

New Cherokee 140 B's First Long XC Flight

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N5571F flies over the terminal area of the Flagstaff, Ariz., Airport (altitude 7,010 feet). The author reports the new Piper trainer took 7,000-foot airports in its stride.

Two weeks and a transcontinental trip give author a real affection for Piper's new version of its popular trainer

■ ■ Coast to coast and almost border to border certainly gives one plenty of time to learn about a new airplane, particularly when it's a trainer. Before we picked up the first new *Cherokee* 140 B destined for the West Coast, Piper Dealer Dale Erickson of Long Beach advised, "Don't get it back here until the 15th of the month because that's the official announcement date."

We didn't. It was over 42 flying hours that covered more than 5,000 miles and more than two weeks away from home before N5571F completed its circuitous route from Florida to California. We landed in 18 states and overflew five more. Our total fuel consumption was 356 gallons of 80/87 octane, just under 8½ g.p.h. and well in line with the factory's quotation of 8.4 g.p.h. for 75% power at sea level. Total oil consumption was five quarts. We cruised almost on-the-deck most of the time, in part because of headwinds but also because we wanted to take a close-up look at many parts of these United States.

At this writing, we should know more about the 140 B than just about anyone except the designers. This little trainer is no slouch when it comes to gobbling up the miles, tackling turbulence, driv-

ing rain, 7,000-foot-high airports, tiny "pea-patch strips" and sandy desert airports.

Thus it was that three of us more-or-less stealthily departed a National Airlines DC-8 in Melbourne, Fla., at dawn on the first of the month. N5571F, a bright and shiny new 140 B with an engaging 1969 white paint job and newly styled trim, was waiting for the sun to come up. The recording tachometer showed 2.22 hours, including the brief ferry flight north from the Vero Beach factory.

Our two weeks', and more, trip in this generously overgrown trainer involved a number of stops to research magazine articles. It also involved dropping daughter Dana and luggage in New York to depart as staff photographer on the Chapman College "World Campus Afloat" cruise.

So, we had an immediate opportunity to check out the full-gross-weight-carrying-capabilities of the new 140 B. 71F was so new that there was no new handbook and we worked with an old 140 "op's manual." This publication stated with ambiguity that the 140 will carry 200 pounds of baggage "or 340 pounds with 'family seats' installed."

Fred E. Weick (AOPA 9893), director of Piper's Development Center at Vero Beach, straightened us out on this problem. "Handbook material which you refer to obviously comes from an old PA-28-140 handbook," he said. "The PA-28-140 B handbook has not yet been released. . . . The area behind the pilot and copilot seats when used as a luggage compartment without jump seats is limited to 200 pounds, because of the strength of the baggage tiedown belts. When the two jump seats are installed in this area, 340 pounds of human cargo can be carried. If the Fiberglass rear bulkhead is installed with the jump seats, 100 pounds of baggage can be installed along with two 170-pound passengers."

That's not bad at all for a plane designed essentially as a trainer. We had one passenger and enough baggage to bring us up to the 2,150-pound gross weight allowance. Weick further explained that the first 909 of the 140's were restricted to 1,950 pounds gross weight. "The gross weight was increased to 2,150 pounds by adding a thicker baggage compartment floor and some fuselage structure. This would account for the 21-pound difference between the two empty weights."

Two bulging "B-4" bags, two Fiberglass Speed Graphic camera cases loaded with lenses and film, two suit bags, a map case and assorted smaller bags took up most of the space normally used for the left rear seat. Yet, with that 150 h.p. Lycoming doing the work, our sea-level takeoff roll at Melbourne exceeded the 800-foot "spec" only because we opened the throttle slowly on this

first flight.

Dana, who has spent considerable time in the back seats of 235 C *Cherokees* and Piper *Arrows*, remarked almost immediately after takeoff that she had as much or more room than in the full four-place version where plushy, padded seats take up some cabin space.

It was time for breakfast when we came up on Daytona Beach. There was no need to add fuel to the 50-gallon capacity of the 140 B. We checked for non-existent leaks and headed nonstop for Ft. Rucker, Ala., and a tour of the U.S. Army Aviation training installation. From Alabama, we out-raced a storm front to Walterboro, S.C., where Dan and Miya Williams of the Travelers Motel kindly furnished ground transportation and even a ride into town for dinner—their restaurant was being painted. Throughout the trip, we used AOPA's voluminous Airport Directory to find restaurants on the field or available courtesy ground transportation. This book is worth more than its weight in your map case, particularly on a flight far afield from your home area. The only problem we found was knowing exactly what state (other than exhaustion) we were in at any given time.

