



Piper/Ted Smith Aerostar

It's as fast and complex as it looks, which means it burns lots of fuel, demands proper training and requires high-quality maintenance.

The Aerostar—with plenty of ramp appeal and utility—has a deserved rep for being blazingly fast with good range. And unlike most piston twins, it has enough power to actually climb on a single engine.

But bring a Visa with high limits. The airplane's Lycomings are somewhat thirsty and although it's hardly a maintenance hog, the Aerostar fleet is aging and getting expensive to maintain. But for owners who can afford it, the model is hard to beat for getting from A to B faster than anything that doesn't burn Jet A.

The Aerostar is the product of famed aircraft designer Ted Smith, whose name is attached to such classics as the A-20 twin-engine bomber and the Twin and Jet Commander lines. In 1963, Smith formed his own company to build a family of fast fliers, all built around the same fuselage, wings and tail. Five years later, the Model 600 emerged in 1968, with normally aspirated Lycoming IO-540 engines and a takeoff weight of 5500 pounds. A year later, the 601 appeared, with a pair of Rajay turbo-

chargers and manually controlled, electrically actuated wastegates on each engine. With turbos, the en-

The Aerostar is hard to beat for getting from A to B faster than anything that doesn't burn Jet A.

gines could maintain 290 HP from sea level to 16,000 feet.

SELLING OUT

By this point, Smith had sold out, first to American Cement and later to Butler Aviation, which acquired both Aerostar and Mooney and moved them to Kerrville, Texas. A squabble between the new owner and the old over corrosion idled the line for two years. Unwilling to let his idea wither, Ted Smith organized a group of investors and bought the company back, setting it up in Santa Maria, California. The new company began building the 600A and 601A in 1973. The A models had Lycomings with

heavier crankcases and crankshafts and engine TBO was boosted from 1400 hours to 2000 for the 600A and 1800 hours for the 601A.

The first pressurized Aerostar, the 601P, appeared in 1974, with a max differential pressure of 4.25 PSI, good for an 11,000-foot cabin all the way to 25,000 feet. The tenth 601P emerged with a longer wing (stretched from 34.2 to 36.7 feet) and higher max takeoff weight, 6000 pounds. These changes were incorporated in the unpressurized turbo model in 1977. The engines on the new B-model 601 were fitted with an automatic wastegate control, dumping the electric version.

Ted Smith died in 1978 at 70 years of age, after open-heart surgery. Plans for nine-seat Aerostars with 450-HP piston engines and turbines died with him, unfortunately. Later that year, the company was acquired by Piper Aircraft, which moved it from Santa Maria to Vero Beach.

Piper kept at it, despite a soft market. It improved the wastegate system in the 601B and 601P, increasing critical altitude from 16,000 to

SMITH/PIPER AEROSTAR



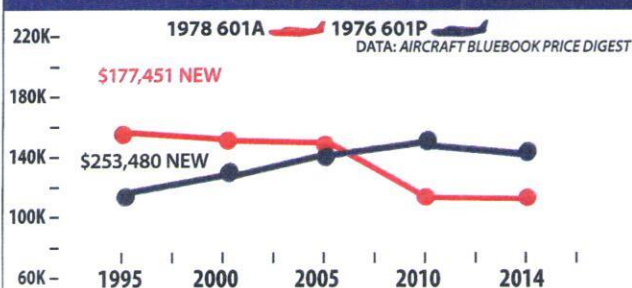
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PIPER/TED SMITH AEROSTAR MODEL HISTORY

