



AERO COMMANDER 200

Rockwell-Standard hopes to gain on competition with this airplane—formerly the Meyers 200D—and its hard-core of followers.

THE AERO COMMANDER 200 (née the Meyers 200D) is expensive, fast, and one of the great white hopes now coming out of Albany, Ga.

At least Aero Commander, one of the most discriminating of all purchasers, bought the design rights to the Meyers, moved production to the South, and set its sights on competing with Bonanza, Centurion, Comanche, and the Mustang.

The performance and general flying qualities of the Meyers developed a hard-core loyalty among those who flew them. Aero Commander hopes to capitalize on this.

The long-legged landing gear on the plane obviates that low slung look of many low-wing singles and makes the 200 seem larger than it is. Wheels are large—800 x 7 tires on the mains and 600 x 6 on the nose gear—for rough field taxiing.

The control surfaces are conventional with the standard complement of tail surfaces, both fixed and movable; the ailerons are wide span, as are the semi-

fowler flaps which fit neatly into the wing and wing fairing at the root. Unconventional (by today's lightplane standards) and unseen on the finished product is the tubular steel center section of the plane. The structure encloses the cabin and extends through the center 10 feet of the wing, out to and including the gear attachment points. In addition to strength, this construction affords a smooth, flexible ride and simplifies wing removal.

The plane's outward appearance reflects high-quality workmanship and a minimum of compromise with aerodynamic efficiency. The cowling is tightly fitted about the Continental IO-520-A engine, and the cabin resembles the shape of a teardrop.

A step and assist grip aids stepping onto the right wing (and flap) walkway. The step is piped into the gear system and drawn into the wing fairing when the gear is raised. The cabin door is large and quickly removable to admit bulky objects.

The panel has the standard "T-grouped" flight instruments and center-mounted radios. Engine gauges were readable on the right, and panel-mounting of the outside air temperature gauge makes it easy to read.

A small console to the left of the pilot's left leg contains electrical switches, circuit breakers, and gear position lights. The fuel selector and emergency hydraulic pump also are within easy grasp of the pilot's left hand. Engine controls (vernier) are centered and dual controls are standard, with toe brakes on the left.

The panel is post-lighted and, in addition to these red lights, there are white lights under the glare shield and ultra-violet overhead. With these the pilot can blend his lights to match ambient light levels and his own visual requirements.

Our flight was in midday, so we had no chance to try the instrument lighting system. Flying conditions were perfect with the wind from the west at 10 knots, scattered clouds at 5,000 feet, and unlimited visibility.

First we tried a short-field takeoff with 20 degrees of flaps. We were light at about 2,750 pounds, the elevation was 815 feet, and the wind was 90 degrees from the left. Full-power brought us to 60 mph indicated quickly. Then we pulled it off, brought up gear and flaps, and started to climb at 1,500 fpm. Reducing power to 25 inches and 2,500 rpm, we lowered the nose to pick up about 140 mph and continued to climb out at 1,000 fpm.

The climb of the new Aero Commander single is excellent, but its real forte is high speed cruise; it's a good cross-country airplane.

Setting power at 65 per cent we closed the gills and let it run at 6,500 feet. The airspeed stabilized at 187 mph, about 209 mph true. Later, after descending 1,000 feet, we tried it at 75 per cent and settled down at 193 indicated for a reading of 215 mph true. These speeds were not at optimum altitude. A 218 mph cruise at 7,500 feet is claimed at 75 per cent power. In any event, the new 200 ranks close to the fastest (unsupercharged) light and medium twins.

Among single-engine planes, the never-exceed speed on the 200 is one of the highest. The plane can build up speed quickly during letdowns. To aid the unwary, the 200 has a normal gear extension speed of 170 and when down and locked, speed can go to 210 mph. Emergency gear extension speed is 210, if speed brakes are in order.

Sound levels at cruise are relatively low. The only objectionable noise we noted was the hissing of the air vents.

Full fuel is 80 gallons of 100/130 octane, sufficient for a 1,230 mile flight with a 45-minute reserve. Four tanks carry the fuel, and the selector also switches the single fuel gauge to the selected tank. This bit of human factors engineering can keep pilots from draining a tank while smugly keeping tabs on a "full" gauge.

The useful load is 1,060 pounds, which at first seems on the low side, but the plane is strictly four-place. Capacity load for passengers and luggage with full fuel is 544 pounds, enough for three 170-pounders with 34 pounds of baggage. Put another way, the maximum allowable fuel with four average-sized occupants and 40 pounds of baggage is 52 gallons (standard fuel).

