

Cheetah

Grumman American's Econo-tiger

There's no question that the glamorous baby of the Grumman American line is the Tiger, the fixed-pitch, fixed-gear job that'll match airspeed with some competing constant-speed-prop retractables.

But for everyone who buys a Tiger, there's another customer plunking down his money for GA's lower-powered Cheetah. The major reason, of course, is price: for the cost of a Tiger, you could get a Cheetah plus a new car. For that \$5,076 difference, you lose 11 knots at 75% cruise, 190 fpm rate of climb at sea level and 168 lbs. useful load. However, with optional tanks to equal the Tiger's standard capacity, your Cheetah will have a range advantage of 132 statute miles.

About six months ago, I flew both the Cheetah and the Tiger and couldn't help but notice the Tiger's extra 30 hp oomph. This time, I wanted to fly the Cheetah strictly on its own with no comparisons.

I borrowed the plane from Star Aircraft Sales in San Diego, a GA dealership with an impressive sales record and an equally impressive business philosophy. (See adjoining article.) Chief Flight Instructor Larry Huff checked me out. All of Star's flight instructors are aircraft salesmen, and Larry's checkout was a far cry from the usual litany of numbers and directions as rendered by your bored CFI. Larry made sure I noticed the Tiger-sized stabilizer and 45 degree flaps that differentiate the Cheetah from the predecessor Traveler.

When you enter a plane by sliding the canopy back, you really know you're entering a plane, not a car with wings. (I happen to be a sucker for convertibles and canopies.) Once seated, you really have a commanding view and a feeling of brightness, due in no small part to the long rear windows and the low glare shield.

Taxiing out, Larry let me re-discover for myself the toe-tapping technique required to keep the full-swiveling nosewheel pointed in the desired direction. On takeoff, he asked me to advance one-third throttle until I established directional control, then add full horses. Perhaps this was due to our crosswind condition; nevertheless, when I got him out of the airplane, I made right-to-the-firewall takeoffs with no problems.

Initial climb with two aboard was about 1,000 fpm. Head-swiveling on turnout reinforced the earlier impres-

sion of excellent visibility. The next phenomenon I became aware of was a delightful roll response. These Grumman Americans sure are fun to fly! Even the trim wheel is light to the touch.

Low ceilings and worsening weather kept altitude and time to a minimum. At 2,000 ft. and 76% power (2600 rpm), we trued out at 124 knots, or 143 mph. Throttling back to 63% power (2400 rpm), which was a lot quieter, we still moved along at 113 knots, or 129 mph. Fuel consumption was around 8.9 and 7.2 gph respectively, according to the book.

Also according to the book, at 6,500 ft., you can get it up to 128 knots, or 148 mph, if you want to run the engine at 78% power (2700 rpm). That kind of performance holds, give or take a knot or two, up to 8,500 ft., above which altitude the fixed pitch prop loses out. But if you have reason to fly at 10,500 ft., hopefully you can still develop 65% power and 118 knots, or 137 mph. (At least you won't be tempted into hypoxia in order to achieve max airspeed.)

Stalls are very forgiving. Wings level, pull the wheel back into your chest and the Cheetah sends you a nice long telegram of protest, flying and nudging all the while. Even accelerated stalls call a lot of attention to themselves before the nose drops. A little forward pressure and the Cheetah is flying again.

Back in the pattern, the plane comes down at a reasonably good angle with full flaps. Larry told me that slips were okay with full flaps, so I tried a slip and it was, indeed, okay. On rollout, you have to be ready with a little brake, especially in a crosswind—that swiveling nosewheel again—but I don't see this as a problem; the pilot is supposed to be awake during takeoffs and landings. That rotating nosewheel shows its good side at parking time; you can swing the plane into a tight space with the greatest of ease.

