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Double Down

From Dream to reality: Moving Up from a single Engine to a twin story

By Ron Mohrhoff, Photos By Jessica Ambats

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I loved my Bonanza so much I never thought I would sell it. The sexy ramp appeal, the performance, the quality and its friendly nature made me feel as if I would keep it forever. So many trips to great places with friends and family for years revealed its distinct personality. Airplanes like 47A are among the rare machines that are easy to fall in love with.

However, I dreamed about owning a twin ever since I learned to fly, looking up to the pilots who had them, often in the run-up next to me, as if they were the real deal while I flew my single on humbler journeys. I'm not at all ungrateful. I flew 47A throughout its service envelope on five-plus-hour flights, into the teens with oxygen, with the window removed in formation for photo shoots, and to hot and high destinations loaded to max gross weight. I enjoyed long trips, flights at night, flights over water and flights as direct as the GPS can direct you, even if it was many miles over inhospitable terrain. Yet more than once in the Bonanza, I was over the Tehachapis at night direct to SMO, looking very closely at the engine gauges. The roar of two engines surely called to me.



Ron Mohrhoff and formation pilot Patrick Carter fly Mohrhoff's Cessna 340 at sunset over foggy Malibu, Calif.

The Search

I first fell in love with the Cessna 340 when my dad and I stopped at Harris Ranch for a steak salad on our way home from the Bay Area one day. There was one parked on the ramp with its tip tanks, air-stair door and teeny little aisle. It was one of the most beautiful airplanes I had ever seen, but then quite out of reach. I spent hundreds of hours on Controller looking through the 340 ads fantasizing, but alas, I flew and loved the comparatively economical Bonanza for years.



Mohrhoff's twin Cessna is based at Santa Monica Airport, where he earned his multi rating with Joe Justice of Justice Aviation.

real passengers after I earned my pilot's license. They were enthusiastic aviators and quickly became frequent gas-sharing passengers in the Bonanza. They offered to partner on a nice 340, and Karen insisted on pressurization and new engines.

We looked at dozens of airplanes all over the country and even travelled at our own expense to see a few. There are a lot of surprises in the used-aircraft market, and we kissed many frogs before we found a prince. It took over a year for the search to fully develop into a buy, and we learned a lot along the way.

Jerry Temple represented many of the best 340s on the market (he only lists planes with world-class pedigree), and in fact, had sold many of the same 340s more than once. We learned most of what we needed to know watching the marketing videos he makes for every listing. The videos are about an hour long, and he narrates every inch of the aircraft and offers his insights gained from his many years buying and selling 340s. The truth is, if you want a capable pressurized piston twin in today's market, you're going to be looking at a plane 25 to 30 years old because a new one doesn't exist. The continuing market for these amazing aircraft provides a living for a whole twin Cessna industry over which Temple may be the captain. We narrowed our search down to four airplanes, and Temple represented them all.



The path from dream to reality heated up when two senior aviator pals in the field conspired to see me take it up a notch as they had once done. Jerry Moret was selling his Cessna 335 (the non-pressurized version of the 340). The price was kind of within reach, and he gave me the combo to the hangar so I could go sit in it whenever I wanted. That was it. My imagination took over from there. That deal ultimately fell through, but then my parents started drinking the Kool-Aid.

The truth is, strangely unbeknownst to me, my mother Karen and father Roger had always dreamed of flying themselves, but kids, careers and many years came and went, and the dream lay dormant until they became my first

Temple introduced us to TAS Aviation (www.tas-aviation.com) in Ohio, one of the finest twin Cessna shops in the country, and N400HC had been maintained by them for more than 20 of its years in existence. Temple had sold the airplane to a businessman in Iceland, and when that owner traded up to a turbine, Temple sold

the plane to a pilot in Virginia who was retiring last fall and was flying the heck out of the plane to run out the engines. The timing worked out well: We made an offer and I flew out to Virginia between jobs to inspect the plane. When it was time for the pre-buy, there was no doubt we were taking it to TAS.



