The Aviation Consumer

Used Airplane Guide

An airplane designer who set out to beat all competitors in speed, strength, quality and maintainability would do well to study the story of the Meyers (Aero Commander) 200. The aircraft achieved all these goals at its debut back in 1958 and even today has few peers in those respects. But range, payload and comfort were severely limited, and it failed in the one aspect that matters under the American free enterprise system: it could never turn a profit for its builders.

Accounts vary, but about 133 of these airplanes were built before production ended in 1967, and a recent check of the U.S. registry showed only about 68 still in license (with a couple dozen still flying overseas, or about 90 all told).

Those who own a Meyers 200 today have a 200-mph airplane that is supposed to rank among the strongest singles ever built (some say overbuilt) and incorporates features like semi-Fowler flaps that lower the stall speed to 54 mph, and shoulder harnesses as standard equipment in the front seats—forced on other manufacturers now by regulation, but incorporated by Meyers more than two decades ago by choice.

The great bulk of Meyers owners have never seen an Airworthiness Directive on the airframe, which may be a tribute to the integrity of the product or to the small size of the fleet and resulting low profile to FAA attention. Meyers owners have suffered ADs on the props, engines (including the cracking-crankcase Continental IO-520) and some appliances, but only the prop ADs have caused much vexation, judging from owners' comments. Likewise, maintenance costs reported by owners are extremely low for a complex airplane, and direct costs are eased by the high-speed cruise performance, which puts the airplane in the neighborhood of 14 miles per gallon in fuel economy.

One trouble with the Meyers 200 is the seats: there are only four of them and it's cozy in back. This is merely a symptom of another problem that neither Meyers nor Aero Commander ever got around to addressing: the low 3,000-pound maximum gross weight and consequent lack of useful load, which runs around 900 pounds after the avionics are accounted for. When the Meyers took to the airways in the early 1960s, this was on a par with other airplanes in its class, such as the Beech Bonanza and Debonair, Cessna 210 and Piper Comanche. But all of these later added another row of seats, inched up the gross weight and offered the flexibility to haul five or six people a short distance or four people a long distance. The Meyers was doomed to remain a four-placer that can legally haul only two people plus baggage when the 80-gallon (74 usable) tanks are full.

However, the owners are fond of pointing out that all the paperwork for a gross weight raise to 3,300 pounds was completed years ago and may still—someday—gain FAA approval; so in the meantime, some fly as if this were the legal limit.

History

The Meyers 200 was the last finished design of Al Meyers, who gained fame for the OTW ("Out To Win") biplane trainer of wartime years. Establishing a corps of engineers and craftsmen at Tecumseh, Michigan, Meyers also performed extensive work on a light twin that never saw production, and in postwar years turned his attention to a strongly built, speedy two-placer, the Meyers 145. Though certificated, this

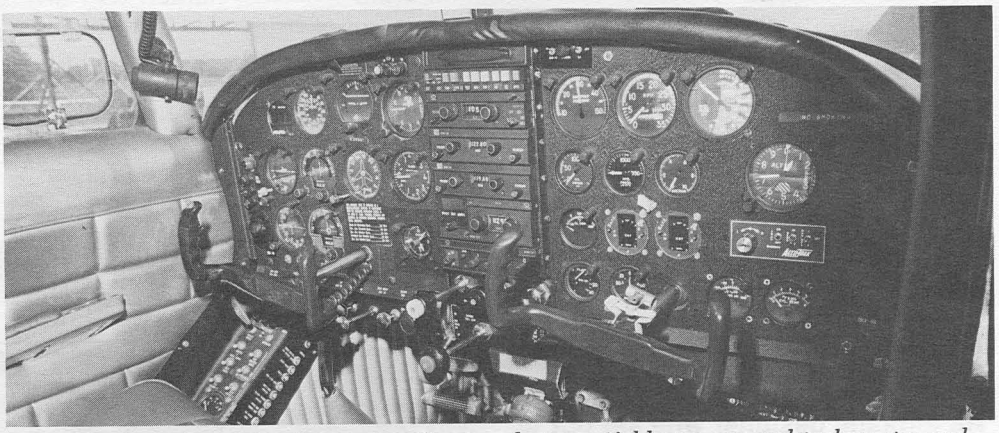
A generally slick aerodynamic package, *despite the blunt nose, affords the Meyers its speed. Owners like to boast that the nosewheel is so well engineered it doesn't need a shimmy damper. Hidden beneath the smooth curves is a massive tubular framework that comprises the fuselage and cabin and the wing out to the landing gear.*

