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By Flip Colmer

Used Aircraft Guide: Meyers 200

Built like a tank, this four-seat single is clean and fast, and has an extremely loyal user community behind it.

There's something about the Meyers 200 that doesn't look like a 40-year-old factory airplane. Its bubble canopy and gently-tapered wings are reminiscent of modern, composite airplanes. Sweep the tail and clean up the cowling a bit, you'd start thinking Lancair had an all-metal retractable.

Alas, the Meyers is a product of the late 1950s, with aluminum shells over massive tubular frames and heavy, hydraulic systems. The good news is its construction

gives the airframe enormous strength. Meyers' devotees note that the airplane's center section required no beef-up when the 200 was transformed into a 300-knot turboprop (more, below). The Meyers can also keep up with just about anything in its class, even many of the current composite-construction speedsters. The only real drawback is a low useful load.

Meyers owners find the airplane's real beauty is in its quality. With few applicable ADs and almost no service-difficulty history, owners of this rare airplane are ecstatic about it.

History

The 200 was Allen H. Meyers's third design. At the age of 28, after working at the Glenn Martin, Chance Vought and Stinson factories, Meyers had set up his own shop in Tecumseh, Michigan. In 1935, he began work on his first design: a biplane called the Meyers OTW (Out To Win), which earned Uncle Sam's blessing for use in the Civilian Pilot Training program.

Later Al Meyers designed a two-place, retractable, low-wing taildragger called the Meyers 145. The 145 was a fast and efficient machine, achieving 145 MPH on the same number of horsepower. Only a handful of Meyers 145s were built.

The design eventually was modified into a four-seater, the 200. The prototype Meyers 200 flew in 1953, but it wasn't until five years later that the airplane received its type certificate. For production, the prototype's carbureted, 225-HP Continental O-470-M engine was replaced with Continental's fuel-injected, 260 HP IO-470-D.

Production started with the 1959 model year, and moved slowly. At the time, there were a few direct competitors around: Piper's Comanche 250, and the Beech Debonair and Bonanza. The Meyers was considerably more expensive than either the Comanche or the Debonair, and cost almost as much as the V-tail Bonanza while offering less load-carrying ability.

The 1959 and 1960 models were designated 200A. They had a 70-gallon fuel system, 3000-pound gross weight and an empty weight of 1870 pounds. Performance was on a par with the V-tail Bonanza: 170-knot cruise speeds and 1150 FPM climb rates. A total of 11 were built.

In 1961, Meyers brought out the 200B, incorporating minor changes including a different fuel system (a mere 40 gallons standard, 80 optional) and an improved instrument panel. Empty weight went up to 1975 pounds, though the gross



remained 3000. Some 17 B models were produced.

The C model, introduced for the 1963 model year, got additional changes: a higher cabin roof, larger windshield and better interior. Only nine C models came out of the factory. Much more significant enhancements arrived with the 200D in 1965. The wings got flush rivets, and the IO-470-D was replaced by a Continental IO-520-A of 285 HP. The D model's aerodynamic changes boosted the cruise speed significantly, to 183 knots, while the stall (dirty) dropped to only 47 knots. Takeoff roll and 50-foot obstacle clearance numbers also improved.

The weight dropped a bit, too, to 1940 pounds empty. Gross remained 3000 pounds. Six were built in that year, according to the Aircraft Bluebook.

By the end of the year, Meyers was in financial trouble. The design was sold to Aero Commander (later known as Rockwell Commander), which was a solid second-tier manufacturer at the time. Production run was 69 airplanes was achieved for the 1966 model year. Aero Commander also developed a six-seat, swept-tail E model and flew a prototype.

Another 20 D models were produced in 1967, but the design abandoned when Aero Commander merged with its parent company, Rockwell-Standard. In all, only 135 Meyers 200s were produced, and fewer than 100 are still flying.

The rights to the airplane were acquired by Interceptor Corporation, which certified a turboprop version, the Interceptor 400.

Several attempts have been made to resurrect the design, but for one reason or another none were successful.

