

If You Own a Twin Cessna, You're Nuts!

By: Larry A. Ball

Ok, I'll accept the fact that owning a twin Cessna is probably not the most financially sound decision. I remember when I bought my first 310. Several pilot friends told me I was nuts and it was going to eat me out of house and home. Well, I've still got my home, but there is a strong possibility that owning an aircraft of any kind is not a financially responsible decision. Let's consider the alternate possibilities.

1. Most of the people old enough to buy an airplane already have a car or two and with the super highway system, you can go a long way in a day even if it is only at 70 miles per hour. It's even kind of peaceful riding along in the car with your family. The phones aren't ringing, you can tune the radio to your favorite kind of music and if the kids don't continually ask, "How far is it now, dad?" you can actually enjoy the drive.

2. If you would rather get there in a hurry, forget about seeing what's between you and your destination, and the major carrier you choose is working at full strength, you can buy airline tickets. Most destinations are close to a major airport and car rentals are available all over this great land. This allows you to go from one end of this country to the other in the same day, with some time left over. It costs more than driving, you have to wait in lines at the airport, you stand a chance of losing your luggage (forever), there's always a hassle getting from one plane to another if you

change during your route, and the kids probably won't ask how far it is now until you finally do get in the rental car.

3. If all you care about is safety, you can take the safest land travel available in this country, the train. Yes, I said the train.

Amtrack still runs between a large number of cities every day and according to the NTSB, your chances per mile traveled of having a life threatening accident are minimal. Of course, you better not be in any hurry and by the time you get there, you're ankles might swell to the point of not fitting inside your shoes anymore.

4. There is the bus. Let's be honest, how many of us would actually buy a ticket on a bus unless absolutely strapped for cash?

If the above four options aren't appealing, you can either

walk or fly your own airplane. If you are a family of four adults or more, you want to carry enough luggage for a week, and maybe even throw in your golf clubs, there are precious few personal aircraft that will do the job. Throw in the desire of cruising along at 200 + miles per hour and the number of single engine aircraft just went down even more significantly. The most logical answer is to own your own twin.

When we look at the number of twin engine aircraft that carry 4 to 5 people, full fuel, baggage for a week, golf clubs, scuba gear, bicycles, or whatever other special equipment comes to mind, we have narrowed the options even more.

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Now, let's throw in the big factor - the aircraft has to be able to cruise at 200 or more miles per hour. That will eliminate a large portion of even the twin models. When you look at the few models left that will fit the criteria mentioned above and compare costs to buy one of these models, you have to admit, it's hard to beat a piston twin Cessna.

This would be a great time for any of you out there reading this that are fond of Beech, Piper or any other brand that comes to mind to send us your thoughts. We would relish the information and welcome comparing your facts and figures to a "like" model twin Cessna.

The point made here is, when it comes to flying your own aircraft and having the versatility at an affordable price, a twin Cessna is almost impossible to beat.

Let's take a hypothetical situation where you own your own twin Cessna. The oldest 310 will haul 5 adults, full fuel and about 150 pounds of baggage. It will do this at speeds of 200 miles per hour burning about 25 gallons of fuel per hour. Total cost of flying this airplane with all things considered should run slightly over \$200.00 per hour. (Don't kid yourself, trust me, it really does cost this much.) The newest 421C will haul 6 adults, full fuel and 200 pounds of baggage at speeds of 200 + knots using altitude and a power setting that burns about 45 gallons of fuel per hour. Total cost of flying this airplane with all of the same things considered should run slightly under \$400.00 per hour. Again, don't kid yourself, plan on spending big bucks. All of the other models vary between these two in some form or another and all of them cost money.

The question is, how much are you ready to spend on convenience?

Here are some facts:

The average round trip airline ticket purchased today costs about 496.50. This does not take into consideration travel across

either bodies of big water at each end of this great country, only tickets for travel within the continental United States. If you multiply the above cost by 5 people, you have \$2,482.50 to spend flying your own twin Cessna. This is 12 hours in a 310 and probably about 7 hours in a 421C. If you are going on a round trip that would take longer than the times mentioned above, it would be less expensive to buy airline tickets.