was practically a custom airplane, and few were ever built. The design did spawn the model 200, however, which has been described as "a 145 cut lengthwise and widened." It flew in 1953 but took until 1958 to be certified. It went into production and the first copies issued forth in 1959, but in the next five years Meyers built and sold only about 40 of them, before falling onto financial straits.

Along came Aero Commander, which was just then embarking on what became a career of trying to prove to itself that it can't build a single-engine airplane economically. Aero Commander's misapprehension was that the only problem in Tecumseh was high labor costs, which could be cured in a trice if the Meyers were built in Albany, Georgia. Aero Commander did turn out 95 of the Meyers 200s there from 1965 to 1967, but spent a lot of money in the effort, and a sharply escalating price tag couldn't save the Meyers from the fate of the Lark and the Darter (not to mention the 112 and 114 of later years). Aero Commander is rumored to have spent $4 million building airplanes whose total (list) value was $3 million, apparently using as its guideline the old saw about making a small fortune out of a big one.

During the Aero Commander years, the horsepower went from 260 to 285, to create the model 200D, but this was a change overseen by Meyers. Most other differences between the Meyers design and the Aero Commander execution are cosmetic, although speed was enhanced a bit by flush-riveting the wings on top. Since most Meyers aircraft in license today are of the Aero Commander ilk anyway, it adds a little snob appeal if one has a Meyers-built Meyers.

There is a distinction to be made if one has the original 200A and has a



Instrument panel is plain, flat, and utilitarian, *but manifold pressure and tachometer and fuel flow are relegated to the right in front of the copilot.*

yen for more horsepower: this model needs some structural beef-ups, whereas the 200B and C will accept the 285-hp as almost a plug-in replacement. The holder of FAA approval to do the re-engining is Beaumont "Pard" Diver of Tecumseh Aircraft (Al Meyers Airport, Tecumseh, Mich. 49286; phone 313-447-3752). Diver is the last active member of the old Meyers Aircraft crew and is known among owners for his ability to make just about any part necessary to keep the plane flying.

In 1968, Aero Commander sold the tools and certificates for the Meyers to Interceptor Corp., which set about to revolutionize general aviation (yet again) with a pressurized turboprop version, the Interceptor 400. The fabled 400 showed the slick airframe could be driven to cruise at about 275 mph behind a Garrett TPE 331 and could be pressurized to a legal 22,000 feet, provoking aviation writers of the time to call it a "dream come true." Unfortunately, only two were built and only one survives. Undercapitalization and the morass of FAA regulations left the company bankrupt, and it had only a dozen solid orders, when the machine was certificated in 1971. The company was reformed as Interceptor Co. and later went under the holding company, Prop Jets, Inc. (Box 1882, Boulder, CO 80306), whose head, Peter Paul Luce, holds onto all the type certificates and a glimmer of hope that the 400—or maybe even the 200—may still return to production. In 1977, Luce licensed Carl Branson (Branson Aircraft, Unit B, 4275 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216; phone 303-825-3530) to put the 200 into production, but this fell through. Branson's company is still important to Meyers owners, however, because he retained the country's largest collection of spare parts for the airplane.

Performance

While some may look upon the 200-mph-plus cruise speed as the airplane's most enticing attraction, it is not the sole allure of the Meyers. Certainly, owners are happy to report cruise speeds in the neighborhood of 205 mph at 75 percent power, burning about 16 gallons an hour, and are equally pleased with moping along at "only" 195 mph burning 13.5 gph.