A turboprop version called the Interceptor 400 received a type certificate in 1971, but only two of them were built. One survived two accidents—a ditching off the coast of California and a crash into trees on short final. Both were from engine flameouts. No one was hurt in the accidents, but the aircraft was later destroyed in a hangar fire.

The Market, Then and Now

While the 200's performance is equal to or better than its contemporaries, and its construction is impressive, it does suffer from one glaring flaw: lack of payload.

While precious few single-engine airplanes will let you fill all the seats and all the tanks at the same time, the Meyers comes up shorter than most. A typical four-place single is usually a three-place when fuel and baggage are added; the Meyers is a two-placer.

Put yourself in the shoes of a new-airplane buyer in 1966: You could go for a Meyers 200D, pay \$29,500, and have a 3000-pound gross weight airplane capable of cruising at more than 180 knots. Or you could buy a 3300-pound gross weight Beech C33A Debonair, save \$1500, and be able to carry 465 more pounds of payload while sacrificing only nine knots of cruise speed. Enough buyers opted for more capacity at less cost that the Meyers just didn't sell.

Today, the Meyers fetches quite a bit less than comparable-vintage Debonairs, Bonanzas and Comanches, and is on a par with the Cessna 210 according to the

Bluebook. However, like any rare vintage airplane, a significant percentage of the remaining Meyers have been painstakingly restored and could easily fetch much higher prices. Our readers estimate that the real-world average value is higher than that quoted in the price guide, more on the order of \$65,000 to \$75,000.

Design and Construction

The Meyers 200 was labor-intensive to build. Paul Whetstone, the man behind the 1992 attempt to resurrect the design, said that it takes 800 more man-hours to build a Meyers than to complete one of its competitors. Many observers contend that Al Meyers never intended the airplane to be mass-produced.



At the pilot's left knee are numerous switches and circuit breakers, along with the auxiliary hydraulic system's pump handle.



Also incorporated into the console is the fuel selector and gauge.



This wing center section for the Micco SP26—a modernized Meyers 145 that has an on-again/off-again story of its own—

"Meyers was in the FBO business," recalled one observer. "When there were no orders for a 200, they pulled the little jigs and fixtures up into the rafters to free up some floor space for repairs."

At the heart of the airplane's design and reputation are welded, 4130 chrome-alloy steel tubes forming the fuselage and center section. The structure runs from the firewall to the rear fuselage bulkhead and three feet out into the wings, where it supports the main landing gear assemblies. The rear fuselage section is of semi-monocoque design and construction.

The landing gear and Fowler-type flaps are hydraulically actuated, and the flight controls incorporate push-pull tubes. There are two emergency gear-extension systems: a hand pump to supply hydraulic pressure and an uplock-release mechanism. If the hand pump doesn't work, the pilot releases the locks and slips the airplane, allowing aerodynamic loads to shove the gear down.

The gear system is unusual. Aside from the desirable trait of multiple emergency backup systems, there's a switch built into the circuit that prevents the starter from turning if the massive gear handle is not in the down position (though there are no squat switches, and pilots have inadvertently retracted the gear on the ground). After takeoff, the handle is moved to the up position, then must be moved back to neutral once the gear is stowed to reduce pressure in the system (there is a warning light to keep the pilot from forgetting).

The nose wheel is the same size as the main wheels, a feature that makes rough-field operations practical, should the owner wish to subject his rare bird to the

vagaries of an unpaved surface.

The elevator trim is also different. It's a vernier control mounted just underneath the three power controls. Strictly speaking, this is not good ergonomics—it could possibly be mistaken for one of the engine controls—but in practice it's not a problem, once the pilot gets used to it. The good news is it's easy to make fine adjustments to the trim.

Fuel in most 200s is carried in two main tanks and two auxiliaries. Each holds 20 gallons; total usable capacity is 74 gallons. The management system leaves something to be desired, in our opinion: There's only one fuel gauge, and it only reads the tank in use; there's no way to tell how much fuel is in one of the other tanks without actually selecting it. Overall, the panel layout is excellent for the time, with plenty of room and a fairly standard instrument arrangement. In-flight visibility is just about as good as it gets.