MODEL YEAR	ENGINE	TBO	OVERHAUL	FUEL	USEFUL LOAD	CRUISE	TYPICAL RETAIL
1969-70 AEROSTAR 600	LYC 290-HP IO-540-G1B5	1400	\$40,000	165	1965 LBS	211 KTS	±\$78,500
1973-75 AEROSTAR 600A	LYC 290-HP IO-540-K1F5	2000	\$40,000	165	1965 LBS	211 KTS	±\$90,000
1976-78 AEROSTAR 600A	LYC 290-HP IO-540-K1F5	2000	\$40,000	165	1965 LBS	211 KTS	±\$105,000
1979-81 AEROSTAR 600A	LYC 290-HP IO-540-K1J5	2000	\$38,000	165	1965 LBS	211 KTS	±\$120,000
1969-70 AEROSTAR 601	LYC 290-HP IO-540-P1A5	1600	\$40,000	165	1970 LBS	237 KTS	±\$92,000
1973-76 AEROSTAR 601A	LYC 290-HP IO-540-S1A5	1800	\$40,000	165	1970 LBS	237 KTS	±\$109,000
1977-78 AEROSTAR 601B	LYC 290-HP IO-540-S1A5	1800	\$40,000	165	2025 LBS	233 KTS	±\$128,000
1974-76 AEROSTAR 601P	LYC 290-HP IO-540-S1A5	1800	\$40,000	165	2025 LBS	232 KTS	±\$130,000
1979-81 AEROSTAR 602P	LYC 290-HP IO-540-S1A5	1800	\$40,000	165	1900 LBS	232 KTS	±\$180,000
1982-83 AEROSTAR 602P	LYC 290-HP IO-540-AA1A5	1800	\$40,000	165	2025 LBS	229 KTS	±\$195,000
1984 AEROSTAR 700P	LYC 350-HP TIO-540-UTA	1800	\$73,000	165	2135 LBS	258 KTS	±\$345,000

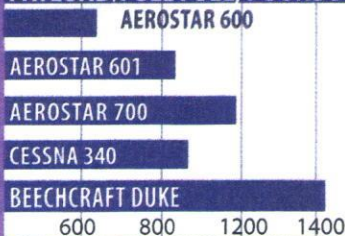
RESALE VALUES



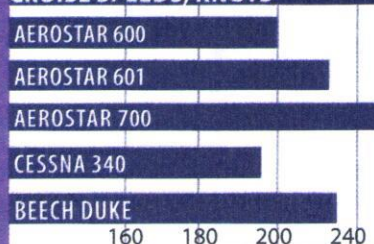
SELECT RECENT ADS

AD 03-22-01	AUX FUEL PUMP TRANSFER
AD 01-08-10	MAIN GEAR SIDE BRACE ASSEMBLIES
AD 98-24-29	UPPER SPAR CAP INSPECTION
AD 94-15-13	NOSEGEAR DRAG LINK CORROSION
AD 90-01-02	FIRE DETECTION KIT/RETROFIT

PAYLOAD/FULL FUEL, POUNDS



CRUISE SPEEDS, KNOTS



PRICE COMPARISONS





The Aerostar's instrument panel wasn't designed for big-screen glass avionics, but the aircraft deserves as much as you can fit, top. That's a Smith 600A, bottom photo, that belongs to Howard McComass.

21,500 feet. A known-icing package—boots—was also added.

In 1981, the 602P was introduced, with engines and turbos certified and installed as a package by Lycoming. (Previously, turbos and wastegates were tacked on at the Ted Smith and Piper shops.) The last model, the 700P, was introduced by Piper in 1984 and had intercooled, 350-HP engines, cowl flaps and outward-rotating propellers. With

only 25 built that year, the 700P is the rarest model. The most prolific model was the 601P, with 454 built by both Ted Smith and Piper.

The 600A remained in production the longest—10 years—but only 206 were built. Piper's figures show 59 600s, 68 601s, 48 601As, 41 601Bs and 110 602Ps built before the line closed for good. Although Piper exited the cabin twin market by the late 1980s, the Aerostar line endured.

In May 1991, Piper sold the type certificates and STCs to Aerostar Aircraft Corp., headed by Stephen Speer and James Christy, both of whom had been involved in the Ted Smith days. The new owners pledged to keep Aerostar parts and support flowing and they've done just that.

One upgrade they offered is called

the Super 700 Aerostar, which takes 601P and 602P Aerostars and fits them with 350-HP Lycoming TIO-540-U2A engines turning three-blade Hartzell props.

The airplane gets a gross weight boost to 6356 pounds ramp weight. Claimed 75 percent cruise is 261 knots, and initial climb rate is 1875 FPM. At economy cruise (55 percent), the fuel burn is 32 GPH and claimed speed is 225 knots. Owners report that the mod is worthwhile and the speed claims realistic.

