



Color scheme of Aztec D is simpler and stronger than previous designs. Plane's dimensions remain same as those of previous model. Nose and rear compartments hold 150 pounds of baggage or cargo each.

New model is basically the same as predecessors, but new touches have been added: decorators have been busy; basic flight instruments arranged in 'T' order; electrical switches are of rocker type. Prediction is made that Aztec will continue to be one of the most popular light twins

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AZTEC D Lives Up To Tradition

■ ■ She has an attractive new paint job. The interior has been laid out a good deal more attractively, she has an even more professional look, and her official name now is "Aztec D." The "D" is the latest version of the Aztec, but—thank goodness—she's still the same basic Aztec. Which means she should continue to be one of the world's most popular light twins.

It took me a while to get used to the location of the knobs, switches and buttons on N6540Y. But I finally did. And I finally remembered to stop flying around with the cowl flaps open all the time (which, I found, cuts the cruising speed about five knots!).

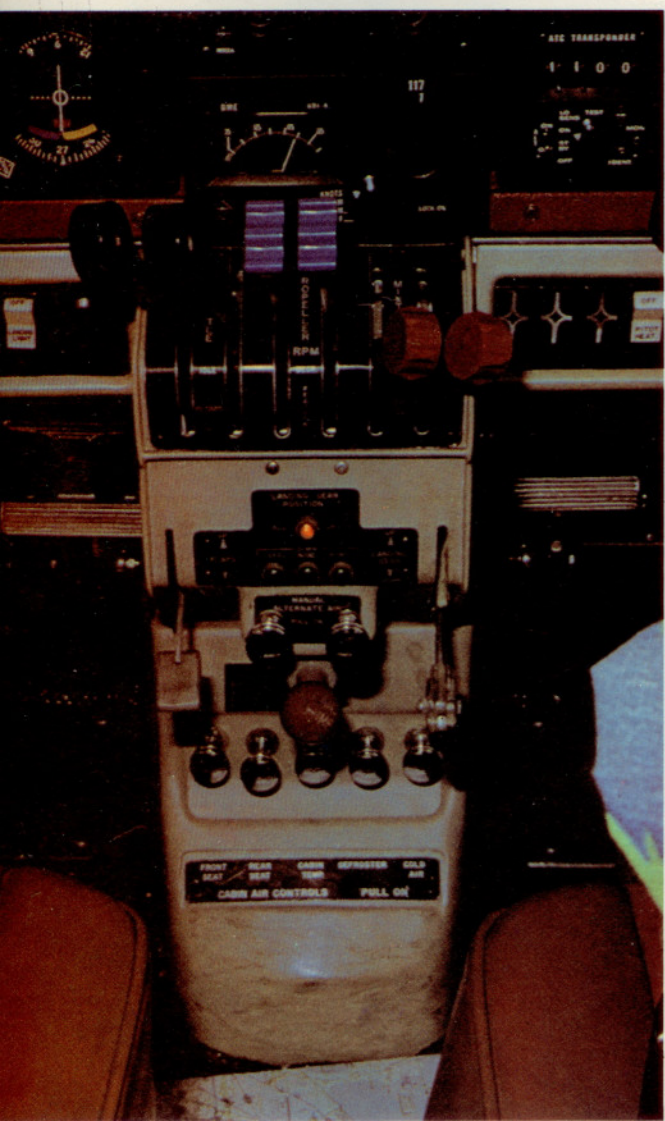
With six seats and a big baggage compartment both in the nose and behind the seats, the Aztec D is certainly one of the roomiest airplanes in its class for its power (two 250-h.p. Lycomings). And I can never quite understand how it gets such excellent cruise performance with that thick, high-lift wing. The fact is that I could regularly depend on a ground speed of 180-190 knots at 65% power at cruising altitude, measured with the ground speed indicator portion of the Narco DME.

To me, at least, one of the most beautiful things about the Aztec is its soft, gentle landing characteristics. I own a *Twin Comanche*, which is just

about the direct opposite in this respect. It's pretty near impossible to make a bad landing with an Aztec, and you can get into some of the shortest and worst strips imaginable—some I would hesitate trying in a *Twin Comanche*.

The basic airplane is pretty much the same as its predecessor: airframe, engines, and the like. But the "D" has gotten quite a bit of attention from the interior designer. All of the operating electrical switches, for example, are the rocker or cradle type, and are backlit at night. Even the radio function selector panel has such switches. The instrument panel has been modified, with the basic flight instruments

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Instrument and panel layout is reorganized and improved for the pilot. Ignition cradle switches are on left wall with master switch. Excellent Mitchell autopilot is just to left of control wheel. Center radio stack includes dual VHF navigation, 360-channel communications, one full ILS, one ILS localizer, ADF, DME, marker beacon and transponder. Aztec was cruising IFR at 9,000 feet when picture was taken. Power was 65%.

◀ Power, heat and ventilation are on the throttle quadrant, as are the gear-warning lights. (Amber light indicates gear is up; three green lights, directly below, come on when gear is down.)

Pilot's overhead lighting and ventilation is improved and simplified in the new Aztec D.