There's a retractable step, complete with its own door, and a large, incongruous chrome assist handle jutting out from the side of the fuselage to aid in climbing aboard.

The passenger seat and the two rear seats can be removed quickly to accommodate cargo. There's also a large baggage hatch on the right side of the fuselage. But the airplane cannot haul much—legally, that is.

Loading

Throughout production of the relatively heavy airplane, gross weight remained at

3000 pounds, with real-world equipped empty weights typically running 2100 pounds. Add full fuel, and you can fit only about 450 pounds of people and baggage into the airplane and stay legal.

As one owner commented, the four-place Meyers 200 really is "a legal two-place airplane." Although Aero Commander completed testing to raise the gross weight to 3350 pounds, the paperwork was never submitted to the FAA for approval. If this were approved, it would allow the aircraft to be topped with fuel and still carry a full passenger load and baggage.

The airplane appears well able to handle the load. There are many stories of Meyers being operated (illegally) at the higher weight with no problems.

Performance

shows why the type has earned a reputation as a well-built airplane. We've seen flimsier bridges.



The Meyers 200 instrument panel has plenty of room to work with. Installing modern systems gauges would also save a few acres.



The airplane's forte, of course, is speed. Maximum cruise speed of the original models is 170 knots—as fast as the V-tail Bonanzas produced during the same period, and nearly 10 knots faster than contemporary Cessna 210s.

Focusing in on the above image - landing gear and flap switches, along with throttle, prop and mixture controls (the round knob with the red button). The large control to the right? That's the pitch trim.

With its bigger engine and flush-riveted wings, the 200D is even faster: 183 knots at max cruise. This is a bit faster than S- and V-35 Bonanzas and a whole lot (10 knots) faster than D- through G-model 210s. Never-exceed speed of the 200A is 208 MPH, and its maximum structural cruising speed is 165 MPH. Starting with the B model, these limits were raised to 236 MPH and 210 MPH, respectively. Thanks to relatively high gear- and flap-extension speeds, the slippery airplane can easily mix with traffic in the pattern.

In the 200A, the gear can be lowered at 165 MPH, and the flaps at 125 MPH. Gear-extension speeds for the B, C and D models are 170 MPH for normal operation or 210 MPH in an emergency, though the gear doors will get ripped off at that speed.

At the other end of the speed spectrum, the D model stalls at a remarkably low 47 knots thanks to the Fowler flaps, with the earlier models a few knots higher. As with many airplanes in this class, proper power and speed management are needed during approach to avoid excessive sink rates.

Stalls are reported to be relatively benign for a high-performance retractable. The airplane is not certified for spins, though there is anecdotal evidence that it is capable of self-recovery after one turn.

The controls are relatively heavy, thanks both to the push-pull tubes and to the short lateral throw of the yoke. Owners say that, due to a bungee arrangement in the control systems, little or no trim change is required with gear and flap extension.

Owners report that the airplane generally is easy to fly. But newcomers, especially those with little experience in heavy, high-performance singles, should get a thorough checkout by an instructor who knows the airplane. Al Meyers chose not to offset the engine or horizontal stabilizer to lessen low-speed, high-power torque effects. As a result, almost full right rudder is needed on takeoff and initial climb. The airplane lacks rudder trim.

Maintenance

There have been no ADs on the airframe structure. The only two Meyers 200-specific ADs are old, one-time directives dealing with systems: 66-28-1 called for modification of the elevator trim, and 67-23-1 mandated inspection of the landing gear rigging. It's safe to say there are no instances of non-compliance with these directives.

A few ADs have targeted the prop, though none are repetitive. Three ADs on McCauley props have required replacement of their attach bolts and inspection of their blades and hubs for cracks. The Hartzell props have drawn two directives. One required blade replacement; the other, issued in 1985, called for replacement of blade clamps. A 1991 directive called for replacement of certain defective parts.

The engine and ignition systems are subject to the usual collection of one-time, shotgun ADs affecting other airplanes. There are only three directives that might involve repetitive inspections: 77-13-22 calls for repetitive inspection of the crankcase for cracks on IO-520s; 86-13-4 mandates pressure checks of IO-520 cylinders each 50 hours until replacement; and 96-12-22 requires repetitive inspections of the oil filter assembly.

