## General Aviation in 1974: ••• Nineteen hundred and sever and most will say "good riddand cynicism, inflation and recession resigned from office. Arabs play

No year of tears

■ Nineteen hundred and seventy four is dead and buried, and most will say "good riddance." It was a year of tumult, cynicism, inflation and recession in America. The President resigned from office. Arabs played usury with oil. The stock market sagged below 600. Long queues formed outside unemployment offices. Everything cost more—sometimes a lot more—than a year before.

The boom-time '60s went bust, and things got downright scary.

Yet, almost unbelievably, flying was fine. General aviation was healthy, optimistic and growing. Manufacturers made more money than ever before. There were more airplanes, more active pilots and more hours flown in 1974 than in any other year in the past decade.

The aviation pros were delighted, naturally, but slightly stunned as well. When viewed in light of the nation's economic situation, aviation was like some rosy-cheeked lad scampering around a cancer ward. It was unprecedented.

That is not to say that general aviation didn't take its lumps. First, the federal government tried to reduce the amount of fuel to general aviation by 42%. We got most of our avgas back, but paid ever so dearly for the many-hued fluid. The days of 45¢ 80 octane were gone forever. When you could find it, 80 octane cost between 60¢ and 70¢ a gallon, while 100 octane pushed towards the 90¢-per-gallon mark at some big-city pumps.

Almost all aircraft sported a new, battery-powered radio in 1974—again, by federal dictate. The ELT proved to be more often an annoyance than a life saver since most activations of the emergency beepers were false alarms.

The FAA made airspace above Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh and Seattle a bit more exclusive last year. Transponders are de rigueur in these new Group II terminal control areas.

Then there was the biennial flight review. If you wanted to continue flying, you had to prove yourself to an instructor's satisfaction. FAA insisted the review was not a flight check per se, but the fine distinction was lost on the thousands of pilots who had to take it. Deadline was Nov. 1.

These factors, combined with the inflation/recession gripping the nation, had some ill effects upon general aviation. The number of new students dropped by more than 17,000. FBO profits slid, due to rising costs and government-fixed avgas prices. Finally, new plane deliveries slumped slightly in December, marring an otherwise excellent year for airframe manufacturers.

But even these negative effects must be qualified some.

Student starts were down, yes, but the new students—and there were 113,997 of them—were described by one industry official as being much more serious about their training than in the past, and thus much more likely to become pilots.

While FBOs complained that their profit margins on fuel sales were cut, they were still making a profit. Larry Burian, head of the Aviation Business Association within the National Aviation Trades Association, said: "Business has been pretty good, overall. Aviation is one of the brightest spots in the economy."

And although only 1,134 new aircraft were delivered this past December, as compared with 1,240 new planes the same month the year before, you needn't weep for the manufacturers. American plane makers for the whole of 1974 delivered over 14,167 airplanes (almost a record) worth \$909 million (easily a record). Add to that the 841 commercial helicopters delivered, valued at \$190 million, and 1974 turns out to have been a billion-dollar year for American general aviation airframe manufacturers alone. Hardly a year of tears.

December's sales slide was not regarded by the manufacturers as the first crack in the dam. The General Aviation Manufacturers Association has predicted that 1975 sales will exceed last year's, a forecast that was buoyed by January's performance, in which 1,155 aircraft worth \$77.7 million were delivered. Deliveries for the same month in 1974 were 1,139 aircraft, valued at \$64.6 million.

Even the number of new students was up in January. Some 9,794 men and women began flight training in the first month of this year, a figure unequaled in at least the past five Januaries.

And even though flying was more expensive and certain airspace more exclusive, 742,400 airmen were able to log 31.2 million hours of flight time, in 158,000 general aviation aircraft, without too much trouble. That represents an increase of 30,000 fliers, one million hours, and some 4,500 aircraft over figures for the previous year.

The logical question that arises, when considering these statistics, is why. Why is general aviation going great guns when huge enterprises like the auto and construction industries have been going nowhere but down? Why, when gas is priced like gold and depression is pressing recession, is the flying flying?

Cessna, the giant of general aviation, credits several factors for the surge, but the key to it all is business.

For years lightplane makers have been preaching to businessmen about the flexibility and time savings offered by

## This Is General Aviation

Aircraft	(FAA estimates)
Total	158,000
Single-engine piston	128,800
Multi-engine piston	19,700
Turbine	3,900
Rotorcraft	3,200
Gliders, balloons, etc.	2,400
Airmen	
Total	742,400
Student	185,000
Private	315,600
Commercial	192,000
Airline transport	38,700
Helicopter (only)	6,200
Glider (only)	4,900
Instrument ratings	159,000
General aviation hours flown	
Total	31,250,000
Single-engine piston	22,700,000
Multi-engine piston	5,100,000
Turbine	2,100,000
Rotorcraft	1,150,000
Other	200,000

Air	Traffic	<b>Recorded by</b>	FAA	Control	Towers
		1964 -	1974		

	Operations				General
	Towers	(in millions)	Airlines	Military	Aviation
1964	278	34.1	22%	11%	67%
1965	292	37.8	21%	9%	70%
1966	304	44.9	18%	7%	75%
1967	313	49.8	19%	7%	74%
1968	322	55.2	19%	6%	75%
1969	328	56.2	19%	6%	75%
1970	331	56.1	19%	6%	75%
1971	343	54.2	19%	6%	75%
1972	357	53.6	19%	6%	75%
1973	364	53.9	18%	5%	77%
1974	395	56.8	17%	5%	78%

Source: FAA

General Aviation Aircraft Deliveries, 1964 – 1	97	1
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	Aircraft Delivered	Retail Value (in millions)
1964	9,459	\$250.6
1965	12,053	\$401.6
1966	15,723	\$514.3
1967	13,536	\$453.1
1968	13,749	\$553.2
1969	12,581	\$632.2
1970	7,297	\$430.4
1971	7,377	\$407.2
1972	9,636	\$532.6
1973	13,646	\$828.1
1974	14,167	\$909.0

Source: General Aviation Manufacturers Association

## **GENERAL AVIATION continued**

general aviation, versus the air carriers and the automobile. Apparently, those businessmen finally saw the light.