All in all, the Cheetah impressed me as a plane that gives a lot of performance for 150 hp, plus nice handling qualities and excellent visibility. Base price is \$19,094, but, of course, that's just for openers. The one I flew was IFR equipped, with Narco dual nav/comms, glideslope, ADF, transponder, Mitchell wing lever and a price tag of \$30,752. Last year, Grumman American sold 203 Cheetahs and Travelers and 196 Tigers. This year, the

manufacturer's production has been handicapped by their move from Cleveland to Savannah, but GA still expects to increase the output by about 25%, maintaining an even split between Cheetahs and Tigers. The two-place Trainers and TR2s will continue off the line at the rate of 120 per annum.

Pilot reports are almost inevitably written by aviation writers who don't have to lay out their hard cash for the aircraft, or live with them month in, month out. Therefore, wherever possible, we will include interviews with real, live, bill-paying owners. Starting right now.

The following interviews were conducted by Associate Editor Tim Stone.

WHAT THE OWNERS SAY:

Richard Pack is the owner of a plumbing company and has recently purchased a Cheetah from Cloverleaf Aviation, located at Santa Monica (Calif.) Airport.

AP: Before you purchased your Cheetah, what other aircraft did you own or rent?

Pack: Well, I've owned, either in whole or part, interests in Pipers, Cessna Skymasters, and twin Cessnas—but I've rented everything. I'm an ATP with over 2,500 hrs.

AP: When you were shopping around, what other aircraft did you consider buying?

Pack: Oh, I really didn't look at any other aircraft that seriously. I liked the looks of the Cheetah, and I thought it was better than the ordinary Piper Cherokee. It sure had all the Cessna 172s and stuff like that beat.

AP: What features do you like or dislike about the Cheetah?

Pack: I don't see anything I really dislike about it. I really like its performance above climb, and its top speed. I like its clean lines, and I think it handles very well.

AP: Does the Cheetah live up to your expectations?

Pack: Yes, it sure does. It flies very well.

AP: You bought your Cheetah at Cloverleaf Aviation. Were you happy with the way your sale was handled?

Pack: Well, I've got to tell you, the deal was screwed up. And pretty badly, too. I was going away for the holidays, so I paid the money before I went, and the airplane didn't come in.

Maybe it was the factory that screwed up. Let me say this: Cloverleaf, I think, did everything they could.

The factory was supposed to have my airplane ready by the middle of September—then October! I was supposed to have the 13th or 14th aircraft off of the assembly line. Then the story I got was they sent all of them overseas. I finally got the 77th off the line. It took four months for the order to come through, and even then there was some problem before they test flew it. So really, I was disappointed in the promises made on delivery.

AP: So, in that respect, the dealership didn't follow through for you?

Pack: I really don't know if it's the dealership's fault. I'll tell you one thing, they blamed it on the factory. And I think, what with the four-month delay, it probably was the factory's fault. I'm sure that Cloverleaf wanted their money and everything faster.

AP: How has the post-delivery service been with Cloverleaf, as far as aircraft and avionics maintenance are concerned?

Pack: Service? Oh, it's been fair. I've got the airplane leased back and they're doing a pretty good job on that. However, there have been a few minor problems with the electronics. I had the radios installed out here.

AP: What kind of radio package did you have installed?

Pack: I've got all Narco, Narco 111Bs I guess they are, and I have the Nav 11 and 12 with glide slope. Visual DME with 3 axis autopilot with couplers, transponder, three light marker beacons and encoding altimeter.

AP: Overall then, you're pretty happy with your Cheetah. Is that right?

Pack: Yes, that's right. We've got 100 hrs. on it now with no major maintenance. So far, it seems to be holding up pretty well.

AP: Well, thank you Mr. Pack for letting us interview you. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Pack: Just that I did have a few problems, and thought that you would want the truth. I think the main problem is coming out of the factory, and that you might want to warn your readers to make sure they get a promised delivery date if they order one.

* * *

Guy Brown is a Flight Inspector for the F.A.A. flying DC-3s for nav aid calibration of ILS and VORs, and a few months ago purchased a Grumman American Cheetah from Executive Air located at Oxnard airport in Ventura County, California.