But the speed should be viewed with other performance features, like the low stall speed with full flaps, and the high gear-extension speed. The gear can be dropped at 170 mph (or even

Model	Year	Number Built	Average Retail Price	Cruise Speed (mph)	Rate of Climb (fpm)	Useful Load (lbs)	Fuel Std/Opt (gals)	Engine	TBO* (hrs)	Overhaul Cost
200A	1959	5	$26,750	195	1,150	1,130	42/80	260-hp Continental	1,200	$5,800
200A	1960	6	$26,750	195	1,150	1,130	42/80	260-hp Continental	1,200	$5,800
200B	1960	7	$28,000	195	1,245	1,025	42/80	260-hp Continental	1,200	$5,800
200B	1962	10	$28,000	195	1,245	1,025	42/80	260-hp Continental	1,200	$5,800
200C	1963	3	$29,500	195	1,245	1,025	42/80	260-hp Continental	1,200	$5,800
200C	1964	6	$29,500	195	1,245	1,025	42/80	260-hp Continental	1,200	$5,800
200D	1965	6	$33,000	210	1,450	1,015	42/80	285-hp Continental	1,200	$6,800
200D	1966	69	$34,000	210	1,450	1,015	42/80	285-hp Continental	1,200	$6,800
200D	1967	20	$36,000	210	1,450	1,015	42/80	285-hp Continental	1,200	$6,800

**Up to 1,500 hours TBO with improved valves.*

210 mph in an emergency), a valuable tool for slowing up to enter the airport pattern. In addition, little or no trim change is required for flap or gear extension, which obviates extra pre-landing fiddling.

Push-pull tubes drive the ailerons and elevator, giving a direct-drive feel to the controls in comparison with cable-driven aircraft. Some pilots report a "heavy" feel to the controls, possibly created by the small radius of the yoke, but most of our surveyed owners consider this a virtue, making the Meyers a "good instrument platform." One owner went against the grain and declared it to be "very unstable in the roll axis," however. Takeoff and climb require a healthy amount of right rudder.

There is some disagreement among Meyers owners about landing the airplane. Most maintain that it develops a sharp sink rate that must be arrested by a large dose of power; cut the power too abruptly in an attempt to stop floating, and you get the hard landing you were trying to avoid.

Others say there is still ample elevator left in the flare (if flared low enough) not only to achieve a fine landing, but to cut the rollout to a bare minimum. Book figures call for a 1,150-foot landing over a 50-foot obstacle.

Why Buy It?

Undoubtedly, the lack of useful load costs the Meyers a lot on the used plane market. A 1967 Meyers 200D listed in that year for $35,365 and still draws $35,000 to $40,000 today, which is great tribute to an old airplane. But when this is matched against a 1967 V35 Bonanza, which listed then for $43,875 and now runs about $44,000, the comparison for some favors the Beech, with its five seats. Likewise, a 1967 Cessna Centurion sold then for $40,107 and now for about $33,500, also approaches the Meyers speed, and it has six seats. And both the Beech and Cessna are currently in production.

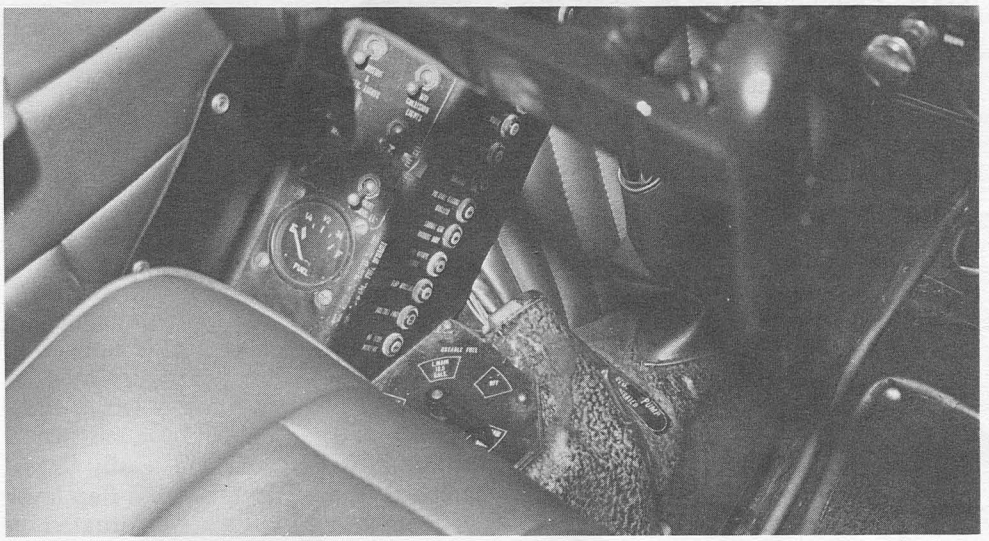
Further, if the Meyers suffered any comparison against four-seaters, it would have to include, say, a 1977 Mooney 201 selling for about $46,000, offering nearly the same speed on a lot less engine, and having the advantage of current production and support. Likewise with a 1977 Piper Turbo Arrow, now selling at around $45,250.

