

Moving on up! (Time for a bigger plane)

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There comes a time, when it makes sense to look to move forward from the small aircraft at a larger machine. Our upgrade epiphany came in the form of identical twin bundles of joy and a flight from Calgary to Edmonton.

We had enjoyed a lot of great flying in our Piper Cherokee 235. It was roomy and carried a lot of load, by small single standards, but with the addition of two extra humans and the associated equipment that requires, we were finding it was a struggle. We had to load two car seats in the plane, one in the front seat and one in the back, with my wife at the time trying to manage two little ones from one of the rear seats. When I mentioned an upgrade, her comment was “buy whatever you want, but I want to have club seating. That is a must for us now”.

The search commenced with only that parameter initially. The first thing we did was engage a Broker. What was our mission? What did we need to carry? Was club seating a make or break? We discussed all the possibilities from twin Cessna and Senecas, Lance, Saratoga and Bonanza. With a sustained mission heading over the mountains from Calgary to Victoria, BC regularly (we had family out there), wanting something all weather capable, turbo charged and relatively quick.

We reviewed all the available club seating airplanes. The Lance and Saratoga series was intriguing. Staying with the Piper family, club seats, good speed and load carrying were all benefits. Bonanza’s were an option as well, though they demand high prices in the market for the 36 series. I also have a personal connection that does not make the aircraft my favourite, my father was killed in his just months after I was married. That didn’t make it out of the question but did push me to review other options too.

Twins seemed like a viable option as well. We discussed Senecas, but most of the good ones were demanding a high price due to flight schools wanting them for training aircraft. We then hit upon the possibility of a twin Cessna. I was intrigued but thought that was out of our price range and operating budget. Though much more than the single, I had no idea how capable this aircraft was at its price point. The Broker also walked me through the operating costs.

I spoke to a couple Twin Cessna owners, including my brother who owns a Cessna 310R turbo. We had previously taken that plane from Ottawa to Edinburgh, Scotland, so I was confident in the capabilities. The Broker then mentioned that the price differential for both purchase and operating costs was not a huge jump to move up to a pressurized twin, i.e. the Cessna 340. With the addition of pressurization and the thought of trying to keep an oxygen mask on two squirming little ones for a 2-hour flight, we agreed that a pressurized twin would be a great benefit in our mission.

The search began in earnest. Now I must confess, I didn't do any searching at all. The Broker conducted the searching, found suitable planes in our price range and presented them to us in a package. We discussed the pros and cons of each one presented. In the end, the Broker was able to locate a plane right here in Calgary that had sat un-used for several years since the owner had passed away. The plane had mid time engines, great paint and interior, and had extensive avionics upgrades. This included dual WAAS GPS Nav/Comms and a Garmin G600. It had good maintenance by quality AMEs I knew and though it was missing the US log books, the US package had been ordered from the FAA. The Broker also did extensive searches to ensure there were no incidents that had not been presented.

I was away with the family on vacation during the late stages and relied heavily on the Broker and our specific requirements. This meant that when we found the 340 we wanted, I was away in Florida and wasn't even able to see the plane. We struck a deal pending a pre-purchase inspection and the Seller agreed to put it through an annual inspection with their maintenance facility. I was so impressed with this maintenance facility that I use them for my annuals to this day.

The pre-purchase showed no major show stoppers that would not be covered in the annual and we moved forward. The annual came up with some issues, including a faulty de-ice valve, which the Sellers fixed as part of the agreement and I had some upgrades done at my cost to fix a few things I wanted changed. My final acceptance was a test flight with an instructor I knew well. This was a critical situation as I had not completed my twin rating at that time and needed someone familiar with big twins. The test flight was great, and the plane was ours.

In the meantime, I was busy pounding out my twin rating in a local flight training unit's Piper Seneca and was able to complete my flight test the weekend after we accepted the new Cessna twin. Since I was by no means safe or capable to fly this much larger machine, I conducted many hours of training for my IFR in it and lots of great cross-country flights with my instructors. They were invaluable for learning systems. The new avionics I learned by plugging in a small APU we have in our hanger and "hanger flying" the avionics. I spent so much time doing this, that at one point I could put my hand on the switches and gauges with my eyes closed.

This would serve me well a few month later when we had a turbo charger fail on the left engine, which required us to shut it down in flight and shoot an approach to minimums at an unfamiliar airport. I knew the plane so well by this time, that it was a non-event. Well it was a non-event for me, my non-pilot passenger might feel differently about the whole situation!

The plane was an amazing machine. We flew all over Canada and the US. Took the family to countless vacations, Christmas get togethers and family meet ups. The costs were higher of course, but my sons grew up in the back of that plane. Our whole family could travel in comfort, over the weather and my wife could deal with anything that came up (you can use your imagination about what had to be accomplished in the back with two little kids). It was also a great load hauler for the family. In our case, with Twin boys, we needed two cribs, two high chairs, countless clothes and toys. All of it went into and came out of the big Cessna. Many a ramp attendant burst out laughing watching us load or unload the "gear" required to spend even a weekend away with twin little ones.

We have since sold the big plane and purchased a Mooney (see our previous article "Where did the other prop go? (our Mooney Story)" in this magazine. Though our mission has changed, and we no longer needed the big twin, the choice to upgrade and the assistance from a seasoned Broker was key to our twin ownership experience being a positive one.

If you are looking to upgrade, or downgrade, FlightSimple Inc. offers focused Acquisition Searches. Things have changed and I am now part of these searches for our customers. The experience of going through the process as a previous customer, means I have a unique insight into how they go and the amazing benefits that can be had from "Moving on Up!".