Tony Saxton's family flew cancelled checks for the Federal Reserve Bank all over the East Coast and the Midwest in a fleet of piston-twin Cessnas. They put thousands of hours on those planes, and that's how Saxton learned how to take care of them. That evolved into what we know today as TAS Aviation, with years of hard-earned experience in a friendly family atmosphere that made the purchase one of the most enjoyable experiences of my flying career. Marla Pancake is Saxton's capable no-nonsense sibling who was my main contact through the whole process, which she coordinated with precision. As soon as I knew N400HC was the one, I

made the call to trigger a process that ended at home, in Santa Monica, two weeks later in the new twin—trained, checked out and insured.

Pre-Buy

The first step was to get the plane from Virginia to TAS in Ohio for the pre-buy. Pancake had arranged for Phil Kennedy to fly commercial to meet me and fly the plane to Defiance. He's a retired Northwest captain and has flown twin Cessnas around the world for TAS for 20 years. He walked me through the preflight, and we were off in unseasonably warm and clear weather. The 1,900-hour RAM VIs were past TBO, but the plane screamed off the runway and climbed to altitude very quickly. The pressurization checked out, as did the autopilot and avionics. I remained a passenger on this flight, but there was a lot to take in.

“ I dreamed about owning a twin since I learned to fly, looking up to the pilots who had them as if they were the real deal. ”

Minutes after we arrived in Defiance, TAS rolled the plane into the hangar and started the pre-buy. The field is a county airport, but it really consists of TAS and a runway in the middle of green forests. I went over a short list of squawks with Pancake and made myself comfortable in the large office she shares with Saxton. They pulled the interior and the inspection panels, and put the plane on jacks. I think the whole process took two days. Pancake threw me the keys to the TAS ramp car, and I spent the evenings in town at the Hampton Inn. During the day, I peeked in on the work being done and was very happy to see a clean and corrosion-free airframe. Our goal was to find a very clean airframe with decent paint, interior, avionics and run-out engines. I sat in the hangar and asked a lot of questions while reading the POH cover to cover. I was in perfect company to get acquainted with the new airplane. Pre-buy completed, Temple and I finished up the negotiating and the deal was done. All parties had good reputations, the product was good and we trusted each other, so it went very smoothly.



Now it was time to get started on the insurance training requirements. I had passed my multi checkride only weeks before with Joe Justice at my home airport in Santa Monica and hadn't logged a minute in a 340. It

was intimidating, and I was told more than once that turbocharged piston twins are among the most complicated airplanes to fly. Pancake organized another trusted associate from her deep arsenal, James Duval, to begin my 340-specific training. He spent several hours with me on the ground during the pre-buy, and once the sale was completed, we started flying. Duval is a very easygoing Midwestern soul who made the experience comfortable, and he instinctively knew how to coach me through the process. I was thrilled beyond words in the left seat for the first time. I had already purchased the airplane without having flown it once, and while I was relatively certain I was going to love it, it was nice to have my expectations exceeded. With those two fat fuel tanks on the wingtips and 6,000 pounds of gross weight, my first impression was that this is big and very stable. You set the power and point it where you want to go.

Recurrent Training Center

The next morning, I was off to the Recurrent Training Center (www.rtcpilot.com) in Illinois with Phil Kennedy and his wife in his personal 310. He was headed to visit some friends and dropped me off on the way in a continuing effort to save me from the indignity of commercial air travel. RTC was a good choice. They were close to TAS so I didn't have to make a special trip later, and they had an actual 340 simulator configured very much like OHC. I enrolled in the initial course: one day in the classroom and two-and-a-half days in the simulator. The facilities were modest, but so was the price. However, I got the training I went for, not fancy furnishings and new carpet. I was the only guy in my class and received training tailored to my needs. Having read the whole POH and the Simcom manual I inherited from the previous owner, my instructor, Dave Patrick, didn't waste time on material I already knew and instead focused on the things I needed.



Jerry Temple represents many of the best 340s, such as this one, on the market.