Still, Meyers owners are a little cultish and aren't interested only in utilitarian concerns. Rather, they are very proud of being able to walk away from other retractables by a knot or two at firewall speeds, and they prize the rugged construction. In both respects, they particularly like to fly or park alongside a Bonanza, and love it when somebody notices how much thicker the sheet metal is all over the Meyers, compared to the skins on the V-tail of the Beech. It should be mentioned, however, that the reputed extra strength of the Meyers is not documented in tangible terms like utility category (as the Bonanza is).

Safety Record

While it is unfair to make much of an accident record that could be greatly changed by the addition or subtraction of just one accident due to the small fleet size, we did query NTSB and obtain reports on Meyers accidents from 1974 through 1978 and have performed the arithmetic for the sake of information.

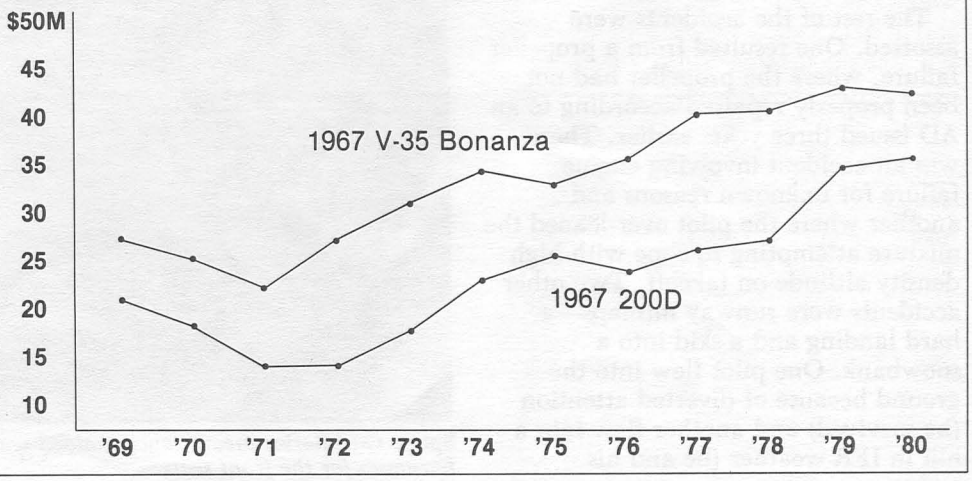
The airplanes suffered a total of 11 accidents in the period, one of them fatal and two others causing serious injuries. Posing 68 aircraft in the domestic fleet and assuming flight time of 100 hours a year (which is almost precisely what the Meyers owners reported to us), this would result in a total accident rate of 32.4 per 100,000 hours and a fatal accident rate of 2.9. For reference, earlier studies show the major single-engine retractables with



Fuel management *calls for switching to four separate tanks with the lever at the left of the pilot's leg. Fuel gauge shows only the fuel in the tank selected.*

Investment Value

The last (1967) production model of the Aero Commander 200D shows a phenomenal increase in value through the last decade amounting to 240 percent from its low point in 1971. This exceeds even that of the Beech Bonanza V-35 during the same period—a rise of 187 percent.



The aircraft has the luxury of both aileron and pitch trim. *The unorthodox pitch trim is the knurled vernier knob above the mike; aileron trim is located at the left of the white-tipped throttle control. Mixture is below and between throttle and prop.*

total accident rates ranging from 6.4 to 16.8 per 100,000 hours, and fatal accident rates from 2.0 to 3.8. Thus, the Meyers would appear to be about twice as bad as the worst single-engine retractable overall, but about in the middle as far as fatal accidents. Again, we find the Meyers numbers too small to use for meaningful comparison: one fatal accident less and it would have been best in its class.