MID-WINGS

Ted Smith evidently liked mid-wing designs, as anyone who has seen a photo of an A-20 would surmise. The Aerostar's wings are mounted midway along the oval fuselage and are the same NACA-64 series used on the Learjet. External skins are butt-joined and flush-riveted. Primary flight controls are via push-pull tubes, torque tubes and bellcranks.

Like larger aircraft, the landing gear, main gear doors, flaps and the nosewheel steering system are electro-hydraulic. The nosewheel has its own steering control and isn't connected to the rudders. Fuel-selector valves and elevator and rudder trim systems are also electric.

The engines are supposed to draw fuel from the two 62-gallon wing tanks and from the 41.5-gallon fuselage tank at the same time and at a rate that leaves 12 gallons in the fuselage tank when the wings have been emptied. But this only works in straight-and-level flight. The thin wing tanks easily become unbalanced—there are only two degrees of wing dihedral—and crossfeed must be used to bring them back in synch.

This shortcut led to trouble if the single fuel pick-ups in the wings became unported and electrical power was lost, leaving no way to reposition the valves. AD 79-1-5 sought to solve the problem by placarding crossfeed procedures and installing a low-fuel warning light and individual tank quantity indicators.

The 601 models have relatively high-compression turbonormalized engines, producing 290 HP. The 601P is especially prone to detonation if leaned to peak EGT at altitude. The 602P's engines have a lower compression ratio, alleviating the detonation problem, and are

Many owners remove a middle seat to make more room in the cabin, while high wing loading tames the bumps. With counter-rotating 350-HP engines, the Aerostar offers decent single-engine climb.

ground-boosted to maintain 290 HP at 37 inches MP.

Alternators on most Aerostars are rated at 70 amps, but can actually put out only about 55 amps due to heat. Potential buyers should be wary of any airplane with an electric air-conditioning system. It's heavy, has four motors that draw a lot of juice and cannot be used at night or in IMC. A better bet is an engine-driven-compressor system.

PERFORMANCE

If you want speed, look no further than an Aerostar. The normally aspirated 600s will easily steam along at 210 knots on 34 GPH at 70 percent power. The 601s model can turn in an amazing 233 knots on 36 GPH at 70 percent power at 20,000 feet. The higher-powered 700P trues at a whopping 260 knots on an equally impressive 51 GPH at 81 percent power and 25,000 feet; throttled back to 65 percent power, a 700P can do 230 knots on 36 GPH.

As if the stock airplane weren't fast enough, Machen conversions make them even faster. At 75 percent power and 25,000 feet, a Machen Superstar 650 cruises at 240 knots on 42 GPH; a Superstar 680—inter-cooled—does 250 knots on 40 GPH. Machen conversions also improve single-engine performance.

Maximum published single-engine rates of climb are 360 FPM for the 600, 240 FPM for the 601s and 602P, and 320 FPM for the 700P. Accelerate/stop distances—with 20 degrees of flaps for takeoff—are about 3100 feet for the 600 and unpressurized 601s, 3400 feet for the 601P and 602P and 4000 feet for the 700P.

Since it was intended to become a jet one day, Aerostar handling can be said to be jet-like. That means high flap speeds—174 knots indicated for most models—and fairly high gear speeds of 156 knots. The Aerostar's wing loading is an eye opener: 35.4 pounds/square foot. High wing loading translates to high speed and



a soft ride in turbulence, but also a brisk stall and a narrow slow-speed envelope. Crossing the fence at 100 knots, the Aerostar isn't a terrific short-field performer but owners say it's adequate.

Both Piper and the factory have modifications to improve the Aerostar's stall behavior at aft CG and alleviate the restrictions imposed by AD 83-14-7. Most owners prefer Machen's vortex generators to Piper's water rudder. Stall behavior has been the focus of attention, thanks to tendencies to stall sharply when held into the break. The AD was issued to improve stall controllability with

flaps extended with aerodynamic kits like those mentioned above.

CABIN COMFORT, LOAD

Passengers are sometimes taken aback by having to enter the cabin by clambering over the pilot's seat; that's the only door in the airplane. Once inside, an Aerostar is reasonably comfortable, but no one would mistake it for a chapel; the noise level is quite high, especially in models without pressurization.

The cabin is more than 3 inches wider than a 55-series Baron's, but 3 inches narrower than a Cessna 310's, and has 2 inches less headroom.