In all, there are only 31 ADs applicable to the Meyers 200, a low figure for a 40-year-old design. Given the small number of airplanes in existence, it's not surprising that there have been almost no service difficulties reported on the Meyers 200. One of note indicated cracks found on the rudder spar near the upper hinge attach point. An improved rudder hinge kit is available on the aftermarket to address this. Past examinations of the record pointed up a couple of nose gear maintenance discrepancies. A broken nosewheel horn in a Meyers 200A prevented the wheel from extending fully; and a broken cable in a 200D allowed the gear to cock and jam in the wheel well.

There were also two SDRs on frayed rudder cables found in 200Ds. One of the good things about the Meyers 200 from an owner's standpoint is the fact that the airplane was built using a lot of "off the shelf" components. Owners report that they have few if any problems getting parts for their airplanes. They say that most parts requiring regular replacement are used on many other aircraft, so there is a good supply.

Owners did reveal two potential sources of grief. One is the cabin door. It is constructed of aluminum and fiberglass and

does not hold up well to use and abuse. Most owners say their doors do not fit properly anymore, and leaking air creates quite a racket. Many have had their doors pop open in flight. Tecumseh Aircraft (the old Meyers factory) can rework the door to improve it, however.

Landing gear bushings are another problem. Each airplane has about 52 of them, and they require regular replacement. One owner said he replaces his bushings every 250 hours.

Like any airplane this age, deterioration of plastic components is a problem. In the Meyers, there isn't much of it, and it's found mostly in the seats. However, fiberglass replacements are available.

One owner also noted that the fuel tanks are relatively flimsy, and says that removal for rewelding should be expected "every 20 years or so."

Buyer Checkpoints

There are two good reasons for buying a Meyers/Aero Commander 200. The first is speed. The airplane can outrun just about anything else in its class. The second reason is the strength of its construction. Several of the airplanes have survived harrowing accidents with only minor damage.

A possible third reason is just that it's a Meyers 200. It's a unique airplane—an attention-grabber. You're hard-pressed to spot one at even a crowded general aviation airport.

But prospective buyers should know what they're getting into. Evidence of compliance with ADs should be in hand before any deal is consummated. The fuel system and potentially high sink rate could spell trouble for the unwary. And, while parts may not be hard to find now, there is concern about the diminishing supply of some landing gear components. In the future, a badly damaged Meyers may be a total loss.

Mods

Some useful mods reported by owners include the usual aerodynamic tweaks (flap gap seals and hinge fairings), turbocharging, Hoerner-style wing tips and inflatable door seals.

My-Air Aviation in Sherwood, Arkansas, makes the previously-mentioned fuel monitor system and improved rudder hinge kit.

The 200A can be upgraded to a B model by installing stringers in the tail, which permits higher speeds.

The earlier models can swap the IO-470 engine for an IO-520A, bringing them up to a D configuration. Recently, upgrades to the Continental IO-550 have also been made available. A three-bladed prop can be fitted, though owners report that it's not worth the effort.

A modified nosebowl is available, with an extended profile and smaller air inlets.

Support

The Meyers Aircraft Owners Association is a rather informal but tightly knit group of owners and admirers. The association holds an annual fly-in at various parts of the country and publishes a regular newsletter.

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Bill Gaffney, the association's secretary, is handling correspondence at 26 Route 17K, Newburgh, N.Y. 12550, 914-565-8005. Other contacts are Vince Vandeford, 530-673-2724 and Dave and Karen Palmer, 707-938-2181.

Parts are available from Keith Diver (son of the late Pard Diver, one of the original three builders) at Tecumseh Aircraft, 517-423-8040, or from the holder of the type certificate, Prop Jets, Inc., 210-438-3100.



Viewed from below, this Meyers 200 shows off its (for the time) industry-leading features: tapered wings, fully enclosed landing gear and trailing-edge belly strakes. The only airframe ADs should have been complied with long ago.