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in that airline "T," and the radios stacked vertically in the center of the panel. There's even a little warning light for the cabin door, to show if it's unlocked.

There are new ram's-horn control wheels, making it easier to see the instrument panel and switches. There are two 75-amp alternators to operate the 12-volt system. All the circuit-breakers are now out in the open, on the lower right side of the instrument panel, and easily visible.

This ship has an Altimatic III autopilot, which is much the same as the Mitchell President; Mitchell has made Piper's autopilots for years. The Altimatic III is an excellent autopilot, and certainly vindicates Mitchell for some of the early autopilots we used to find in Piper planes. This one does an excellent job of flying the plane, is smooth and gentle on the controls, holds altitude beautifully, and does an excellent job of coupling to either the heading indicator, omni or ILS. During the time I flew this airplane I had several occasions to use it under full IFR, and it worked very well. It makes ILS localizer approaches a good deal better than the average person can do by hand. But the autopilot has one drawback: it has a built-in airsickness feature. As you approach an omni station and the needle gets more sensitive, the autopilot chases the needle all over the instrument. By the time you actually fly across the station you quickly learn to snap the selector to the "heading" mode or you'll be all over the sky. Seems to

SPECIFICATIONS AND PERFORMANCE COMPARED

	Aztec D	Cessna 310N	Beech B-55 Baron
Engines and hp.	Lyc. 250	Cont. 260	Cont. 260
Gross weight (lbs.)	5,200	5,200	5,100
Empty weight (lbs.)	2,933	3,125	3,075
Service ceiling (ft.)	19,800	19,900	19,700
Cruising range (miles)	1,210	1,086	1,225
Cruising speed (m.p.h.)	210	237	225
Wing span (ft./in.)	37.2 (ft.)	36/11	37/10
Length (ft./in.)	30.2 (ft.)	29/5	27/3
Height (ft./in.)	10.3 (ft.)	9/11	9/7
Base price	\$57,990	\$63,950	\$59,950

me a little cut-out circuit in the left-right needle, which would automatically switch the autopilot to magnetic heading when the needle passed a certain point, would solve that.

While I haven't flown an Aztec C or its predecessors for a while, I get the strong impression that the new "D" is noticeably quieter at cruise. The ventilation has been improved, and it's easy to fly in shirtsleeves, winter or summer.

I averaged well over 1,000 f.p.m. in climb after takeoff, though I was never fully loaded to the 5,200 lbs. gross. The manual says its best rate of climb is 1,490 f.p.m. Stalling speed is shown as 68, the gear is both soft and rugged, so you can get into almost any usable strip. In approaching to land, the Aztec retains one feature that, while disturbing, is easily controlled once you're aware of it. When you lower the flaps during the approach, the nose pitches up steeply. If you're not pre-

pared, you hold hard forward on the wheel while frantically trimming the nose down, either manually or with the electric trim button on the control wheel. I tried it once at 120 indicated, leaving the wheel alone, just to see how aggravated that pitch-up is. As soon as I put the flaps down the nose pitched up, and kept going up right to the stall. I had to push forward on the wheel to keep it from stalling (by the way, the Aztec has a gentle stall). Like the tricks that *Twin Comanche* pilots have for landing smoothly, there are tricks that Aztec pilots use to cope with that pitch-up, such as pulling off the power beforehand, or lowering the flaps in a turn where you'd hold the wheel back anyway.

Piper lists 75% power as being normal cruise for the Aztec where, at 4,000 feet, they claim 210 m.p.h. At 65% power it's supposed to do 208 at 6,000 feet. The turbocharged "D" will do 236 at 24,000 feet. In the flying I did with 40Y I got that true airspeed for that power easily, and the ground speed was over 200 no matter what direction I flew.

But I never got the fuel consumption they claim. Instead of a rated 24 g.p.h. I averaged 25.6. This could have been either because the engines' mixture was set too rich (other Aztecs I have flown do give their rated consumption), the engine instruments could have been off, or the Radair exhaust gas temperature gauge wasn't peaking properly.

All told, the Aztec D should keep Piper on top in its class. □

Aztec Modified For Floats

An FAA supplemental type certificate for installation of Edo Model 679-4930 floats on the Piper Aztec has been obtained by Melridge Aviation Company, Piper Aircraft distributor for the Pacific Northwest and Alaska.

The seaplane installation includes the addition of a left side pilot's door. Approval has been received for both the Aztec C and D models by Melridge,

which has named the twin-engine seaplane the *Aztec Nomad*.

Since original announcement of the Aztec seaplane project over a year ago, extensive flight testing has been carried out and water handling characteristics and performance have exceeded expectations in all categories, said Melridge.

The *Aztec Nomad* will accommodate six passengers and 120 gallons of fuel.

It requires 1,750 feet for takeoff. Cruising speed is 160 m.p.h. The float installation, which is being marketed in kit form for \$23,500, permits conversion to wheels for seasonal operation. Installed kit price at Melridge is \$24,750. □

Piper Aztec Nomad deliveries began this month by Melridge Aviation, Vancouver, Wash.

