AOPA PRODUCT REPORT

Queen Air 80 ranks high among the royalty of the air. Standard model, with two 380 h.p. engines, sells for $135,000, but 62Q, flown by the author, carried $79,786 worth of extra equipment

Two Plush Planes

Single-engine Piper Palm Beach Comanche and Beech's twin-engine Queen Air 80 are flown by AOPA. Both are designed to provide maximum comfort and ease of operation

by MAX KARANT • *AOPA 18*
Editor, The AOPA PILOT

Two interesting planes flown recently by AOPA: Piper's Palm Beach *Comanche*, and the new Beech *Queen Air 80*. Both aim at the ultimate in their class: the maximum in comfort, automation, and ease of operation.

Palm Beach *Comanche* is a deluxe version of the 250-h.p. *Comanche*. Actually, it's the most deluxe model of the *Comanche* (the "Autoflite", list price $26,880), with an even more deluxe interior ($320 extra), and a special exterior ($180 extra). This particular airplane—N-7813P, a factory demonstrator—went even farther. It had a Narco DME ($2,350 installed), Narco Mark X and Mark V with omni indicators, and Motorola ADF-T-12 ($2,560 installed), Altimatic autopilot ($1,195 when installed as replacement for Autoflite), rotating beacon ($120), and heated pitot ($50). Altogether, the value of this airplane came to $33,655.

To see it at its best three of us flew 13P to Florida and back over a weekend: Charles Miller (AOPA 128826), PILOT managing editor; Robert Bornarth (AOPA 195093), of AOPA's Service Department, and this writer. We flew 13P a total of 19:06.

The Palm Beach *Comanche* is the best Piper has done to date in producing a truly plush single-engine airplane. In 13P the Altimatic (Mitchell) autopilot held the plane so accurately in position that you could tilt the seats back, loll on the comfortable head rests, and just relax and watch the scenery while the plane did a better job of flying than you could. The luxury, comfort and automation was enough to make even the most blase pilot drool.

Several excellent features: you can carry 90 gallons in the wings (enough for nine hours at economy cruise), good ventilation (the windshield defroster took off a solid sheet of rime ice within seconds after I turned it on), ample heat, an excellent tank sump drain right beside the pilot's seat, excellent fuel-management and quantity-checking system, and very useful large compartments for maps, etc., under each front seat.

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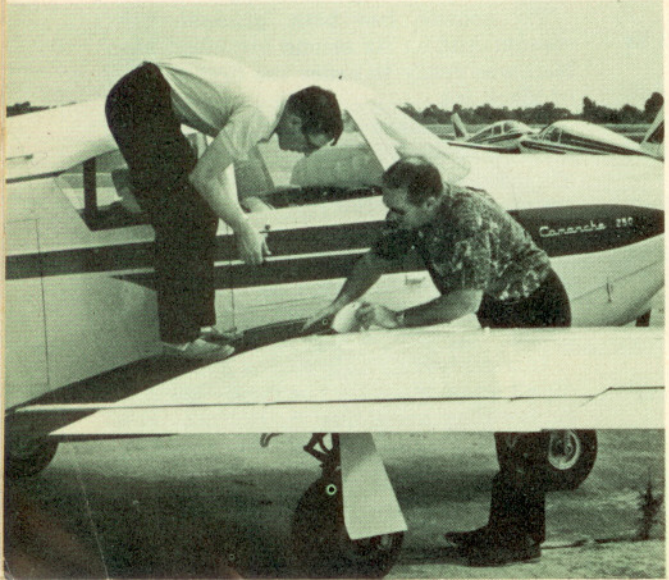
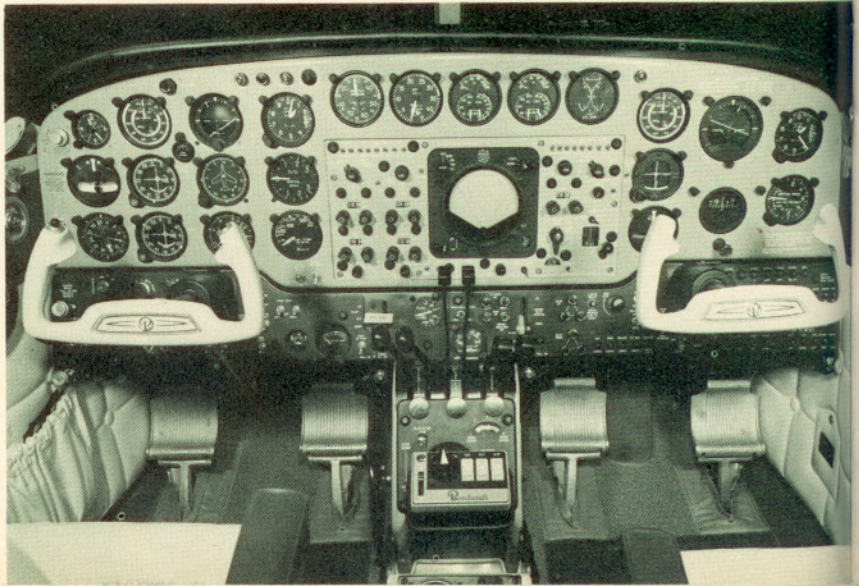
The author and Robert Bornarth (on the wing) inspect 13P's gas tanks during a stopover at Vero Beach, Fla. *PILOT Photo*