The 200 was heavy on the controls; some people even use the term "truck" in describing the feel of the airplane. This seems unfair, at least in comparison with other planes in its class. It has a big plane feel, but the ailerons are responsive and—to a large extent—it is an aileron aircraft. The elevator forces are firm, but we didn't like the trim knob on the panel.

It does take a good push to yaw the airplane at cruise, but only a slight rudder is needed during most turns. A little slipping occurs during turns made without rudder, but even during a series of steep, rudderless banks, both left and right, the ball tends to remain in the center.

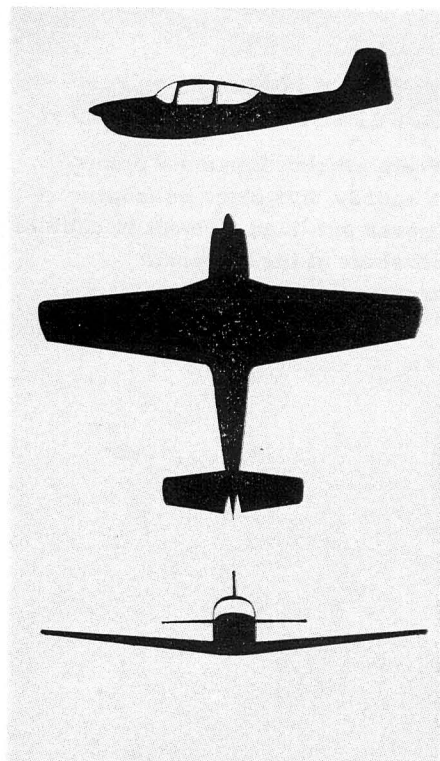
Slow flight has not been sacrificed for high speed cruise. Some turns, reversals, and a few wing-level stalls proved that. With the wings level, both power on and off, the stall break is heralded considerably in advance by the warning horn and buffeting. The plane broke at about 62 mph clean, around 50 mph with flaps, and in both instances aileron effectiveness was retained into the stall.

Both gear and flaps are hydraulic and a servo valve in the flap system permits direct selection of 10, 20, 30, or full 40 degree flaps. An indicator points out flap position.

It's suggested that half flaps and 90 mph on approach be held until close in. Then full flaps can be dropped and the plane slowed up. We were closer to 80 mph, but things worked out nicely. Touch down speed is about 60 if the plane is held off.

On takeoff, a judicious amount of right rudder must be applied, but there is no severe "lug in" tendency, to use a race track term.

Power on, the plane made a nice short field approach and the landing gear withstood a "firm" touchdown. We couldn't get used to the elevator trim and tended to manhandle the plane, but low-speed handling is good. †



Aero Commander 200

Specifications	Basic price: \$29,500
Engine	Continental IO-520-A, 285 hp, 2650 rpm
Propeller	Hartzell or McCauley constant speed
Wing span	30 ft. 6 in.
Length	24 ft. 4 in.
Height	7 ft. 4 in.
Wing loading	18.75 lb./sq. ft.
Empty weight	1,940 lbs.
Useful load	1,060 lbs.
Gross weight	3,000 lbs.
Power loading	10.5 lbs./hp.
Fuel capacity (std.)	42 gals.
Fuel capacity (with reserve)	82 gals.
Oil capacity	12 qts.
Baggage capacity	34 lbs.
Performance	
Takeoff distance	900 ft.
Takeoff distance over 50 ft.	1,200 ft.
Rate of climb	1,400 fpm
Service ceiling	18,500 ft.
Cruise speed (75% power)	210 mph
Range (at max. cruise)	1,040 s.m.
Stall speed (clean)	67 mph
Stall speed (gear & flaps down)	54 mph
Landing distance over 50 ft.	1,150 ft.
Flight characteristics	
Control response (cruise)	Good
Control response (slow flight)	Good
Hands-off stability	Excellent
Stall recovery	Excellent
Runway handling	Fair
Visibility	Excellent
Seat adjustment & comfort	Excellent
Accessibility of switches etc.	Excellent
Panel layout	Good
Entry-exit ease	Good
Front seat room	Good
Rear seat room	Fair
Ventilation (in flight)	Good
Ventilation (during taxi)	Good
Noise level	Fair
Interior finish	Excellent
Exterior finish	Excellent