AEROSTAR WRECKS: LACK OF PRECISION

Our search of reported Aerostar accidents turned up 65 in the last 20 years. Their causes matched our experience that the airplanes have performance that will reward a competent pilot, but won't forgive a sloppy one.

The most common Aerostar accident couldn't be pigeon-holed into anything but the "other" category—of which there were 21. We'll discuss them in a moment.

What we did see were pilots who couldn't meet the airplane's demand for precision: there were eight loss of control crashes; four badly blown instrument approaches; six crashes that started from landing long and either continued into obstructions off the end of the runway or a crashed while trying to take off again; four landings were so hard they tore up the airplane and four were stall/spin crashes. If imprecise piloting were a category, it would have 26 items in it.

An indication that Aerostars have more-than-adequate control authority was shown in the low number of runway loss of control (RLOC) accidents—only four—we're used to seeing a higher proportion.

Seven accidents began with an engine problem and progressed into ground impact when the pilot failed to deal with the situation appropriately. In one case the pilot shut down the wrong engine.

There were six fuel-related accidents, two because of mispositioned fuel selectors and four from running out of gas—although one pilot with tranquilizers in his bloodstream could not follow the controller's vectors. He flew random headings until the tanks ran dry.

Aerostars have to be sitting level when fueled to take on a full load. One pilot found that out the hard way on a max range trip—after fueling on a sloping ramp. He ran out when the totalizer showed he still had 15 gallons.

In the other category: One pilot took off into IMC, cleaned up the

airplane but then let the nose drop. He pitched back up, hit a tree and flew on to his destination. Once there, he found damage to the right wing leading edge, nacelle and prop spinner—and a cracked right rear wing spar.

A foggy day led one pilot to have his passenger walk the runway to check for obstructions. He then started his takeoff roll, only to realize he was using a relatively short taxiway. He unsuccessfully tried to swerve onto the runway it intersected and tore up the airplane.

Not much is known about the pilot of one damaged Aerostar that overshot a landing. He beat feet after the airplane stopped and was never found. Authorities did, however, manage to locate 250 kilos of cocaine in the airplane.

Because of their speed, Aerostars have long been used to haul cargo. Two crashes were attributed to Part 135 pilots who were simply exhausted and fell asleep.

In the "it sometimes catches up with you" department, a pilot was killed when he tried to clear obstructions in a distance only 100 feet longer than the book said was required—without using short-field technique. Investigators found that the pilot had previously had his certificate suspended for "using an airplane in an unsafe manner" and had blown off an FAA demand for a "709" re-examination flight following a recent crash he'd survived.

Finally, the Aerostar pilot who got our attention was one who didn't have charts with him, so he estimated a heading to, and pattern altitude of, his destination on a VFR night flight. Arriving at what he thought was the place, he let down and tried to activate the runway lights. When unsuccessful, he figured he'd better start climbing as he might be in the mountains. He was. He hit one and survived the crash. He was surprised to discover that his navigation was a bit off—he wasn't even in the right state.

Many owners have taken out one of the middle seats to make more space in the cabin. For a cabin-class airplane, it's on the tight side.

It's also not a great carrier. An Aerostar is hard-pressed to carry even five adults, their bags and a reasonable load of fuel. Real-world useful loads vary from a meager 1600 pounds for a lavishly equipped Aerostar to a marginal 1800 pounds with average equipment. Also, the airplane has a relatively narrow CG range and it's easy to bust the limits. Weight-and-balance calculations are a good idea for takeoff and landing profiles, because the CG moves forward as fuel is burned. And in a twin, CG is always a worry for engine-out operations.

MAINTENANCE

No surprises here. The Aerostar can be a hangar queen, but owners who say it's a wrench hog also say that this is to be expected in any aircraft of this class and age. Even so, the Aerostar has a couple of marks against it. For one, it's a compactly built airplane, so its systems are tightly packed and difficult to get to. Second, the systems themselves are complex. One owner reported dozens of individual failures in his first 18 months of ownership and another said elevating the airplane to squawk-free status is hopeless.

Since the type certificate is owned by a solvent business, owners do have a place to go for support. Aerostar Aircraft Corp. is holding up its end of the bargain, picking up on the task of issuing service bulletins. Some 18 have been published since the company bought the TC. All are conveniently listed on the Aerostar website. A critical one—SB600-136—describes visual inspection of the wing attach fittings. Contact the factory at 800-442-4242 or www.aerostaraircraft.com.