Among causes for the 11 accidents, fuel system problems and fuel mismanagement top the list. In one case, a hose fitting came loose, and in another the lining of the metal-braided fuel hose sprang an unseen leak and sucked air. The grapevine of Meyers owners has spread the word, and many have replaced these metal-braided lines with ones that more readily reveal the leaks. In two other accidents, pilots ran out of fuel or ran tanks dry and killed the engine. The fuel system does require some attention, since there are four 20-gallon (18.5 usable) tanks, with a selector and a single gauge located on the left subpanel alongside the pilot's leg. On any fairly long trip, there will be two or three changes of tanks, and the only way to read the gauge for a tank is to switch to it.

The rest of the accidents were assorted. One resulted from a propeller failure, where the propeller had not been properly repaired according to an AD issued three years earlier. There was an accident involving engine failure for unknown reasons and another where the pilot over-leaned the mixture attempting to cope with high density altitude on takeoff. Two other accidents were runway mishaps—a hard landing and a skid into a snowbank. One pilot flew into the ground because of diverted attention (he survived) and another flew into a hill in IFR weather (he and his passenger died).

Every Meyers owner we talked to was thoroughly indoctrinated with the safety features of the aircraft, and many tell of accidents they know about where the airplane took a terrible bludgeoning but the pilot walked away, because of the 4130 steel tubing that comprises the major structure of the fuselage and center section. Our small group of accident reports did not confirm or refute this. We do note the absence of any stall-spin accidents in the sample (the Meyers is reputed to maintain aileron control throughout the stall) and the absence of inadvertent gear-up landings. The detented gear lever is situated to the left of the throttle and is crowned by a massive wheel-shaped metal knob, easily distinguished from the flap-shaped flap lever of more discreet dimensions situated on the right of the throttle. An oddity is a vernier-type elevator trim control located where one would normally expect the mixture handle to be. However, we cannot think of a way this quirk might contribute to design-induced error.

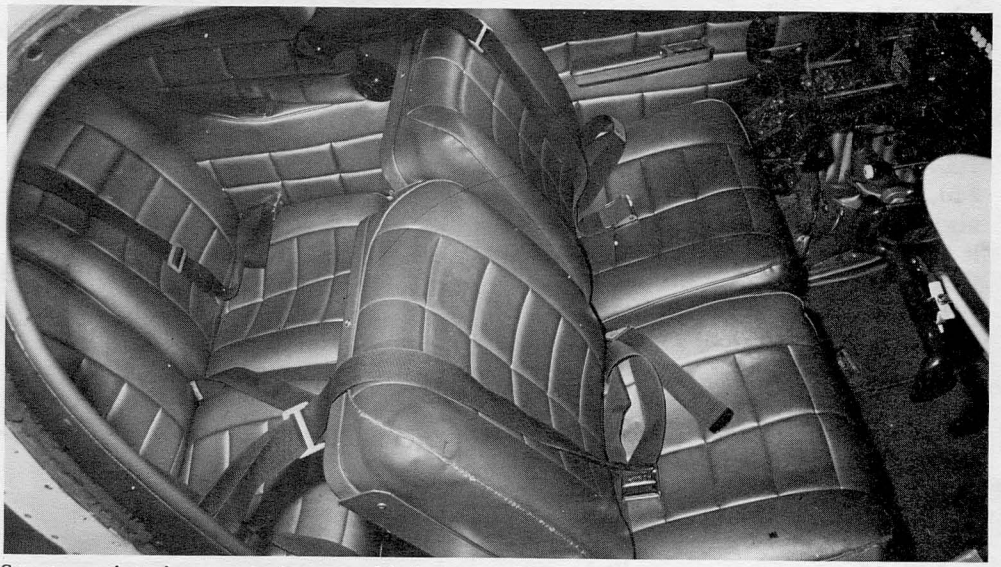
An engine-driven oil pump does double duty in operating the gear and extending the flaps. A wobble pump between the seats serves as a backup for this system, so only a hydraulic leak could put the whole affair out of commission. Even then, there is a free-fall procedure for the landing gear, although a no-flaps landing would be necessary.