Instrument panel of seven-to-nine-place Queen Air. Beechcraft luxury twin is a gentle, easy-to-fly airplane. Learning which knobs to turn, switches to pull, etc., was most difficult part for Karant



Two Plush Planes

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Equipped the way it was, 13P required a number of compromises. Empty weight was 1,839.8 (it's supposed to be 1,630 for the standard 250 *Comanche*). Just the radio equipment alone weighed 75.5 pounds. Even with three people aboard, fuel had to be limited to 75 gallons to stay within maximum gross (2,900 pounds). With the full 90 gallons aboard, you could carry two 200-pound people and 120 pounds of baggage.

I was only able to make one flight with 90 gallons. Because of mechanical trouble, Miller and Bornarth returned from Jacksonville, Fla., to Washington by airline, while I took the *Comanche* to the Piper dealer at nearby Craig Field to have a standard directional gyro installed. Once finished, all tanks were filled and I flew non-stop IFR from Craig to Washington at 7,000 feet in 03:43 for a block to block speed of 156 knots (180 m.p.h.). By that time I was flying the airplane entirely by hand, using the replacement directional gyro.

During that 19 hours of flying the DME had quit, one portion of the Mk X was malfunctioning, the directional gyro (modified for the autopilot by Mitchell) had failed (I wasn't really sure of this until the radar controller at Jacksonville noticed I was unable to follow his heading instructions and suggested I not use it for my instrument approach, making a no-gyro radar approach under the 600-foot ceiling instead), the autopilot was out completely, and the magnetic compass was sticking.

Cruising power used throughout the flight was 65%, which averages 12.3 g.p.h. at 163 h.p. All true airspeed checks at all altitudes were as good or better than the Piper manual says they should be. Examples: 165 m.p.h. (statute) at 3,000 feet, 175 at 6,000, 178 at 8,000. Landing and takeoff performance is excellent, even at maximum gross. You can get 65% power for cruise all the way to 10,000 feet, and 55% up to 14,000.

All together, the Palm Beach *Comanche* is an excellent collection of useful features, making it one of the most versatile single-engine planes on the market, and a pleasure to own.

Queen Air 80

Queen Air 80 is so plush and expensive a private transport that it is primarily a novelty to the average AOPA member. I flew this factory demonstrator—N-362Q—for 02:39, and I must admit I enjoyed every second of it. But back to reality: 62Q is priced out at $214,786 on the wheel—$135,000 standard price for the airplane, and $79,786 (37.2% of the total price) for the extra equipment.

The *Queen Air 80* is a giant among general aviation aircraft. An expansion of its little brother (or sister—the *Queen Air 65* which has two 340-h.p. Lycomings), the 80 has two 380-h.p. geared, supercharged, fuel-injection Lycomings. A big airplane, the *Queen Air 80* grosses 8,000 pounds, can carry up to nine people, though six (including pilots) is normal. Maximum fuel capacity is 230 gallons, which is good for a maximum range of 1,330 miles at 45% power at 5,000 feet. Published cruising speeds range from 182 m.p.h. @ 45% power @ 10,000 feet, to 230 m.p.h. @ 70% @ 15,000 feet. Top speed is 252 @ 11,500 feet.

Except for the sheer management of all the equipment in the cockpit, the *Queen Air 80* is a gentle, easy airplane to fly. The pilot of a well-equipped *Bonanza* or *Comanche* would have little trouble with this ship, once he got his multi-engine rating. And the pilot of any light twin, from the *Apache* up, might even be able to check out in the *Queen Air 80* on the ground.

Most critical item on the *Queen Air 80* is its supercharged engines. Unlike the great majority of general aviation aircraft, you don't just shove the throttles wide open for takeoff. So the pilot must above all learn to go just so far with the throttles and prop controls, and no farther.

Other than the power plants, the greatest problem I had was in finding

all the switches, knobs and buttons, and quickly learning to operate the radios and flight instruments. Instead of the old-fashioned directional gyro, for example, 62Q had slaved gyro compasses which read the reverse from the more widely-used D.G.

But so far as the straight flight characteristics are concerned, this ship is as easy to fly as any of the light twins. The controls are heavy to about the same extent as those on the *Aztec* or *Twin Bonanza*. Maneuverability in the air is excellent. Landings and takeoffs are as easy as with the *Apache* or *Comanche*, and the rate of climb (1,500 f.p.m.) can be breath-taking if you want to try a short-field takeoff. In one such climb we climbed 2,000 feet at an average rate of 1,870 f.p.m. at a gross weight of just over 7,400 pounds.

Besides costing $79,786, the extra equipment in 62Q weighs 657 pounds. Just the radios weigh 219 pounds, the airborne radar (naturally!) 81 pounds, the Honeywell H-14 autopilot (about $10,000) 58 pounds, and so on.

The *Queen Air 80* is a dream to fly, is to be the standard *Queen Air* to be sold on the domestic market (the earlier 65 will only be produced for export), and is certainly well worth the consideration of any AOPA member contemplating spending anywhere from $150,000 to $250,000 for an airplane.

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