

## Aviation Consumer Response - Cessna 340

Our organization, The Twin Cessna Flyer, has represented 340 owners since 1988. The 340 was a great airplane then and today, in 2010, it has never been a better value. Prices are depressed, it's a buyers market and bargains abound.

The 340 is a perfect step up to the cabin-class pressurized twin market. Many 340 owners previously owned non-pressurized twins like Barron's and 310's but a surprising number move up from late model high performance singles like a Cirrus or Columbia. Their family has outgrown their airplane and they quickly notice for the same amount of money, and sometimes less, they can fly a larger, much more capable airplane like the 340.

One reservation people have prior to making the move is switching from, say, a 5-year old Cirrus to a 35 year old 340. They are concerned about increased maintenance cost and downtime. I tell them this: a well maintained older airplane can be every bit as reliable as a newer airplane. The 340 is more complex and has more systems, not to mention an additional engine, so it will definitely cost more to maintain. But one in tip top shape can be as reliable as any airplane on the market - new or old.

On the other hand, a "bargain" airplane can be a financial nightmare. Corrosion is a big concern. Our technical advisor, Tony Saxton of TAS Aviation, sees airplanes with beautiful paint jobs and a panel full of nice avionics come into his shop only to find unairworthy, corroded engine beams for example. The owner who thought he had the perfect airplane is hit with a bill of 25% of the value of his airplane. These airplanes simply must be maintained by a knowledgeable shop. And when buying one, a thorough pre-buy by a shop that specializes in twin Cessna's is a must.

The electro-mechanical landing gear on the 340 must be maintained strictly according to Cessna's instructions. That means re-rigging it every year or 200 hours whichever comes first. It's an 8-hour job start to finish and many shops don't do it. They swing the gear a couple of times and declare it good. This is asking for trouble. Again, owners need to use a shop that knows twin Cessna's.

Often the biggest challenges for someone moving from a Cirrus or Columbia to a 340 is switching from a G1000, for example, to a steam-gauge panel. The new owner can be overwhelmed. (Interestingly, a few think it's really "cool" - all those dials and gauges!) Of course, with the many panel upgrade options from Garmin, Aspen and Avidyne, they don't have to go retro unless they choose to. And more and more of the fleet is being upgraded, making it easier to buy a 340 with glass already installed.

Another change for the high-performance single owner moving up to a 340 will be the training involved. Insurance companies will typically require initial training at SimCom or FlightSafety plus 25 to 50 hours with a safety pilot in the right seat. Thereafter, annual simulator sessions are usually required. We have had members with as little as 400 hours TT successfully transition to a cabin-class twin Cessna. It can be done if the owner is sufficiently motivated.

The 340 was manufactured by Cessna from 1972 to 1984 and there are a number of variations and mods to choose from which I'm sure your article will cover. The "queen of the fleet" would be an early 80's model with a RAM VII engine conversion, known ice equipped,

VG's, spoilers and, of course, as much glass in the cockpit as possible. Equally important would be a history of maintenance by a shop specializing in twin-engine Cessna's. If such an aircraft were built today it would cost well over \$1 million, yet today can be had for well less than half that amount.

After moving up to a 340, what we hear most often from the new owners is how much they love the pressurization. They no longer have to cajole their family to wear oxygen cannulas. They now routinely fly in the flight levels where the airplane is faster, the airspace less crowded and it's easier to circumnavigate the weather. It's a whole new world for them and they often like it more than they thought they would.

It is very gratifying to see people buy these airplanes and bring them up to 2010 standards. We are seeing more and more glass cockpit retrofits, complete interior renovations and, of course, new paint schemes. The result for someone making this move up is the ability to have a small, personal "airliner" that allows them to fly 4 or 5 people at 200+ knots for 3.5 to 4 hours in pressurized and air conditioned comfort. Our members report all-in operating costs in the \$500 to \$600 per hour range.

The two long term concerns for 340 owners are Cessna's Supplemental Inspection Document program (SID's) and fuel availability, given the likely phase out of 100 LL. SID's, of course, are the industry's way of addressing the aging GA aircraft fleet. It's likely SID's will be developed for all legacy GA aircraft, not just twin Cessna's. Currently, SID's are not mandatory in the U.S. for piston powered aircraft which, of course, includes 340's. No one has a crystal ball, but the conventional wisdom is that the FAA will continue to address specific safety concerns via AD's and not resort to the broad brush approach of mandatory SID's. This opinion is bolstered by the fact that the reports we are getting from overseas, where some countries require SID compliance, is that not many age related issues are being found. Some corrosion here and there, the occasional manufacturing or maintenance defect but nothing common or widespread. The 340 fleet appears to be aging very well.

Solutions are in the works for the 100LL problem. Your publication has covered this issue extensively so I won't address it here except to say we are optimistic that over the long run a workable solution will be found.

Finally, we often hear that the piston twin market is dead, squeezed by high performance singles on the low end and turboprop singles on the high end. We respectfully disagree. You will not find a single example of either that can do what a 340 can do for the money - fly 4 to 6 people at up to 200 kts for 800 miles with the security of a second engine - all for a purchase price of less than \$300,000 and in many cases, well below that. For many people, the 340 is the perfect airplane for their mission.

Any of your readers interested in learning more about 340's are welcome to contact us at 704-910-1790 or [editor@twinessna.org](mailto:editor@twinessna.org)

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