A Cessna spokesman said the hard-money times now upon us are forcing salesmen to be more aggressive, necessitating face-to-face selling techniques. These salesmen can get to the customer more quickly and efficiently by plane.

Furthermore, many planes compare favorably with automobiles in fuel consumption, and as airline fares and auto prices rise, the cost gap between various modes of transportation and the lightplane is closing.

Productivity is yet another consideration. As Cessna noted, "Instead of having 10 district managers covering an area by car, you have fewer people covering the same areas and accounts by planes. . . and save on salaries and transportation costs."

Today, about 80% of all flying is for business and commercial purposes.

But while money is the motivation behind general aviation's current popularity, it is also its potential killer. Everyone involved in the business of flying readily admits that should the economy truly collapse, general aviation, like every other industry, will suffer.

The overall state of the economy was one factor in Piper Aircraft's recent decision to postpone indefinitely production of a new light twin called the "Arapahoe." The company said "the national economy and buying mood would not warrant a very high business risk of going ahead with the program at this time."

It must be noted, however, that the state of the economy did not stop Piper from introducing its top-of-the-line Cheyenne, its Pawnee D, or its Seneca II in 1974. And all three models are selling rather well.

Nor did the economy stop Grumman American from unveiling its 180-hp Tiger or Enstrom its 280 Shark. The Navion was back in production in 1974, as were Taylorcraft, Great Lakes and Hiller. The resurrected Mooney works in Kerrville, Tex., turned out 130 Rangers, Chaparrals and Executives in this first full year of production. And Gates Learjet began deliveries of its new long-range models 35 and 36 in 1974.

The number of new profiles on the flight line is not likely to diminish, either. Grumman American has its new light twin flying, as does Beech. Beech is also experimenting with a two-place trainer, and Cessna is working on a tri-jet Citation and a new turboprop. Meanwhile, Rockwell has agreed to develop a new twin in cooperation with Fuji Heavy Industries of Tokyo. And Jim Bede now predicts his cozy BD-5J jet will be in production soon, and the pusher-propped BD-5D —well, sometime after that.

The mood among manufacturers is not pessimistic.

Pilots and aircraft owners might well look to the future

with a bit less enthusiasm, for by all indications flight will cost more as time goes on.

NATA's Burian flatly predicts gasoline will cost more in 1975. Talk of gas rationing or more stringent allocations bodes no good for flying, either.

If you want to fly into big-city airspace, you'll probably need an encoding altimeter as well as a transponder now. As of Jan. 1, both pieces of equipment were required in all Group I TCAs and, as the rule stands now, they'll both be required in Group II TCAs on July 1. AOPA has taken FAA to task over the encoder requirement in the lesser TCAs. The agency is considering dropping the encoder requirement for the Group II areas, but has not rescinded the order as yet.

The Ford Administration is also pushing for implementation of "departure fees" at tower-controlled airports (\$10 per takeoff at radar-equipped towers, \$5 at nonradar fields) and fixed fees for pilot licenses, permits, tests, etc. It is unlikely that all or any such proposals will pass this year, however. Flying has always been expensive; user fees, high-priced

avgas and new avionic requirements simply assure that tradition's continuance.

Yet, in spite of such expenses, and in spite of severe national economic and energy problems, general aviation flourished in 1974. Now, to 1975. . .  $\hfill \square$ 

	Student Starts by Month				
	1972	1973	1974		
January	7,515	7,608	8,200		
February	7,936	8,622	6,195		
March	10,176	10,513	7,661		
April	10,445	10,513	7,960		
May	10,495	10,712	10,013		
June	11,174	12,242	10,970		
July	10,366	13,473	10,261		
August	15,007	14,643	12,431		
September	10,850	11,568	10,320		
October	10,962	11,715	10,863		
November	10,298	12,385	9,770		
December	6,319	7,940	9,353		
Totals	121,543	131,934	113,997		

Source: FAA

## U.S. Landing Facilities, 1969 - 1974

			Open to the Public <sup>®</sup>		
	Total		Airports	Heliports	Seaplane Bases
1974 <sup>2</sup>	12,732	Publicly owned Privately owned	4,074 3,898	174 145	186 205
1973	12,700	Publicly owned Privately owned	3,890 2,668	99 102	182 184
1972	12,405	Publicly owned Privately owned	3,867 2,730	92 98	180 176
1971	12,070	Publicly owned Privately owned	3,850 2,762	76 98	182 175
1970	11,261	Publicly owned Privately owned	3,764 2,847	56 86	153 178
1969	11,050	Publicly owned Privately owned	3,684 3,026	48 93	149 192

<sup>1</sup>Most airports closed to the public are privately owned.

<sup>2</sup>Source: AOPA's AIRPORTS U.S.A. 1975. All other statistics from FAA.