One of the subtle Meyers touches is the boarding step, which extends hydraulically when the gear are extended, and tucks itself away behind a cover when the airplane is cleaned up.

Maintenance

While a lot of the airplane is assembled from off-the-shelf fittings, Meyers owners report better success in certain areas, like fuel and hydraulic system maintenance, if the mechanic who works on the plane has been "educated" about it through experience. One owner said a mechanic caused the engine to cut out intermittently by installing a fuel fitting backwards, for instance.

We queried the entire registry of Meyers owners about maintenance costs and got responses from 23—a third of the fleet. Averaging their reports, an annual for the Meyers will be flat-rated at $287 and will actually cost $585 when the work is done. They report an average of $278 worth of unscheduled airframe maintenance a year, and $224 worth of unscheduled engine work, the airplane being out of service an average of nine days a year. All of these



Sports car interior *means fancy molded seats and "togetherness" in the rear. Note shoulder harnesses for the front seats.*

numbers are quite good in comparison with other aircraft (even those a couple of years old).

A Meyers with original brakes (Goodrich or Goodyear) is said to be miserable, both in performance and in the need for replacement brake pads at frequent intervals. A change to Cleveland brakes costs about $1,000 and converts the brake rating to "excellent," according to owners.

The Continental IO-470 and IO-520 engines started out with 1,200-hour TBOs, and many of the planes available on the used market will have original engines. Later powerplants got 1,500-hour TBOs. The IO-520 is notorious for cracking crankcases and drew ADs on the subject, but none of the Meyers owners reported any such problem. Their main AD annoyance is the propeller—either Hartzell (one AD) or McCauley (three ADs over the years).

Slick Electro magnetos came with the airplane, but apparently haven't irked the owners by malfunctioning frequently. The Airborne dry vacuum pump suffered an AD, and some owners have replaced several.

Two owners complained about not being able to get the door to seal well, creating excessive cabin noise. A major aggravation is the back-seat bench, a vacuum-formed plastic affair which breaks down with age. Vinson Vanderford (5852 Bogue Road, Yuba City, CA 95991; phone 916-673-2724) is a Meyers Association stalwart who copied the mold and had fiberglass replacements built for the many owners who have redone the interiors of the Meyers.

Conversions

Vanderford and 17 other Meyers Association members have banded together in a company (Mycom Development) seeking to gain a supplemental type certificate on a turbocharged Meyers, using a 310-hp TSIO-520R with a Garrett blower and a Hartzell three-bladed Q-tip propeller. It has flown and can hit 244 mph, they say. Their efforts also include drag reduction work: burying the landing lights in the wings and getting rid of the huge rotating beacon atop the tail, which tuft tests showed was one of the greatest sources of airflow separation on the otherwise extremely clean airframe. They also intend to seek a separate STC for Hoerner-type wingtips to improve roll rate, applicable to any Meyers model.

Daniel G. Skaggs (1155 A Ave. West, Seymour, IN 47274) told us he is working on a 400-hp installation of a Lycoming IO-720 on one of his 200Ds and expects to have it flying in about a year.

An owner with a run-out IO-470 engine who wishes to step up to the 200D's IO-520 should contact the aforementioned Pard Diver at Tecumseh Aircraft, who has retained FAA approval for the mod.

Anybody thinking about buying a used Meyers should get in touch with a fellow named Gid Miller, in Frenchtown, N.J.; 201-996-2730. Miller is perhaps the country's reigning Meyers dealer. He usually has at least a couple in stock and probably knows the price and location of any others on the market.

Owners Association

The Meyer 200 Owners Association is a small but active group which stages an annual fly-in and issues a newsletter about four times a year. President is Chuck Haines, 1806 Hummingbird Drive, Costa Mesa, CA 92626.

Owner Comments

"The Meyers 200D has got to be the greatest plane ever built. Performance is tops and true IAS of 225 is not uncommon.

"The landing gear gave us some problems. A loose fitting on the hydraulic system caused many headaches. Once the problem was corrected the plane was flawless.

"The Meyers is the Ferrari of the sky. All high-performance airplanes should be modeled after this thoroughbred."

☆

"With the steel cabin and wing center section, I feel safer in the Meyers than any other aircraft."