MODS, OWNER GROUPS

Interestingly, the factory offers the most mods for the Aerostar. These range from service bulletin kits to factory options available at the time the airplane was built, but not installed. The Machen Superstar upgrades are still available—the Aerostar factory website has a complete list—and given the low purchase price of the airplanes, many

owners may find the prices attractive. Machen, by the way, still exists as a manufacturing company, but all of its mods are provided only through the Aerostar factory.

The Aerostar Owners Association publishes a magazine and holds regional meetings that focus on safety and maintenance. Contact the Aerostar group at 918-258-2346 and www.aerostar-owners.com.

READER FEEDBACK

I have flown a lot of different planes and just finished an eight-year love affair with a Mooney, which I sold the because I needed more room as my son, at 14 years old, was passing 6 feet tall. I use a plane for my law practice, so speed and air conditioning are two things that are essential. I noticed that the prices of twin-engine planes has been depressed, so I decided to look at Barons, Cessna 414s and Aerostars.

After looking for a while, I bought my Aerostar, N702RJ, in February 2014. I have always been attracted to the Aerostar because of the pilot door, which in my opinion is the way every plane should be designed. I have yet to taxi up to a ramp where someone doesn't comment that the airplane is beautiful. I should have been prepared for that because when I went to see the plane for the first time, various people at the airport stopped by and checked out the plane. My wife—who is a nervous flyer—even likes this plane, which thrills me to no end.

My Aerostar is a 700P and one of the 25 or 26 planes manufactured in 1984 and sold by Piper. Some people call these planes a factory 700 and they are not to be confused with the other Aerostars carrying the 700 moniker—they are different planes. My 700P was the final development of the breed having incorporated much of what was learned in the earlier models. Two of the most important improvements were the relocation of the pitot tube from the vertical stabilizer to the side of the fuselage, plus the addition of a stall warning horn. My Aerostar is basically in the same configuration as delivered, save for a few important mods.

In my opinion, the best mod is the winglets. Aside from looking incredibly cool, they add considerably to

slower-speed handling. I flew an Aerostar without the winglets and I could definitely tell the difference. The other major mod to my plane is its 5.5 pressurization increase—offering a 5000-foot cabin at 25,000 feet. Having a cabin capable of maintaining that pressure means that I arrive at my destination without any of the fatigue I would ordinarily get in a higher cabin altitude. The mods were done at Aerostar Aircraft and I would encourage anyone to go there if you need any service—I found its work to be impeccable.

In terms of used Aerostars, I was extraordinarily lucky because my plane had low time (only 2200 hours). The seller of the plane passed away unexpectedly and was someone that had done things right and spared no expense. The seller, lucky for me, had not been planning to sell the plane when he passed away, which meant that everything was top notch. The instrument panel had already been upgraded with a Garmin G600, GTN750 and GTN650 navigators, GTX32 transponder and GMA35 audio system—clearly state of the art. The plane was painted a few years earlier in a very modern scheme, but was still in perfect condition and the interior looked, for all practical purposes, like new. No one believes that the plane is a 1984.

I have flown the plane a lot in the few months that I have owned it. It's incredibly easy to fly if you fly by the numbers. In the last two months alone, I have put almost 150 hours on the plane and I have yet to make a landing where I needed to apologize to anyone.

In my total operating time of 200 hours, I have only had an alternator failure, which speaks pretty well for the condition of the plane. I change the oil myself, so I am pretty knowledgeable about its current maintenance. Having owned a Mooney for years, I would say that if you multiply every bill by two, you would get a fair estimate of the expense of owning a plane like this. I can tell that if this plane had been in bad condition, the cost of making it right could be prohibitive.

The most eye-opening part of owning the Aerostar is how much fuel it burns. At level cruise, with about 230 knots true, it burns about 44 GPH. I have become the best

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friend of just about every 100LL-selling FBO in Texas. Kudos to Business Jet in Dallas—they are an awesome business.