One of the fun factors in ferrying a trainer is the joy of viewing previously unexplored areas of these United States at fairly close range. For example, we found the world's biggest ghost town, not in the far west but north from Cape May along the New Jersey coast. This is the area where the beaches are jammed with visitors during the 13 to 14 weeks' summer season and virtually deserted when "the season" is over. Fly 300 feet above the surf and 300 feet off shore (that's legal) and you'll gape at town after town with no more than a handful of year-around residents.

We landed at Ocean City, Md., where tiedown, transportation and accommo-

dations were reported to be available. The net result was 10 gallons of fuel (they were short), no motel and/or transportation, no Unicom in operation and a less than active interest in the off-season visitor. We shook the blown sand from their very fine oiled strip and continued on up the coast.

As we crossed the mouth of Delaware Bay, over 12 miles of open water, we contacted both Waterloo and Sea Isle FAA/FSS for a modified "Lake Watch."

"If anything starts shaking, besides the crew, we'll give you a call," was the transmission from 71F.

At Cape May's broad Wildwood Airport, the Piper FBO, South Jersey Airways, assured us on Unicom that transportation, motels and meals were available. After tiedown in a brisk wind, we found that local cabs can't cross various city and county lines, so we spent the night at a clean little motel, with adjoining 24-hour trucker's restaurant, in the hamlet of Rio Grande rather than taking the time, trouble and expense of going to the resort towns of either Cape May or Wildwood.

After Dana, complete with baggage and cameras, deplaned at Asbury Park, N.J., our gross weight was down below the 1,950-pound category. Quite naturally, we missed much more than her weight as she started on her 4-month trip. Our take off and landing rolls shortened a bit and our indicated air speed came up a couple of miles per hour. We visited editors and friends (sometimes they're both) before starting our leisurely trek westbound. When you preprogram your mind for a two-miles-per-minute cruise and attempt to keep your hops to less than 2½ hours, the payoff is in magnificent vignettes: sailboats bobbing off shore, crumbling farm houses and abandoned windmills, wild deer and cowboys along the Santa Fe trail. It's an intimate touch of the

face of America that can't be reached in any other way. At 500 feet, you're close enough to see the details yet far enough away to miss the dirt. Did you ever see anything that looked ugly from the air?

We took a little longer going west, burned perhaps a half a tank more fuel, but it was certainly worth it. The Atlantic Ocean slid behind our trailing edge from Bridgeport, Conn., and we headed toward Lock Haven to see what the "other" Piper people were doing. Tree leaves were changing color into vivid yellows, reds and magentas. It's something that we don't see often in Southern California so there was a race to see which we ran out of first, colorful trees or color film.

There are some wild and wonderful things flying in Lock Haven including at least two new versions of the *Navajo*, but the Piper people want to surprise you—so we'll let them. We called Williamsport's FAA/FSS the next day to inquire about Cleveland weather—and promptly decided to spend another night in Pennsylvania.

When you literally live with a new model airplane for a couple of weeks, you have ample opportunity to dwell on the things that might be changed just a little bit. There's really only one basic area of question in this otherwise excellent flight package. We discussed this same item on the *Cherokee* 235 C in *The Pilot* (Sept. 1968) and had identical problems with the new 140 B. The complete carburetor heat system leaves something to be desired as far as we were concerned. With the 235 C, we had carburetor heat stick in the full "on" position during our first check ride at Phoenix, Ariz. The new 140 B waited

New Cherokee 140 B flying near home after a two weeks' cross-country flight that included landings in 18 states. Author Downie was at the controls when Tom Roberts (AOPA 298474) took this picture near Brackett Field, Calif.



until run-up following our fourth flight and jammed full-on at Savannah, Ga. Two and a half hours and \$16 later, we were back in the air. However, the flex cable and "flap handle" on the carb heat control gave us some apprehension all the way home.

Ever since Piper first introduced the "throttle quadrant," they've used a flap-shaped up-and-down handle to apply carburetor heat. This completely non-standard installation will certainly rise up and confuse *Cherokee* pilots as they "step up" to more sophisticated equipment with power-driven flaps.

The downward motion used to apply carb heat, as one would do prior to landing, is the same right hand motion that's required to close the mixture control to idle cut-off and is less than a hand-span away. Granted that this error would require some doing, it's still a good bet that someone has already done it.

Our query to Fred Weick at Vero Beach brought the following exclusive comment: "In regard to the carburetor heat control, this has given us trouble from the start and our power plant group has been working on a redesign. We hope to have a completely satisfactory arrangement in the very near future."

