

## **Where did the other prop go? (our Mooney Story)**

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After 5 great years of Twin Cessna ownership, it was with a heavy heart I watched our 1979 Cessna 340A fly off to its new owner in Texas. As a broker of airplanes, it is always fun to watch planes head off to new owners, but this one was mine, so it was very different.

Due to a change in our mission, we had essentially stopped flying as a large group and we were flying around either just myself or myself and one other person. I reviewed long and hard what our new mission meant as far as what plane should be next on our list. “Can’t go without one in this business” was my favourite way to justify the cost and expense..... and it still is.

Once we determined what types of flying we were doing and wanted to do, we ended up settling on the Mooney M20 series of aircraft. Mooney’s are known for their speed and minimal fuel burn, but not for their cabin size. The normally aspirated M20J is one of the best aircraft around, but I do like the ability to climb up and with our location and high summer density altitudes, turbo charging was likely going to be required.

After much deliberation, I was fortunate enough to have friend offer to let me sit in his to see how I fit. I am over 6 feet tall and over 250lbs, so I was concerned it would be a very tight squeeze in the little cockpit. I popped by his hanger and was amazed at how much room there was. It was no 340 of course, but with a bit of adjustment, I was able to sit comfortably in the aircraft. Now that we know we fit, the search was on.

As a Broker and Aircraft owner, I was not going to fall into the pit falls of purchasing that so many other owners do. I was going to take the emotion out of the process, be impartial and professional. Wow, was I wrong. Buying an airplane is emotional and I can say, even with my experience and knowledge, I needed a little voice speaking in my ear. “Don’t get in a rush”, “do the research”, “make sure this is the right one to buy”. Without that voice, I would have purchased one plane and it would not have been the right aircraft.

We reviewed logs on a couple and I even went to out BC to look at one. Some good, some bad, but eventually I was lucky enough to convince a former client of ours to part with his. He had it listed with us for some time, but did not like the low offers he was getting. The plane was in great shape and he moved forward doing a few additional upgrades. He had every intention of keeping the plane, but found that he was not flying enough to warrant it.

I approached him about purchasing the aircraft. He said to me “give me a low ball offer so that I can tell you to get lost and justify keeping the plane”. I gave him my number (remember we do this a lot, so it was not a low ball, but a fair market price for the aircraft based on it’s condition). He looked at me and said “that is fair and I am glad to see it going to someone who will fly it”. We drafted the agreement, went through pre-purchase inspection and finalized the deal a week later. It took a while, but we finally found the plane for us. A 1981 Mooney M20K. We now own a Mooney. As owners, we could now be called “Mooney-acs”.

Mooneys are terrific aircraft, but they do require some careful work at pre-purchase. The Mooney cage (the steel structure that gives all Mooney’s their amazing occupant safety reputation) needs to be carefully checked for corrosion. This is especially important if the plane has sat outside. Another big issue for Mooney’s can be the nose wheel steering stops. If an over-zealous line person cranks the nose wheel to hard, they can bend or even break the stops. It is a pricey fix, ask me how I know.

The landing gear is a rubber puck type system, not the traditional sprung gear or oleo system used by other manufacturers. Due to this, the pucks must be checked for wear and tear, as they do eventually deteriorate.

The M20K, due to its turbo charger, has some very specific requirements as well. Most have been fitted with the intercooler mod, this is great for cooling the charge air going to the engine, but it means a careful hand is needed to ensure the plane does not over boost. It takes a bit to master, but is not so difficult as to be a headache.

Our Mooney is fitted with a very nice suite of avionics, including a WAAS GPS, HSI and KFC 140 Autopilot. Though a lot of the avionics are older, they function well and the plane is a very solid IFR platform. A Garmin Aera 510 added XM Weather and Radio to the package. Very nice to have on long flights.

One of the upgrades we immediately did was to install speed brakes. Mooneys are notoriously slippery planes and take careful control to reduce speed. This can be completed by proper planning, but can cause headaches if you are trying to get into fields with approaches near the mountains (i.e. Springbank). The speed brakes are a nice addition in that they allow you to conduct slow power changes but still drop the airplane from altitude. We have utilized them on every flight since installation.

There is a saying amongst pilots that Mooneys are hard to land. I can tell you that Mooneys do require a focus on speed control on landing, but are no harder to land than a 172. The difference is that if you come in hot (i.e. 85-90 kts) on short final in a Mooney, it will tend to fly along in ground effect without settling onto the runway. The alternative is to come in to slow and bounce. If this occurs, every Mooney flyer is told to go around and try again. One bounce is not a big deal, but the third bounce historically results in a prop strike (due to the short landing gear). Better to go around one more time and hit your speeds properly.

So far, in the two months we have owned the Mooney, we have flown over 35 hours on it. This includes trip to High Level and even out to Winnipeg. The fuel burn and speed are exceptional and with one or two people and light bags, it is a truly phenomenal cross-country machine.

Though I miss the big airplane with it's twin engines and pressurization, I sure don't miss it when I pull up to the fuel pumps!