

vesterday's wings

The Spartan Executive

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Most pilots, seeing one of the rare Spartan Executives today, would have a hard time convincing themselves that this thoroughly modern-looking bird was actually an antique dating from 1935. A little thought, however, would bring the realization that big radial engines haven't been put into production general aviation planes in this country since the early 1950s. Further, the tailwheel landing gear is another anachronism that has all but vanished from modern production.

C1766

The sequential factory designation of the Executive, Model 7, was a switch on previous Spartan practice. Originally, the model number reflected the seating capacity. The first Spartan was the C-3, a three-seat biplane introduced in 1927 by a predecessor company. This was continued by Spartan into the 1930s, and 201 later versions were delivered to the U.S. Navy as NP-1 primary trainers in 1940. Then there was the C-4, a four-place high-wing cabin monoplane of 1929, and the little C-2 two-seater, which appeared in 1931.

The five-place Executive was one of the first general aviation models to follow the early 1930s trend of military



The lines of the sleek, all-metal Spartan Executive can hold their own with any of the industry's present products. This is one of several owned by Texaco in the post-World War II years.

and transport planes toward all-metal semimonocoque construction, fully retractable landing gear, flaps, and completely cowled radial engines. The layout was conventional for the time, with pilot and copilot or passenger sideby-side at throw-over wheel controls, and two or three passengers on a single, full-width seat at the rear of the cabin. A single door was provided at the left front seat, and the flaps and landing gear were electrically operated.

gear were electrically operated. The powerplant of the early Executives was the 300-hp Pratt & Whitney SB Wasp Jr. engine. The 1938 version of this same engine produced 450 hp and was used in later Executives without change of designation. The performance table accompanying this article shows how the additional power improved some performance parameters while the associated weight increase compromised others.

Though Spartan had a design that was a world-beater in its class, the company was a tiny organization by early post-depression standards. It remained so, and the output of Executives totaled only 34 units. While the firm had produced unspectacular but reliable biplanes in the C-3, the name was best known in the late 1930s when applied to the associated Spartan School of Aeronautics, which is still in business at Tulsa, Okla. Originally, the firm had been the Mid-Continent Aircraft Co., also of Tulsa, but in 1928 it adopted the given name of the C-3 airplane and became the Spartan Aircraft Co.

The few Executives produced were virtually custom-built items, their price tag of \$23,500 being a little too high for the average individual who would want a fast five-seater. The name "Executive" was well chosen; the principal owners were corporations.

Spartan tried for foreign military sales in 1938/39 by modifying the basic Executive into a canopied two-seat light bomber and trainer called the "Zeus" (also known as the Model FBW-1 and the Model 8). Few were sold.

Military use of the Executive came about in an unexpected way. Faced with a shortage of light transports, the U.S. Army bought 16 Executives from their owners in 1941/42, applied warpaint, and designated them C-71s. Most of these survived the war and found ready sales on the surplus market; some even went to the same corporations that had owned Executives before Pearl Harbor.

Although Spartan produced no more Model 7 Executives after the war, it indicated a willingness to do so, as evidenced by renewed listings in such references as Jane's All The World's Aircraft. The company did build a single prototype of a new Model 12 Executive, however, with tricycle landing gear and minor refinements. There just wasn't much else that could be done to improve the basic 1935 model.

When the Model 12 did not sell, Spartan concentrated its production efforts on its famous line of streamlined metal house trailers and on its other lines, which included aircraft radios, food freezers, and floor furnaces. The company name was changed to Spartan Aero Repair in 1948.

Current FAA records show 10 Model 7s and the single Model 12 still flying. That's a remarkable survival rate of almost 30 percent for a model in the 35to-40-year age group. No longer corporate equipment, these now function mostly as shining stars in the antique airplane movement, where their age not their appearance—places them.



38 ft 111/2 in 26 ft 97/8 in

P&W Wasp Jr.

SB, 300 hp @

2,000 rpm @

190 mph @ sea

level, 210 mph

57 mph (flaps)

@ 9.600 ft

1,530 fpm

22,000 ft

950 sm

9,600 ft

2,600 lb

250.8 sq ft

1938

38 ft 111/2 in 26 ft 97/8 in

P&W Wasp Jr.

SB, 450 hp @

hp @ 2,200 rpm @ 5,000 ft 2,987 lb

212 mph @ 5.000 ft

208 mph @

63 mph (flaps)

1.430 fpm

24,000 ft

1.000 sm

4.400 lb

9,600 ft

2,300 rpm, 400

250.8 sq ft

1936

Span Length Wing area

Powerplant

Empty weight

Gross weight

Cruise speed

Landing speed

Rate of climb

Service ceiling

Range

High speed