



Student in a Skymasters

Q. Let me explain my situation. I have not flown for about 20 years and I have just a few hours (no license yet), mostly in a Cessna 172. Recently, my spouse and I had the opportunity to fly in a Cessna 172 and after three landings and 3.5 hours later, my spouse asked what it would take me to complete my license.

My thoughts are to buy a Cessna 337 Skymaster and find an instructor familiar with the nuances of the 337 and learn to fly 'my' specific plane. I can install a 2500-foot grass strip on my own property and build a combination hanger - barn - office near my house.

What are the training and insurance implications (and the associated costs) to do this? Is it even possible?

A. I would guess the biggest problem would be getting insurance in a Skymaster as a low time pilot. The underwriters will require dual instruction, a multi engine rating and solo time before you haul any passengers. If you are a low time pilot (less than 500 hours) there are very few companies that will even offer a quote for any type of coverage. If you do not have any retract time, there will probably be very little chance to get a quote.

In addition, if you do not have an instrument rating.... that's another hurdle.

Since you are not a licensed pilot, the chances of getting any coverage will be almost (if not) impossible. The only real hope for coverage would be getting your license in a Cessna 172 or similar aircraft and building experience prior to getting training in the Skymaster. You are looking at having to fly the simple type of aircraft for a few hundred hours (at least 200 hours) and getting retractable gear (RG) hours in a single engine RG aircraft (about 25 or 30 hours worth of retract time) before the underwriters will consider coverage in the Skymaster.

That said the next problem would be basing it on grass strip. Few aviation insurance companies approve putting a retractable gear aircraft (let alone a twin engine aircraft) on a grass runway. If it is a very nicely manicured, long and clear at both ends, maybe?



Therefore, you have a couple of things going against you from the start.

For example, I just quoted a 1400-hour pilot with an instrument rating and 550 hours of retractable gear time (but no multi engine rating) in a \$65,000 Skymaster. He is going to keep it on a 2600 grass, farm strip. Sounds kind of like your situation. We have only one quote and it is for over \$4000 a year. It is possible, in the right circumstances, for a licensed pilot to get insurance.

Send your questions or comments to
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Hangar Talk Q & A continued

Q. I am looking for the most efficient (i.e. efficient in terms of both pilot training and operating costs) six place aircraft that has a cruise speed of over 200 knots. Is it possible for you to list your top four choices and explain them? I would greatly appreciate your opinion.

A. That is a tough question. Do you want a single or twin? Are you sure you need six seats? Most of the smaller efficient aircraft have very small fifth and sixth seats. A few good singles have “book” cruise speeds that are over 200 knots. They are turbocharged (turbo normalized) and often pressurized. Of course, you need to remember that “factory book” speeds are representative of the aircraft operating in perfect conditions.

Most six-seat singles will not break the 200-knot mark. Many will make the 175 to 190 knot cruise speed. It will usually take a turbocharged and more than likely a light twin-engine aircraft to pass the 200-knot cruise regularly. Even the Malibu Mirage has a book cruise speed of only 201 knots. Of course, I am talking piston engine singles. If you jump to a turboprop powered single, the speeds go up pretty quick. That would open the door for the Beechcraft A36 and Malibu Jet Prop conversions or the Malibu Meridian. Faster, but more expensive

As far as efficiency, when it comes to aircraft that will carry six people and operate at those speeds, you will need

to be instrument rated and more than likely attend annual recurrent training. Operating costs will typically be close between the different models. All are large displacement six cylinder engines with turbo chargers (except for the Twin Comanche) and lower TBO's (time between overhauls as recommended by the factory) than their slower counterparts. They will also have retractable gear and constant speed propellers, which will increase the cost of maintenance slightly.

A few of the singles that have six seats available and have book speeds over 200 Knots are: Beechcraft V35A (or B) Turbo charged or a Cessna 210 Turbo or Pressurized and the Piper Malibu Mirage.

Next would require moving to a light twin. That would increase your training costs and your operational costs. Look at aircraft like the Piper PA 23 Turbocharged Aztec, C or D model, and the Piper PA30 C Turbocharged Twin Comanche. You can also look at the Cessna Turbocharged 310 Q models or later, or the Cessna T337H Turbocharged Sky-master. In the Beechcraft line, check out the Baron 55 and 58 models.

If you can get by with a four seat aircraft, check out the Cessna Turbocharged 182 RG, the Mooney 252 models, the new Cirrus SR22, Lancair Columbia 350, and 400 models. These aircraft have not passed the 200-knot cruise yet, but they are getting extremely close. An advantage of the Columbia and the Cirrus would be the fixed landing gear.

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