AP: Before you purchased your Chee-

tah, what other aircraft did you own or rent?

Brown: I had a Cessna 182 and a Belanca Citabria.

AP: When you were shopping for your new airplane, what others did you consider?

Brown: I looked at the Cessna 150, 172 and 182 primarily. And, of course, a couple of Piper products, mainly the Cherokee Arrow.

AP: What made you decide on the Cheetah?

Brown: Well, primarily the 2,000 hr. TBO Lycoming engine, the low fuel consumption and efficiency cost per mile, and the low maintenance. I was interested in the cost particularly, and Grumman emphasizes the minimum maintenance. And I did feel it was a well-built airplane, looking it over and talking with people who had owned the TR2, and Traveler, which was the predecessor of the Cheetah. They seem to have a good record on maintenance. And I knew the engine from owning the Citabria.

AP: What features about the Cheetah do you like or dislike?

Brown: Well, I very much like the layout of the instrument panel. All of the controls and levers seem to be well laid out, and for the size of the airplane, it seems to have a roomy feeling inside it, unlike that of the Cessna 172 which I was comparing the Cheetah directly to.

AP: Does the Cheetah live up to your expectations?

Brown: So far, yes it has. I've had no maintenance problems at all, and one minor avionics problem that was taken care of under warranty. No other problems at all. The airplane has performed amazingly well.

AP: You bought your Cheetah at Executive Air in Oxnard. Were you happy with the way the sale was handled?

Brown: Yes, very much so.

AP: Have you had good post-delivery service from Executive Air, as far as aircraft and avionics maintenance goes?

Brown: Fairly well, yes. Only one squawk. When I got the airplane, it had a problem with the map light. That wasn't serviced properly and it still isn't fixed. But it's such a minor thing, I can't see worrying about it.

Only one thing I might mention that I wasn't quite happy with, and weren't designed well, were the sun visor shields. These were very poorly designed and promptly got broken. And until they are designed better, or made out of better material, there's no point in replacing them. They're broken so easily by movement of the canopy.

But other than the sun visor arrangement, everything else about the Cheetah has been just excellent.

* * *

Tom Valentine is self-employed, and he and his partner, Bert Cleaver, recently purchased a Cheetah from Star Aircraft Sales, Inc. located at Montgomery Field in San Diego, California.

AP: Before you and your partner bought your Cheetah, what other aircraft did you own or rent?

Valentine: Well, it was kind of unique deal for us. We were both students at Star, so all we had flown were Grumman aircraft. We're both in the same line of work, so it seemed to our advantage, at least at this point in our flying careers, to own and lease back an aircraft. We were familiar with the Grumman, and liked it. And after following its progress as far as sales and performance records, we went ahead and bought a Cheetah.

AP: Have you flown any other types of aircraft besides Grumman?

Valentine: I just returned from a trip to Florida, where I was checked out in a Piper Cherokee. And let me tell you, there was no comparison! The Cheetah had it all over the Cherokee as far as its power, electric flaps, its handling characteristics and general features.

AP: What are some of the features that you like or don't like about the Cheetah?

Valentine: Well, in our particular airplane, and I've flown another Cheetah, so I know it was just with our airplane alone, there was a front nose wheel shimmy. But I do like the sliding canopy because it makes entering the airplane much easier. It's much better than the standard door.

AP: Does your Cheetah live up to your expectations?

Valentine: Definitely. We have the complete IFR package, and after flying with all of the dual nav/comm equipment, it's really hard to get back into the Trainers, or into an airplane that's less equipped. The Cheetah is really all that I hoped it would be.

AP: Were you satisfied with the way Star Aircraft Sales handled your deal?

Valentine: Yes, everything turned out well.

AP: Have you received good post-delivery service, as far as aircraft and avionics maintenance goes?

Valentine: So far. But I am talking to Bill Gordon, our salesman, about that nose wheel shimmy. Now, I haven't flown the plane since I got back from Florida, and that seems to be the only problem with the airplane right now. □