

# Memphis Airships Inc. – small blimps

Peter Lobner, 12 February 2022

## 1. Introduction

Memphis Airships Inc. was founded in Memphis, TN in 1981 by Jimmy Thompson and J. Steven Garner. The firm produced several small blimps before going into bankruptcy in the mid-1990s and being acquired by Interface Airships Inc.

## 2. Ultrablimp

The Ultrablimp was the first airship produced by Memphis Airships. This was a single-seat, ultralight helium airship powered by an 11.2 kW (15 hp) Yamaha engine.

## 3. EXP II (1988)

The EXP II was a larger single-seat blimp certified by the FAA in the experimental exhibition category. With an overall length of 29 m (95.1 ft), the airship generated a gross aerostatic lift of 725 kg (1,598 lb). The gas envelope volume would have been approximately 700 m<sup>3</sup> (24,720 ft<sup>3</sup>). With its single engine, the airship had a maximum

speed of 90 kph (56 mph) and could operate up to an altitude of 1,350 m (4,429 ft). Flight endurance was 2.5 to 6 hours, depending on average speed. The EXP II was priced from \$200,000 to \$250,000.



*Memphis Airships EXP II. Source: Commercial News USA (1988)*

#### **4. Zephyr 200 (1990)**

This was a 18.3-m (60-foot) long, single-seat blimp with a top speed of 56.3 kph (35 mph). The open gondola was suspended beneath the gas envelope by external catenaries. In 1990, this blimp was priced at \$50,000, included a full training program.

Author Roland Escher reported that the Zephyr 200 was powered by a 17.9 kW (24 hp) König engine. "Two Zephyr 200s were ordered by the Westinghouse Group to be used as testbed for a new radar system."



*Zephyr 200. Source: Popular Science (June 1990, p. 9)*

#### **5. Zephyr 500 (1996)**

The largest blimp built by Memphis Airships was the Zephyr 500, which was propelled by two 17.9 kW (24 hp) König engines. Roland Escher reported: "Unfortunately, the project could not be completed before the company went into bankruptcy. The Zephyr 500 was acquired by Interface Airships Inc., while the employees were re-

grouped in a new company called Maximage. Interface Airships Inc. completed the Zephyr 500 and flew it for the first time in March 1996. It was intended for use in environmental research.“



*The Zephyr 500 in flight.  
Source: Interface Airships Inc., via Roland Escher*

### **For more information**

- Roland Escher, “Memphis Airships Inc.” Airship and Blimp Resources, 2003:  
<http://www.myairship.com/database/memphis.html>
- “New Mid-Size Helium Airship,” Commercial News USA, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 14, April 1988:  
[https://books.google.com/books?id=QWUXAQAAMAAJ&pg=RA2-PA14&lpg=RA2-PA14&dq=memphis+airships+inc&source=bl&ots=4HI6Hg0Zxj&sig=ACfU3U0kn9zEKLmrANyJnlTAJ5eyZdG5vA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiMtPee3v\\_yAhXQFDQIHYSBh0Q6AF6BAgaEAM#v=onepage&q=memphis%20airships%20inc&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=QWUXAQAAMAAJ&pg=RA2-PA14&lpg=RA2-PA14&dq=memphis+airships+inc&source=bl&ots=4HI6Hg0Zxj&sig=ACfU3U0kn9zEKLmrANyJnlTAJ5eyZdG5vA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiMtPee3v_yAhXQFDQIHYSBh0Q6AF6BAgaEAM#v=onepage&q=memphis%20airships%20inc&f=false)
- “Blimp designed for one,” Popular Science, June 1990, p. 9:  
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