Just about everything else about the new 140 B is so delightful that you begin to take it for granted after a while. Soundproofing, for example, is excellent and will keep many a flight instructor happy. There's plenty of leg and shoulder room particularly up front. Visibility is excellent. The generous 115 m.p.h. flap-down speed makes approaches more precision than luck. The manual flaps give instant response when you want to "dump them" after touchdown to put weight solidly on the main gear for best braking. That dependable 150 h.p. Lycoming power plant up front, with its 2,000-hour overhaul schedule, gives a service ceiling of a whopping 16,800 feet at full gross. Altitude performance of this type is particularly inviting to fly the high western mountains.

While the cross-country miles rolled by below, there was a chance to study the old 140 "book" while the world's greatest copilot (a knowledgeable mate) did "the driving." The new 140 B has moved the engine gauges and the omni to the left side of the panel to leave more room for those wonderful, expensive black boxes. The tachometer was dropped to the bottom of the panel on the left, as on the larger-powered *Cherokee* models. The throttle quadrant friction lock was formerly a knurled knob that wouldn't gouge your copilot's knee. The mixture control was formerly a push-pull knob. The carb heat knob was to the right of the throttle and the circuit breakers were on the left. Now circuit breakers are across the bottom of the right side with space for an "AutoFlite" autopilot (5.3 pounds and \$450) at the bottom left.

Normally, you wouldn't expect a king-sized trainer to have an autopilot, but N5571F was to be the first 140 B

demonstrator in the Southwest, so it had a full-house panel. In the middle of the panel was a Narco Mark 12A that performed without a hitch throughout the entire trip, but the airports were more fun where we didn't need it.

Piper has continued two definite contributions to safer flight in the 140 B. They have an engraved pretakeoff and prelanding check list on the panel directly in front of the pilot. While this list is obviously abbreviated on a fixed-gear, fixed-prop trainer, it's at least there to remind you to use rich mixture, fuel boost pump and draw from the fuller tank before landing. The second simple item on Piper's safer-flight list are the two neutral-density sun shades that cut glare, yet you can still see through them when flying into the sun at that time of evening when the cows are heading for the barn and the little powered birds are usually heading for the gas pit.

From Lock Haven, we flew over those little hills of the Alleghenies that trap so many pilots. We landed in Cleveland and visited the American Yankee factory. Then it was on westward atop a

ever, of more immediate importance, his airport has both a good motel and restaurant adjoining the property. These smaller, fully equipped fields give fast service, usually eliminate the need of a rental car and make early departures a cinch.

Into each fun-flight a little rain must fall, but we had more than we bargained for between Highland, Ill., around Lambert Field in St. Louis where "the Friendlies" vectored us on radar, and on toward Kansas City. Take it from two who now know; the new 140 B will swim through a cloudburst that cut forward visibility to the point where we made that famed 180° turn. Despite the associated lightning, turbulence and scud, the 150 h.p. powerplant never missed a beat.

We "drove" U.S. Interstate 70 to Columbia, Mo., and landed for lunch to see if the rain would subside.

After a peek at the Columbia weather radarscope, an hour-long game of gin rummy in a rain-swept cockpit and a review of the latest weather, we decided to try it again. Kansas City, just 120 miles to the west, was reporting accept-