I think any Aerostar owner is making a real mistake if they don't join the Aerostar Owners Association (the AOA). The AOA has a gentleman named Ken Bacon who is truly an authority on Aerostars. He is only a phone call away and always ready to help. Jim Christy, one of the owners of Aerostar Aircraft, also stands ready, willing and able to lend a hand. I don't think there is another airplane brand where you could call the factory and get the owner on the phone for a speedy consult. I can tell that Jim Christy is there to help and I enjoy talking with him.

I hired Advanced Flight Training to do my transition training. It wasn't cheap, but they came to my hangar and did a 3.5-day combination of ground school and flight training. I have done a lot of training over the years and I can definitely say that AFT has a great product. By the time I finished the 3.5-day course I was greasing the landings and could very comfortably fly and land the plane on one engine. AFT was recommended by my insurance agent at NationAir in St. Louis, Missouri. It was a great referral. My insurance is about \$5000 per year for \$350,000 hull value and \$2 million smooth. I had about 500 hours of multi-engine time and 3500 hours of complex when I bought the Aerostar.

If you are in the market for a cabin-class pressurized twin, I think this is the plane. It's fast, good-looking and reasonably economical—for a twin.

Eric Lipper
Houston, Texas

I own a 1977 Aerostar 601P and fly it regularly (weekly at least) for business trips ranging from 250 NM to 800 NM. Most flights are fairly lightly loaded with full fuel, some are max gross with less than full fuel. I purchased the airplane after a 10-month research mission to find the fastest, most economical aircraft to fly my specific missions. Candidates were narrowed down based on full fuel payload, maintenance estimates, IFR capabilities and most important, speed.

I chose the Aerostar because it offered 225 knots true in the low flight levels at 36 GPH fuel burn. This was far a better speed/fuel combination than any other aircraft that fit into my budget. After another four months of looking, I chose N981MC.

I have since flown it about 200 hours and can offer its true performance and fuel burn as follows: I almost always will true at 230-233 knots anywhere above 17,000 feet and I burn 40 GPH doing so. Speed is very important to me, so I fly that way. I run at 26 inches MP and 2250 RPM and adjust fuel for 1550 TIT on the hottest turbo, on each engine. My particular aircraft has the Century IV autopilot/flight director, which makes light work of the approaches, often to minimums.

The aircraft is perfect for my missions and has taken many hours off my trips I had been flying in a Cessna 210. The recent annual cost a little over \$4000. Maintenance has not been a big issue thus far, with the airplane mission-capable for most flights. Parts are a little tough to find, however, they are out there. The Aerostar Owners Group is a must for help in operating the aircraft as well as keeping it maintained. The only other advice I can offer to any prospective buyers out there is training, training, training. The airplane is busy and fairly complicated compared to other light twins. I strongly recommend hiring an expert to do hands-on training because most insurers will require it anyway. I will say its single-engine performance and handling is superior to most others.

David Weilert
via email

I have owned a 1976 601P/700 Ted Smith Aerostar for 19 years. Over the years, insurance for my Aerostar has varied from year to year. I have \$1 million in coverage with sublimits of \$100,000 per person. My hull value is \$175,000. Two years ago the premium was \$4500 per year. Last year it was \$2900. Go figure! My advice to any prospective Aerostar owner is to carefully evaluate potential costs of insurance coverage and availability before even beginning the search for an aircraft. I have almost 4000 hours of multi-engine time and I'm ATP-

rated. You can bet that anyone with lower ratings and time will pay more for insurance.

Maintenance and parts are not cheap, but high-quality parts are readily available from Aerostar Aircraft. The overall maintenance costs is pretty much the same as other cabin-class, pressurized piston twin aircraft. Typical annual inspections might cost roughly \$8000, not including any unscheduled costs.

As with any aircraft maintenance, an experienced A&P mechanic is absolutely essential. Any prebuy inspection should be accomplished by an experienced Aerostar technician, even if it means traveling for the inspection.

Last September, my left engine started making metal. It had 1840 hours since overhaul and it, along with the right engine, had been in service for 25 years since the prior overhaul and a conversion to a 700-series.

The first estimate for a new cylinder overhaul was \$40,000. However, after teardown, other problems were found and the crankshafts failed inspection due to cracks. I ended up buying two factory rebuilt engines through Air Power, at \$58,000 each. Expensive, but the new engines were zero time and the U2A-series—designed originally for 350 HP, rather than converted from 290 HP as my original engines were.

