



pinGame journal

Genco Flying Aces, newly discovered -- by Rory Lucas
Click on any picture for a larger image.

I'm sure most American coin-op collectors don't realize how spoilt they are, having so many great vintage machines to choose from. Overseas, things are vastly different with hardly any to be found. But that's not to say there aren't any incredibly exciting finds to be made in even the most obscure places.

How about a previously unknown 1956 Genco pinball, unlike any other, turning up halfway around the world from Chicago in a small, country town near the most remote city on earth, Perth, Western Australia! As unbelievable as it sounds, this game, called Flying Aces, and several other rare 1950s machines were purchased by my father, Roger Lucas, who has operated and dealt in coin-op games since 1967.



In November, 1989, Roger heard of the recent death of an elderly operator who had hoarded a storeroom of old machines for years, never wanting to sell any. My father is a caring, considerate, and compassionate person and he quickly rang the family to offer his condolences ... and then ask what was for sale! It seemed as if they couldn't get rid of their inheritance quick enough and agreed on a very reasonable price. It then took three trips to their country store to bring all the games back to our factory in Perth.

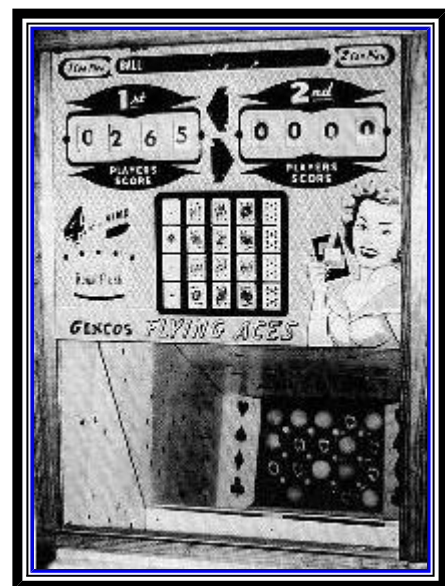
At the time, neither of us had seen any pinballs as old as some of these, because the few that were imported from America in the '50s and '60s were all second-hand and used until they literally disintegrated. Any that didn't wear out were destroyed in order to maintain the monopoly held by the only five commercial operators in the region. So far, the only woodrail pinballs we know to have survived in Western Australia are the eleven from this find.

Since I had been around pinballs my whole life and restored many of the newer vintages ones for my parents, I soon became interested in these real oldies. So, in January 1990 for my twenty-first birthday, my folks gave me a 1958 Gottlieb Sittin' Pretty from this group. After about 100 hours of

restoration work, this game became the start of my collection. The restoration included installation of new woodrails, as all the games, except for Flying Aces, had been "modernized" in the 1960s with steel rails. Six months later, they also gave me the Flying Aces because it was so weird and wonderful they knew I'd never let them sell it.

Over the next six years, I became an avid (addicted) collector and restorer of many coin-op devices, which led me to my first Chicagoland show in April, 1996. Luckily, I bumped into Jim (the "ed") Schelberg and, while chatting, asked him why Flying Aces was not listed in any books, as I'd always presumed it was a well-known classic. Jim didn't know but sent me off to ask Dick Bueschel, who was also at the show. Having read so much of Dick's work, I was excited to finally meet him, especially when he told me that he'd never seen or heard of Flying Aces either! Two weeks later at the Wild West Pinball Fest in Arizona, I also met Steve Kordek, who worked for Genco when this game was built. Yet even he had no knowledge of its existence and was very surprised to see my photos.

What really makes this game special is the unique headboard arrangement that incorporates a ball-shuffling (tossing) mechanism in its base with a 45-degree mirror to give a three-dimensional look of depth, the same as a rifle gallery. This very effective use of animation makes the shuffling rubber balls seem to "fly" at you from the back of the headboard that looks three feet deeper than it really is. Game play is based on poker hands, with each of the 20 headboard shuffle holes representing a different card. At the start of each ball (five-ball play) the ten rubber balls in the headboard are shuffled into the air. If they land in a full sequence of "Four of a Kind" or "Royal Flush," points are scored and a "Made Hand" bonus is scored. Automatic re-shuffling then occurs whenever any full hand is made and stops only when a complete sequence of either hand is not made with the rubber balls.



This is where the playfield comes in, as there are five rollover lanes, each with four switches that correspond with the 20 shuffle-holes (cards). The idea is to try to complete as many incomplete hands as possible, and this can only be done if just one card is out of sequence. For example, if any three Queens are made in the shuffle-holes, the player has to get the steel ball into the Queens rollover lane to momentarily close the needed switch and make a "Four of a Kind." Re-shuffling does not occur with



hands made in this way. Hand values are: Four of a kind = 300 points and one "Made Hand" bonus; Royal flush = 500 points and one "Made Hand" bonus; Four of a kind and Royal flush = 1500 and two "Made Hand" bonuses.

The gobble hole also scores both hands at once. Two bonuses = light lower bumpers; six bonuses = light upper bumpers; nine bonuses = light specials, one free game down each side lane, and three free games down the gobble hole. The shuffled ball placement is also displayed above the backglass window with light-up cards, so that any spectators, who cannot see the rubber balls, know what is happening. And when a hand is completed, the backglass and playfield light to show which type. Another great feature that makes this game much better than most multiple player machines is that if two people are playing, the first player finishes before the second player starts. This way the bonus can be carried over from ball to ball.

As you can see from the photos, this game is in fine, original condition, which is amazing considering that it was in operation until 1973.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said for the other Flying Aces! Yes, there were two in this find, but the other was quite worn and had been stripped for parts years ago, the headboard suffering the indignity of becoming a rack for old video game PCBs. The spare playfield and ball-shuffling mechanism do have minor improvements, making them more reliable, and this could be why the wrecked game saw so much more use. All the clues so far seem to point to these two games being prototypes that were never produced. Maybe they left the factory as samples or were sold when Genco went out of business. Who knows? What I do know is that both pinballs were imported into Western Australia in the 1950s or early 1960s after being purchased from a large dealer in California. The actual production date for Flying Aces is unknown, with the schematic undated, but the mirror does have a 10-year guarantee stamped on the back, starting on June 12, 1956.

It's a pity that so few people will ever get to play this lovely machine, but if you happen to be in the neighborhood, please look me up and I'll be glad to show it to you. pGj



[Back to the main page](#)