Factor in driving to a major airport, standing in lines, possible lost luggage, departing and arriving on the airlines schedule instead of yours and the possibility that any delay that crops up could mean missing a connecting flight and I've experienced lots of times when I could have, indeed, driven there in less time for a fraction of the cost. If I had flown my own airplane, I could have been there even quicker still and the cost difference would have been minimal.

If you own your own business and can factor all or some of the aircraft expenses out of the business before you make Uncle Sam aware of the bottom line, now you have even a more legitimate reason to own your own aircraft. I might add that keeping "iron clad" records is extremely important for tax purposes. Most IRS auditors are not pilots, they don't think like pilots, they think because you're a pilot, you are automatically filthy rich and because of this, they are doing a good job only if they get some of the taxes they feel are due on that money. Trust me, I've been there!

The cost of owning a twin is higher in maintenance, fuel, oil, insurance, and even in hangar, landing and tie-down fees. We really take it on the chin.

Now let's take a look at retail prices for twin Cessnas and how they compare with other models.

Here are some current average retail prices for some high performance singles and what that same average retail price will buy in the twin Cessna line:

1980 A36 Beech Bonanza - \$179,000.00

This will buy an extremely nice 310R or T310R with known ice, or a nice 1972 340.

1980 210N Cessna Centurion - \$138,000.00

This will buy an extremely nice 310Q or T310Q with full de-ice.

1980 182RG Cessna Skylane - \$104,000.00

This will buy a nice 310Q or extremely nice 310P.

1980 PA-32 Piper Saratoga - \$118,000.00

This will again, get you a nice 310Q or very nice 310P.

1998 New Piper Saratoga II HP - \$398,200.00

This will buy almost any twin Cessna with tip tanks and about half of the models with wet wings.

1998 New Piper Malibu Mirage - \$799,800.00

This will buy somewhere between two and 12 Cessna twins depending on the model, equipment, etc.

Even if you compare new twins with used twin Cessnas, it's astounding what you can buy.

1998 Beech Baron 58 - \$739,862.00

1998 New Piper Seminole PA44-180 - \$370,390.00

1998 New Piper Seneca IV - \$517,165.00

New aircraft will depreciate, and used Cessnas, when properly maintained, will appreciate, so why would anyone even think about buying a new twin. Must be most people don't consider cost (money) a contributing factor when buying aircraft.

When it comes right down to the facts and figures, Cessna twins have some strong advantages:

1. Speed - Even the oldest 310 will give you an honest 200 miles per hour. A 421C will give you 230 knots at altitude.

2. Style - It's hard to beat the looks of a twin Cessna. The old 310s give lots of nostalgia, the tip tanks give that military look, and the wet winged twins simplify the fuel systems

while still looking as sharp as airplanes get.

3. Comfort - Put four adults in a 310, 320, or 340 or 6 to 8 adults in a 400 series twin and everyone has lots of elbow room. The wing lockers, nose bays and aft baggage areas in newer models add versatility in loading and keeps baggage away from passengers.

4. Cost - While not the cheapest way around the sky, all twin Cessna models are among the least expensive twins in both operating and maintenance costs.

5. Versatility - I've heard many twin Cessna owners call their machines "high speed load carrying modules." A 310R will carry full fuel, a pilot and 1,000 pounds of canceled checks. A 421B will carry half fuel, a pilot and 2,000 pounds (a ton!) of freight. It's extremely hard to find a 402 with less than 8,000 hours total time. They didn't get that way because they couldn't handle the job. They accumulated those hours because they could, can and will handle the job for which they were designed.

6. Safety - Even though twins do not enjoy the great safety record of fixed gear singles, I'll opt for two engines every time in hard IFR, over large bodies of water, or when ice starts to form on the leading edges.

All in all, it's hard to beat what you have. Moving up for a lot of members in this organization has been a move from a 310 to a 340, then to a 402 or 414, and finally up to a 421. The next move from a 421 would involve something that burns kerosene and the costs involved with all of those aircraft requires a balance sheet ending with several zeros and I don't mean Japanese WWII aircraft.

If you keep what you have, fly it often, maintain it well, take the necessary time for training each year to keep from bending it, it

will only continue to serve you well, grow in value, and in the words of Sky King, “Get you home by dark.”