The overhaul/replacement expense does not end with the engines. Labor to remove and reinstall the engines was approximately \$10,000. Due to condition, four wastegates had to be replaced and four turbochargers had to be overhauled.

Depending on the condition, items such as hoses, engine mounts, engine rack, oil coolers and inter-coolers may have to be replaced or overhauled. I would advise any potential owner to budget at least \$15,000 per engine over and above the engine overhaul/purchase cost for labor and accessories.

Frankly, this estimate is at the very low end. Again, depending on condition, the cost—in addition to the engine overhaul/purchase—could easily exceed \$20,000. Any potential owner must be aware of true overhaul/replacement costs if he or she is considering the purchase of an Aerostar with high-time engines.

What looks like a good deal might be a big financial surprise.

Finally, the performance. I think there are few if any stock piston twins that can outclimb or outrun an Aerostar. It is stable in turbulence and on approach, which makes for a fine IFR platform. Cruise speeds in the 15,000- to 18,000-foot altitude range average 225 to 235 TAS at 65 percent power. Range with full fuel at 65 percent power is approximately 800 NM, with IFR reserves.

The Aerostar's reputation as a difficult—or even dangerous—aircraft is nonsense. With proper recurrent training, it is a safe and reliable aircraft. I look forward to many more years of high-performance flying with my Aerostar.

Robert A. Muhlbach
via email

I have been flying since 1969 and I'm getting to be an old guy. I'm a single- and multi-engine, instrument, and commercial-rated pilot with over 6500 hours of flight experience. I was trained by Emory Wheat in 1969 through 1970 at Aldino Airport (0W3) in Churchville, Maryland, and he was my aviation mentor my whole life until his death last year. At the time, he was a charter and demo pilot, flying the Aerostar 600 for Henry Weber Aircraft—an East Coast sales center in Pennsylvania.

While moving up through the ranks as a single-engine pilot, I was able to fly right seat with Emory in the Aerostar and accumulated over 100 hours. I cut my teeth as a new single-engine pilot in a Mooney Super and then in a Mooney Executive. Next came a Piper Cherokee Six and then a Piper Saratoga, which allowed me to fly an air hearse service for my funeral business.

In 1992 I moved up to N444HM, a Smith Aerostar 600A. It was a fix-up project, but a good, solid airplane. I had the engines overhauled by Columbia Aircraft in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1993 and had it painted by Cimarron Aircraft Painting in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1994. The paint job was excellent, but I had questions about the engine overhaul after experiencing a deer strike while landing in Ocean City, Maryland, in 1997. While having both engines torn down, we found

problems with the cam shafts in both engines after only 300 hours on the overhaul. Needless to say, I would not return to Columbia, if they are still in business, for my next overhaul.

The Aerostar 600 has served me well as I basically fly around the eastern half of the United States. Henry Weber Aircraft in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, still performs my annual inspections and maintenance. I would recommend them to any Aerostar and Mooney owner. Steve, Doran and Larry at Weber's have many years of experience with both aircraft and know them inside and out.

The Aerostar is definitely a pilot's airplane and anyone transitioning up to it should seriously consider initial training by an experienced Aerostar instructor. Even after the initial training, I recommend annual refresher training as the Aerostar is a high-performance, semi-complex aircraft. I use Lester Kyle in Vero Beach, Florida, for annual training. Even after 25 years and some 2000 hours in the Aerostar, I always learn something new during each session.

Thank you for allowing me to ramble about the Aerostar. I hope something I have said will help other *Aviation Consumer* readers that are considering an Aerostar. You do a good job with the publication and I look forward to receiving it every month.

By the way, I am one of the aircraft owners that put money into Avidyne's IFD540 (that's been delayed for nearly three years now) and the IFD440 (delayed for nearly two years). So please keep readers up to date on the progress.

The latest info from my avionics shop, Lancaster Avionics in Pennsylvania (they do all of my avionics work and I recommend them) is that it now might be this fall before Avidyne is ready to ship my units. I am glad editor Larry Anglisano was able to fly with the IFD540, as we now know these radios actually exist.

Howard McComass III
Abington, Maryland

Avidyne said it expects to begin shipping the IFD540 by late July 2014 (by the time you read this), but some orders might not be filled until the fall, depending on when it was ordered.

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