Once in the simulator, Patrick put me through the paces. It took at least half of the first day to get comfortable with the sensitivity of the device, but once I could fly straight and level, out came the gloves. All flights were IFR, with Patrick on the computer just behind me throwing every possible failure at me at the worst possible times. Even though simulated, the experiences felt very real, along with anxiety and sweat. I dreaded what was coming at me next and was suspicious whenever two or three minutes of incident-free flight time passed. However, after each successful outcome, the reward was clear. I hadn't trained before in a simulator, but to safely experience catastrophic failures in IMC is really a wake-up call. Patrick initiated a split-flap scenario that I didn't identify that flipped the plane over and hurt my budding confidence, but I'll never take my hand off the flap switch again until they're deployed and the plane is still right-side up. I also left RTC knowing that this complicated plane must be respected, and I've chosen to fly it at all times like a professional. I always file IFR and follow a regiment of standard operation procedures and settings designed for every phase of flight. It really takes out the guesswork, decreases workload and increases safety. Every pilot I met at the facility was a professional getting their required annual training. I was the only owner-operator, but I'll be joining them next year.

In another expert TAS coordination effort, James Duval flew the 340 from TAS in Ohio to meet me in Illinois when I finished at RTC for the flight home and the balance of my checkride. It was less than two hours from the cockpit of the simulator to the cockpit of the real thing. Duval was by my side for the whole trip so I could collect 10 more hours



Ron Mohrhoff and his parents Karen and Roger celebrate the arrival of their newest family member.

trips planned. We've since skied fresh powder in Sun Valley, walked on the beaches of Mendocino in Northern California and visited relatives in Salt Lake City. And that was all in the first month.

Ron Mohrhoff is a 1,300-hour pilot with instrument and multi-engine ratings. He's a film producer living in Los Angeles and keeps his 340 at Santa Monica Airport. He flies often to stay current for flying missions all over the western United States. He's also a member and active pilot for Angel Flight West.

of dual, but he let me show off my training and just watched. What the pros already know, which was becoming increasingly clear to me, is that you can really learn in a simulator. I climbed into 400HC and went through the checklist, just like I did in the simulator— with a familiarity and comfort level that surprised me. I was intimidated, but I did what I learned and quickly found that I knew exactly what to do at each step. We departed KCMI into actual weather, not something painted on the video screens, and it was sublime. I was PIC on my first super cross-country to the West Coast, and the 340 delivered the dream in a big way.

My parents greeted me at Santa Monica with a bottle of champagne to christen the new family member. A lot had been accomplished in two weeks, and we already had many

The RAM VII Advantage

www.ramaircraft.com

As a fresh twin pilot with little turbo experience, I spent the first 50 hours flying the 1,900-hour RAM VIs that came with our plane to break myself in before we installed new engines. We planned to put in RAM VIIs right after this trial period, so we started the job even though the VIs were running so well when we took them out, some may accuse us of a crime.



The RAM VIIs deliver the best performance on this airframe short of a turbine conversion, and they run and sound like refined works of art. They're smooth and sexy and offer a whole lot of confidence and performance over other options. RAM Aircraft owns STCs for the improvement package that has been engineered to maximize all the power possible out of the venerable Continental TSIO-520-NB. At 38 inches, 2,700 rpm and 70 gallons per hour, they produce 670 horsepower, pushing you way back in the seat while accelerating to 100 mph in 15 seconds. I rotate at 86 knots, start a climb at an initial 1,600 fpm, and cruise up to 23,000 feet in 25 or 26 minutes.

The key to the RAM VII package is the AiResearch TA81 turbocharger. It's seven cubic inches larger and redlines 100 degrees hotter than its predecessor for better cooling and

added safety. The improved stainless-steel turbo and larger intercooler offer takeoff power up to 25,000 feet at lower manifold pressures and operating temperatures.

I've cruised 215-220 KTAS at 22,000 feet, but the real winner is climbing up to the 20s into speedy tailwinds, where I've witnessed 286+ knots ground speed on the GPS. A strong check in the piston column, there's also little penalty for descending lower to stay out of the headwinds on the way home.

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