

I have owned and flown a 1979 Cessna 414A for 14 months, accumulating 235 hours in all sorts of conditions. I bought it to replace a very nice Cessna T310R, which I flew for about a year. N414LL is known-ice, with RAM VII engines, vortex generators, winglets, a Shadin fuel management system and complete copilot instruments. It is equipped with Garmin 530/430 and audio panel; Avidyne EX-500; Bendix color radar, Skywatch Collision Avoidance and Strikefinder, all of which display on the Avidyne. I added a third AI, the Mid-Continent version with battery backup, GAMI fuel injectors, a JPI engine analyzer and a Garmin 396 which sits on my yoke, with Nexrad uplink and rudimentary TAWS.

I wanted all this stuff so I can fly long IFR legs (7-800 NM), avoid other traffic, stay away from airplane-killing weather and towers, and have double- and triple-redundancy. The weakest link in the whole deal is the Cessna 800 series autopilot—sometimes the altitude hold just doesn't want to work. Although I have no trouble hand-flying the airplane, as a single-pilot operator I would not consider flying the aircraft on a long trip, IFR or not, without a working autopilot.

The upgrade from the T310R came about because my family, including a dog, cannot all be wearing nosebags. The pressurized comfort of the 414A, which produces an 8,000 ft cabin at 22,800 ft, cannot be overemphasized. The sound levels are greatly reduced because of the thickness of the windows and pressure vessel fuselage. Basically, it is the flying carpet my wife always wanted, including a potty! If you are wondering, the winglets really do work. I typically get 215-218 KTS at mid-weight at FL 220, running 72% power.

Here's an even more interesting thing—normally, the RAM engines want to gulp down 19-22 GPH a side at higher power settings. However, thanks to the GAMI's and the graphic engine monitor, I can set the fuel flows at 13-14 GPH (That's not a typo: 13-14 GPH) at altitude, watch the TAS sink to 195 KTS, and drive the aircraft for nearly 7 hours. I recently completed a 5 hours trip with 1.5 hours of fuel left at the destination, after holding for 20 minutes and shooting an ILS. Yes, the engines run smoothly. No, RAM doesn't endorse that leaning technique, but my engine monitor tells me otherwise.

The 414A has an excellent safety record for good reason. It is a very stable instrument platform, and I find it as easy to land as the T310 or any of the large singles I've flown. The crosswind characteristics are good, and it's easy to make "squeaker" landings. I'm required to attend an approved school annual for recurrent training. It's an excellent idea, regardless of how much time you have. I use SimCom. My instructor, a 20,000+ hour ex-airline pilot, teaches using the autopilot as much as possible.

I was fortunate to have a consummate pro help me in locating my previous T310 and the 414A: Jerry Temple. If you are going to look for a complex pressurized twin of this sort, use a seasoned professional to help in the acquisition process, including pre-buy, valuation and negotiation. Using professionals from the start will help mitigate any unexpected and expensive surprises. This is a complex aircraft and will need a higher level of skill and experience to acquire and maintain. You should seek out and use a well-

known shop with twin Cessna experience to maintain the 414A, including the annual. The Twin Cessna Owners organization is a great way to keep on top of important information about these planes (www.twinessna.org).

Will I keep it? I'm already thinking about 300 KTS and 1,100 NM trips. That means turboprop. Once again, Jerry Temple and other skilled professionals will be helping me in the disposition of the 414A and acquisition of my next flying carpet.

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