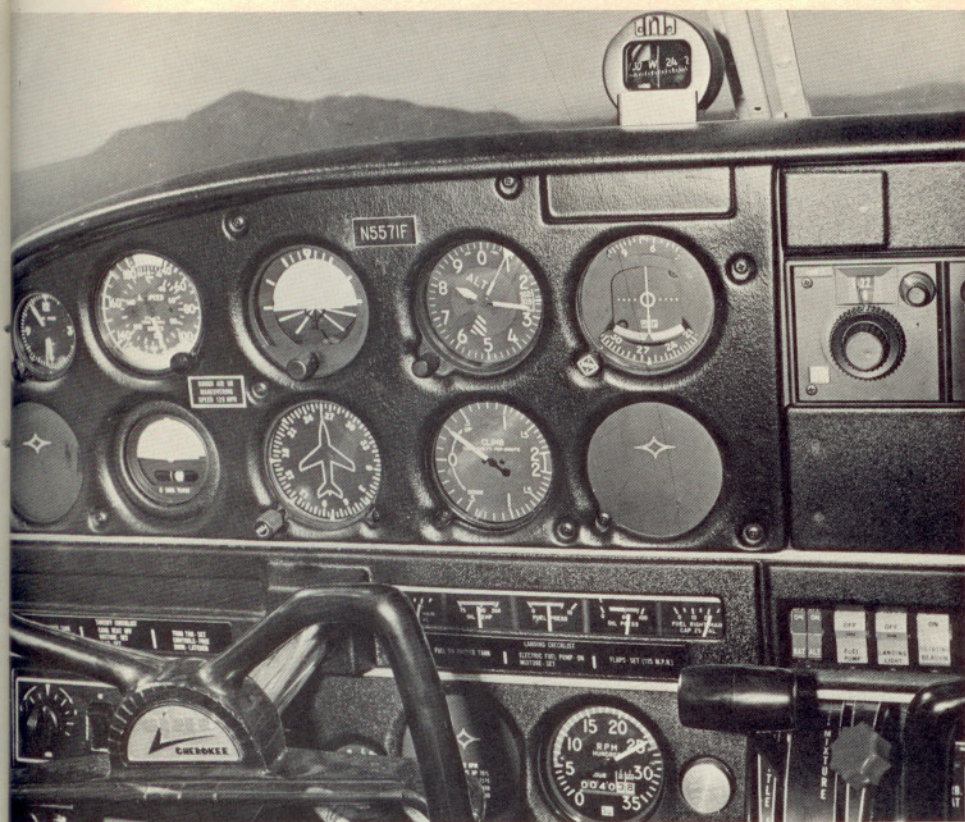


broken-to-solid deck with a landing for fuel and lunch at Bluffton, O. The AOPA directory showed Unicom but no food and a quick call to Piper dealer Harold A. Carey assured us that his car was available for a drive to the restaurant.

Bluffton has a brand new oiled strip, financed in part by the State of Ohio's program to have a paved airport in every county. Mr. Carey pointed out where the new motel, restaurant and swimming pool were planned and invited us back next year to try them out. And, from the enthusiasm shown in Bluffton and elsewhere in Ohio, we'll bet that they make it.

Then another 3:15 through persistent, lumpy headwinds to a landing on the sod strip at Highland-Winet Airpark. Here owner Jim Luber (AOPA 81313) has one of the finest assemblies of expensive sailplanes we'd ever seen. How-





Above: In-flight view of N5571F's main control panel. Gauge readings are self-explanatory. An indicated speed of 120 m.p.h.—corrected to 137 m.p.h., at 8,300 feet,—is shown. The plane is climbing at 300 f.p.m. in turbulence near Flagstaff, Ariz. Note the engraved check list at the bottom of the panel and the circuit breakers on the right of the panel.

Left: New Piper Cherokee 140 B at Santa Fe, N.M., Municipal Airport (elevation 6,344 feet). Takeoff was made in 80° temperature and density altitude of almost 10,000 feet. N5571F confounded skeptical spectators by easily taking off, climbing to 10,500 and continuing its journey westward.

Right: N5571F and its occupants spend a peaceful night at Clayton, N.M., after 140 B bucked strong headwinds all the way from Boonville, Mo.

Below: Cherokee 140 B takes shelter under an aging shed at Boonville, Mo., following an unscheduled landing in a heavy rain storm. A new appreciation was gained by the author for small-town airports when the 2,200 strip got N5571F out of a sticky situation.



able visibilities and improving ceilings. We made it almost half way and then chickened out. When the car lights (they were all on at 2 p.m.) began to blur in the driving rain, we circled back—wet, droopy and glad to be out of the lightning-infested, on-the-deck weather—for a landing at Boonville, Mo. You never really appreciate these little 2,200-foot (perhaps 30 feet wide) small-town airports until they represent just about the only place to land unless you want to try the freeway or take a very good chance of winding up on your back in the middle of some farmer's muddy field.

Boonville looked mighty good and the 140 B showed that its 535-foot landing roll was no myth, particularly after crossing some extremely high trees, whipping in the crosswind, on the approach end of the field. Naturally, you bring the flaps up the instant the wheels

touch the ground for the best possible braking even on a wet runway.

The airport office was open with the key in the door, the heater was on and the area toasty warm, but there wasn't anyone around. After all, who would expect any flying business on such a very wet Sunday afternoon?

We stuffed N5571F into an empty stall and rode into town with an obliging group of teenagers who had stopped to watch us land. The remainder of the afternoon was spent grudgingly watching the pro football game from Kansas City—just 40 minutes away—where there wasn't a drop of rain on the field. However, incessant lightning and rain squalls outside the motel discouraged any thoughts of returning to the airport.

On westward, the country began to look more like home to us. We took 6 hours and 43 minutes into steady headwinds to travel from Boonville to Topeka to Dodge City and on to spend a comfortable night in Clayton, N.M.

