went to Ed Wegner of Plymouth, Wisconsin for his American Eagle, NC7310, and this year's trophy went to Bob Groff and Claude Gray of Northridge, California for their Eagle, NC3738.

"Things happen in threes" is another of saying. You guys with the Wacos, Travel Airs . . . or maybe that Buhl Airsedan we happen to know a prominent restorer has salted away . . . better start leaning into those sanding blocks just in case there's another Eagle out there in someone's shop! - JBC

The 1976 EAA Grand Champion Antique, a 1927 American Eagle owned by Bob Groff and Claude Gray of Northridge, California.

Restorer Claude Gray.
The restoration of NC3738 goes back a number of years... to 1964. That year Bob Groff and I found the airplane in Pine City, Minnesota, purchased it and had it shipped to California. Restoration was started and the job was completed in 5½ years. The airplane was all there when purchased, including a runable OX-5, propeller, a complete set of World War I surplus instruments and all hardware — such as the original stranded cable flying, landing, interplane and cabane wires that, incidentally, are on the plane today.

In checking the airplane's records we were amazed to learn that we were the second owners. George Freeman, the man from whom we had purchased the Eagle, had bought it from a dealer in Minneapolis in February of 1928! It was flown until September of 1940 and afterwards was stored in a farm hangar until we came along.

In the course of the first restoration... we say "first" because it has just gone through the second... we did a complete disassembly, down to sandblasting, and started over from there. The original top wings were in good condition and are still in use on the plane today. The lower panels were useable only as patterns and, consequently, new ones were made. New wood stringers, formers, etc., were installed on the fuselage, an all new, burnished cowling was made, the engine was given a major overhaul and all other parts were brought up to "as new" condition. During this period, we had found a pair of 1928 20 inch aircraft wire wheels with mechanical brakes that had never been used. These were installed along with a Fairchild PT-19 tail wheel assembly. Due to the lack of nice grass landing strips in our part of the country, these two items are almost a must. As might have been observed at Oshkosh this year, we also made provisions for a "quick change" to a tail skid. The tail skid and tail wheel are interchangeable in about 15 minutes.

When completed, the old girl was finished in one of the typical 1927 paint schemes — international orange fuselage, fin and rudder and silver wings. The cowling was burnished, of course — an American Eagle trademark. This was the way the airplane appeared on the March 1970 cover of SPORT AVIATION.

3738 was flown to many West Coast fly-ins from the Spring of 1969 until June of 1970. At that time, the Eagle, Claude Gray and three different sets of power lines got in each other's way in one of the many mountain passes we have to fly through to get from Point A to Point B in California. (In passing it can be said that out here the power companies apparently find it cheaper to replace lines once in a while than to put markers on them so we can see them!) The start of my troubles was a set of wires from one mountain to another at about 400 feet. The third set I hit damaged the landing gear, causing me to flip over upon landing — due to a wheel dragging on the wing panel above it.

All this is past history now... but, fortunately, the Eagle was not too badly damaged. This misfortune was turned into good fortune as it gave us a chance to make a few changes and to put the plane back into authentic, factory new condition. This was especially desirable after EAA's Antique and Classic Division became the first national aviation organization to formulate and adopt a set of judging standards for vintage airplanes. Throughout the second restoration of 3738 we stayed as close to the letter of the new judging rules as possible.

Restoring an aircraft to authentic factory condition means such things as not using elastic stop nuts on an airplane that was built before this type lock nut was invented, not using AN type hoses and fittings, not using shielded harnesses, etc. (These items CAN be used, of course, but the owner must be prepared to forfeit points for each.) The Eagle was put together at the factory in 1927 with hardware store round head stove bolts and round head wood screws, castle nuts and many cotter pins and clevis pins. Cowling pins and piano wire pins were used to hold the cowling on. Cotton fabric and dope were the standard finish materials. Chrome was not in use in the 20s but nickel plate was... and the Eagles left the factory with the owner's choice of nickel or cadmium plated struts. 3738 left Kansas City with the nickel plate and that is what appears on this restoration.

On this second restoration we did make a new cowling again as we had found a much better burnishing process. After some gear repair, new cabanes, some rib repair, a top overhaul of the engine, new prop and a new cover job it was back to flying. We were still spraying dope on some wing panels on a Wednesday morning and that night at 11:30 p.m. we had the Eagle in a truck and were on the road for Oshkosh... via Al Kelch's beautiful grass strip just north of Milwaukee. There the airplane was assembled and test flown. From there it was hopped to the fly-in at Wittman Field. Bob Groff and I want to give credit and thanks to our good friends and "crewmen", Obie Tollman, Don Birlew, Bob Conover and Allen Logsdon for all the effort it took to get the job done and get the plane back there and flying again... and for the same effort that will be required to truck the Eagle back again to California.

Finally, a capsule history of 3738. It is a 1927 Model 101, Serial #82. It was completed in December of 1927 and in February of '28 was delivered to Marvin A. Northrop, the American Eagle dealer in Minneapolis. He used it two weeks for flight training and demonstration flights, then sold it to George Freeman of Pine City, Minnesota. Mr. Freeman flew off his farm up through 1940— until World War II temporarily grounded all private aircraft. The Eagle languished in a small hangar until 1964. Old CAA records show a recover job in 1930 and another
in 1935. A set of large wooden skis came with the airplane, but due to climatic conditions in Southern California we have found little use for them thus far! (You really know how to hurt a cold country flyer, don't you Claude?)

The OX-5 engine was built in September of 1918 by the Willis Motor Company and was converted to the Miller overhead and a Bendix mag when overhauled by Pete Velvis during the first restoration.

There are a few 1928 and 1929 Eagles flying today but as far as we

Claude Gray (EAA 9052) 9635 Sylvia Ave., Northridge, CA 91324 oils the rocker arms — a "must" on the pre-flight of an OX-5. That's the famous "Miller action" modification to the overhead valve train you see — added at the time of the first restoration of the airplane.

The American Eagle, one of the proud names in U.S. civil aircraft history. In the late 20s they were as common as Pipers or Cessnas today.
Burnished cowling — a virtual fad immediately after the Lindbergh flight — and the Eagle trademark on the vertical fin are instant recognition features of the American Eagle.

A standard VFR panel, circa 1927.

know this is the only 1927 model. '27 was the first year of production. There are a number of differences between the early and later models. The '27 has ailerons on the top wings only, a larger, balanced rudder is used, it has a narrower gear, there is no door to the front cockpit and there is no elevator trim in the pilot's cockpit. Washer adjustments on the leading edge of the stabilizer is the only means of adjusting trim. Also, the leading edges of the wings have false ribs instead of a solid panel leading edge. This gives the plane a vintage look — that has long since passed. It was and still is a very basic flying machine.