☆

"Huge semi-fowler flaps require a great deal of power to handle approaches. It flies heavy, much like a military trainers on the approach, but is excellent for short-field landings."

☆

"The McCauley prop has had, if memory serves, three ADs. The oil-filled mod was just done.

"The fuel lines with metal braid on outside are bad leakers. All were replaced with Aeroquip.

"Brakes (Goodyear) were never very good. They were replaced with Clevelands in April this year. They are excellent!

"Body integrity is good but the door is a nonfixable problem. It closes fine on ground but deforms in flight to create air leak and uncomfortable slipstream noise to right seat passenger."

☆

"This is most trouble-free aircraft I have owned. My maintenance costs have been practically nil. I have flown this aircraft over 700 hours. This cost reflects parts

Between the front seats: *an emergency gear extension pump handle. Both gear and flaps are hydraulic on the Meyers, and can be operated manually.*

only as I am an A&P mechanic. However, the dependability I have experienced is fantastic.

"Having flown most high performance singles, I chose the 200D over others because of its outstanding performance, strength, and looks. The 'hangar tale' that it does not climb well is untrue. It will climb 1,000-1,400 feet fpm at 130-140 indicated."

☆

"At initiation of cruise, the bird has a very definite 'step,' and it will fall off that step if anything more than very light turbulence is encountered. The step cruise is 10 to 15 mph higher than a turbulent cruise condition will permit.

"It is a good instrument platform except for one bad trait: it is very unstable in the roll axis, but a good wing leveler takes care of that.

"The landing gear rigging and maintenance must be done by a competent mechanic with a thorough knowledge of the bird."

☆

"My purchasing decision rested among three airplanes: Bonanza, Centurion, and the Meyers. Evaluation of the Bonanza and Centurion proved those two airplanes were poorly constructed, over advertised, and over priced. The Meyers was hand-built, super strong, extremely fast, and fuel efficient.

"Best cruising altitude for the Meyers is between 8,000 to 12,000 feet. Single pilot, one person, 80 gallons of fuel, averages 13 gph at 195 mph true.

"It rides much like a Baron through turbulence and is very stable.

"Descending from cruising altitude to terminal speeds in major TCAs normally placed me in with heavy jets with no problem. The 240 mph red line enables the airplane to stay at jet approach speeds and land at major terminals with no fuss.

"Landing speed of 75 mph makes the aircraft extremely good in tight spaces. Operating the airplane at 350 hours a year averaged $10,000 for fixed and variable cost.

"If a product has to be carried, the three passenger seats can be removed in 40 seconds, giving a considerable amount of space. Any competent mechanic can work on this airplane, as all the systems are straightforward and require only a basic knowledge to figure out the most complex parts of the airplane."

☆

"I am generally very pleased with this Meyers 200D manufactured by Aero Commander. Understandably, since manufacture was discontinued, parts availability presents a potential problem. However, the integrity of the airframe and a powerplant similar to the Bonanza (IO-520C) has not presented any major problems for me.

"Since I purchased the aircraft two years ago, the only major problem was in the hydraulic system for gear and flap operation. This has been corrected and no further problems in over a year.

"Flight characteristics are superb. Excellent speed, climb and slow flight with low stall speed and ability to operate economically at 10.5 gph.

"Range is satisfactory, but I regret that the aircraft was not certified for a higher gross weight.

"I recommend this as a fine aircraft, although I would be happier to know that parts and service were more readily available."

☆

"There is no finer single-engine aircraft. The airframe and systems have never had an AD. It has a wider flight envelope, higher gear-down speed and better specs than any other single. All claims made in the manual are true. I have owned my aircraft for 12 years and my maintenance costs are less than $300 a year, total.

"The aircraft handles so well that my wife transitioned from a 150 to it and felt that the Meyers handled better the first time she flew it.

"As the aircraft gets older, some problems have arisen. The fuel hoses must be replaced. We have warm, dry weather, but some metal lines need checking for corrosion. The Meyers Association has a full list.

"I have never purchased any piece of machinery that has performed as well or been as reliable as this aircraft."

Baggage compartment *holds a respectable 200 pounds structurally.*

Massive bar alongside the door *eases entry and typifies what operators characterize as a quality of being "overbuilt."*