

Runway Models

Come Fly With Us! A Global History of the Airline Hostess

by Johanna Omelia and Michael Waldock. Collectors Press, 2003. 160 pp., \$24.95.

Before husky-voiced ennuï became the norm, stewardesses were pleasant, pretty young women admired by girls and desired by men. It's easy to understand their universal allure; in a world of limited opportunity, airline hospitality paired the glamour and excitement of travel with, well, just a few rules about height, weight, marital status, stocking seams, gum chewing, cigarette smoking, pregnancy, tooth whiteness, nail polish, and the "willingness to retire between ages 30 and 32."

Less about mid-air comfort than about sex appeal, fashion, and gender expectations, *Come Fly With Us!* is pure popcorn reading; it takes no sides and makes no social arguments, only offering readers a delightful ensemble of facts, photos, and advertisements from which they can draw their own conclusions about the history of the airline hostess. In a well-designed and enjoyable coffee table book, Johanna Omelia (a former fashion editor) and Michael Waldock (an aviation enthusiast) trace the evolution of "fly girls" from airborne nurses to sex kittens to safety officers.

Of course, the subject owes much of its appeal to airlines' outlandish efforts to cater to men's fantasies. Well before Hooters Air, there was no shortage of male-passengers-only flights and provocative clothing like micro-miniskirts and gold lamé paper party dresses (stewardesses used



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scissors to adjust the hem). Press shots of chirpy flight attendants are fascinating, not only for the fashions in which they were uniformed, but also as evidence of what could be gotten away with. Pacific Southwest Airlines' 1970s hot pants and go-go boots seem like good clean fun compared to Malaysian Airlines' 1980s geisha-like floral sarongs and advertising which claimed its stewardesses' "desire to please and serve stems from a natural hospitality." On another note, it could be argued that no uniform has ever surpassed in sheer loveliness United's ultra-mod 1960s skimmers.

For all the glamour, *Come Fly With Us!* remembers to touch on the serious: the risk of death when the industry was young and flying was more perilous, the recent phenomenon of air rage, the Civil Rights

Act which allowed men into the profession, and legal victories that permitted married women—and pregnant women—to keep their jobs. Even past the age of 32.

—Sam Goldberg is an associate editor at Air & Space/Smithsonian.

Hypersonic: The Story of the North American X-15

by Dennis R. Jenkins and Tony R. Landis. Specialty Press, 2002. 264 pp., \$39.95.

When I was 12 and fighting the unbearable Kansas summer, I'd spend my days in the air-conditioned library reading encyclopedias. They had no beginning and no end; I could pick up a volume at random, begin at any entry, and spend the day in the cool air, always learning something.

I was reminded of that summer when I read *Hypersonic*. To call *Hypersonic* a "book" is to do it injustice; it's really an encyclopedia, and a comprehensive one at that—no concise kiddie's *World Book*, but



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