



LISA TURNER
COMMENTARY / AIRWORTHY



Check out the February 2020 digital edition of *EAA Sport Aviation* to read part 1 of Lisa Turner's "Secondhand Homebuilt Owner" series.



Secondhand Homebuilt Owner, Part 2

Ideas from the field
BY LISA TURNER

"TRAPS AND TIPS FOR the Secondhand Homebuilt Owner" in the February 2020 issue of *EAA Sport Aviation* hit a nerve. Apparently, a welcome nerve, as more than a dozen secondhand homebuilt owners responded with their own traps, tips, and stories.

"It's a tough position to be in," wrote one owner. "You look at the airplane you just bought, and don't have a clue what is what, or why the builder put things where they did, or how exactly to take care of it."

Another owner wrote, "Ah ... falling in love. Especially at Oshkosh; it's a toy store. You find a used kit airplane and simply have to have it, then find out there are some problems because you didn't have an expert look at it beforehand. Then you have to find the right person to correct it because you want to fly, because you are still in love, no matter what its problems are."

"As many traps as there may be considering a used homebuilt, when I was choosing mine, I kept thinking back to your words about value," another reader wrote. "That you can get simply outstanding performance in what is essentially a new aircraft with all the latest gadgets plus economy. I did find a few problems, but it was well worth the effort. I'm amazed at what I got for the money."

"I'm not a builder, I'm a flyer," another secondhand owner wrote. "I would much rather have a used homebuilt than a used Cessna. But the airplane I bought didn't come with any manuals or documentation or even the original plans and instructions. I had a tough time for a while, seeking out other owners who had built the same model, and I was able to construct some documentation for it. But it was difficult the first six months."

Another person commented, "I was stunned at the quality of the used homebuilt I bought. I'm the third owner, and the airplane is pristine. It came with a POH (pilot's operating handbook) and all the builder documentation. I'm working with an A&P to understand systems and maintenance. I couldn't be happier."

Yet another writer remarked, "The used homebuilt I bought had lots of extras on it, including soundproofing material on the inside of the fuselage, extra panel items, plush upholstery, and a fancy baggage compartment. It flew well going home but felt heavy. I had an A&P go over it when I got home. It was a good thing I didn't carry back any passengers — the aircraft was overweight. Apparently, the weight and balance had been done before the builder added another 100 pounds to it."

MORE TRAPS AND TIPS

All of these writers had “traps and tips” to share. Appreciative, I asked them if I could use their stories and ideas in a follow-up article. They were all excited about it and hope it helps secondhand owners avoid potential problems. They also emphasized that they were amazed at how durable their airplanes were. In spite of an array of problems and issues they found after the purchases, the airplanes didn’t display obvious safety deficiencies to the owners. They don’t recommend letting anything go and do recommend going through the *Secondhand E-AB Owner Checklist* (see page 25 in the February issue) in detail. They also marvel at how tough the homebuilts seem to be.

This is a theme I also heard from designated airworthiness representatives and technical counselors. After inspecting some of the projects that had been flying for some time, they were amazed when they identified issues that troubled them, such as missing safeties, inadequate or wrong electrical wiring, missing or wrong hardware, and structural workmanship deficiencies.

I assembled secondhand owner advice into six topic areas.

Technical Counselors

In the original article earlier this year, I mentioned taking advantage of a technical counselor who could walk you through systems and maintenance for a particular model. The secondhand owners emphasized the importance of this advice, saying that it was critical to their own success with their new secondhand homebuilt.

Many secondhand homebuilt owners don’t think of asking a technical counselor to visit their airplane because they think the TCs are only for building advice. But, getting a TC to look at your airplane can be a big safety advantage and also shorten the learning curve for the new owner. The TCs that I talked to about this said they would be delighted to help secondhand owners and think it’s a really good idea. One TC said, “Don’t trade safety for pride. You can’t be expected to fully understand an airplane you didn’t build, even if you know your way around aircraft. A TC can help you identify the idiosyncrasies and correct problems that the previous owner didn’t see.”

Technical counselors



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Research

It turns out that research, according to the owners I talked to, was the most important advice, and that traps do await the unwary. Here’s what they recommend:

Get to know the builder before the sale if you can. You’ll find out a great deal about the details of the build and the quality of the build. If you get an uneasy feeling, walk away.