The next morning, we were tempted to help herd cattle as we flew down the original Santa Fe trail. We felt a little like Columbus when we were able to locate "the trail" with distinct tracks of wagons and stage coaches plainly visible from the air. The route had been penned on a New Mexico State Aero-

navics chart by the Clayton Weather Bureau Man (one eight-hour shift only). We even scared up four white-tailed deer just east of Wagon Mound, but when we circled back for a better look, they had blended back into the natural coloring of the high prairie.

Santa Fe, N.M., is a story in itself. And, if you're in the habit of looking for the FAA/FSS telephone number under "U.S. Government, FAA," try it again in Santa Fe under "Transportation, Department of . . ."

Al Best, the genial State Aviation Surplus Property Officer, who had acted as our guide, stayed around the municipal airport just to see if the 140 B would really fly with the midday temperature over 80°F and the density altitude nudging 10,000 feet. Santa Fe has an altitude of 6,344 feet, but the main runway is 8,350 feet long and we asked for a southbound (downhill)

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departure under no-wind conditions.

After leaning the red mixture control back more than half its travel, we climbed out easily to 10,500 feet and headed westbound (on flight plan) in search of the Indian ruins at Chaco Canyon National Monument. There are few check points in this desolate Chaco Mesa; a couple of dry washes may occasionally pass for rivers and a few jeep tracks may or may not be roads on the charts. Frankly, we didn't find the set of ruins we were hunting for and it would have put us overdue on our flight plan to spend much time hunting. You can't win 'em all so we landed on time at Gallup for fuel.

Gallup is still 6,450 feet above sea level and we really didn't need full fuel tanks. We asked that they be filled "to the standpipe only" (36 gallons total). Yet when we signed the chit it was for 33 gallons and both tanks were brimful. This was the third time we'd been topped off after requesting "standpipe only." However, we were still well under gross, so we didn't drain any fuel and took off for Flagstaff. If you want only partially filled tanks, it's a good idea to breathe down the line boy's neck during fueling. We didn't add any more fuel until we reached Palm Springs, Calif., and really didn't need it there.

Flagstaff, Ariz., is one of our favorite RON spots for a number of reasons. We

have friends there and the 7,010-foot airport elevation makes an efficient cross-country stop because you're at cruising altitude almost before you're out of the pattern. Latest addition to the Flagstaff Airport is a lighted parking area for 60 planes, complete with five large lights to make night parking easier and discourage vandalism. The lights were installed by the Arizona Public Service Utility and cost the city \$6.25 per month, including maintenance and new bulbs.

We took off the next morning and headed downhill for an hour and 35 minutes with the only day of tailwinds on the entire trip. Our next landing was to see E. G. "Slim" (AOPA 31229) and Nancy Kidwell (AOPA 262195) at their Three Corners airport, 13 miles south of Searchlight, Nev.

Over a sandwich and tea—remember, we're flying—we found an opportunity to do our good deed for the week and looked forward to a steak dinner as a reward. A dejected young man wandered into "Slim's" Cal-Nev-Ari Casino and said that his car had broken down. He was due in Palm Springs to open his restaurant at 4 p.m. and it was then nearly 2 o'clock. "Slim" raised an eyebrow and said that he really didn't have the time to take a charter trip in his *Comanche*. He asked if we had space available. Since our fuel was now down

to half, the baggage more bulky than heavy, we agreed because Palm Springs was only a few miles off course.

That's how Charley Brown, proprietor of a new cook-it-yourself steak house in Palm Springs, happened to be our passenger. The 140 B walked right off "Slim's" packed dirt strip and we took just 41 minutes to cover the 140 airline miles and deposit our passenger ready for work. It was Mr. Brown's first trip in a lightplane but he was both appreciative and enthusiastic. We didn't mention the tailwind. Who knows, perhaps he'll even learn to fly one of these days.

In 1958, Piper sold their fabric-covered *Tri-Pacer* for \$8,800 with essentially the same 150 h.p. Lycoming that powers the *Cherokee 140 B* series. Prices on the faster, all-metal 1969 airplane, 11 years later, begin at \$9,600. Few items of hardware have shown such a small percentage of increase over a similar period of time.

When N5571F was taxied up to the parking ramp of Medina Aircraft in Long Beach, we advised the line boy, "It's one of yours. Where do you want it parked?" He smiled and pointed. As soon as we'd climbed out, a crew was busy cleaning off the mud, dust and bugs in preparation for a display of the new bird the following day.

And a mighty nice bird, too. □