

Budget Buys


Affordable luxury

Try the oft-overlooked
Beechcraft Musketeer Sport
for comfortable transportation

BY ALTON K. MARSH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER





Last year I called the Cessna 152 the "last affordable airplane" and reported that an IFR-equipped model goes for \$30,000 on the used market (see "Budget Buys: The Last Affordable Airplane?" August 2001 *Pilot*). That was before I flew a \$28,000 IFR-equipped Beechcraft Musketeer Sport.

The 150-horsepower Musketeer III A23-19 Sport has a panel large enough for IFR avionics and a cabin wide enough to assure you'll still be "just friends" with the passenger when you land. Yet, its four-seat capacity costs about the same as a two-seat Cessna 152.

Some think it is so slow (most owners report 104 KTAS average cruise) that it is justly compared to a Cessna 152. I saw 100 KTAS during a flight at 2,500 ft from Augusta Municipal Airport, Kansas, in a Model B19 owned by Ken Williams of nearby Wichita. It was built in 1966, the first year the Sport was offered. Although it's really a two-seater, an optional bench in the rear adds passenger seating.



Slow? No, it's perfect

It's the perfect airplane for Williams. "It feels solid and stable. I'm a chicken," he confessed, "and I like it because it is simple, stable, with a good reputation and an engine that is hard to break. It feels safer in turbulence than other models."

Sure, this newly minted 100-hour private pilot looked at other models

before making his decision. He found that the Musketeer was half the price of a used Piper Archer; a used Cessna 172 would cost one and a half to two times as much. "It costs a pittance of a new one," he notes.

Yes, the 180-hp Sundowner, the model created when Beechcraft re-named the unsuccessful Musketeer,

There's plenty of room on the Sport panel for IFR equipment. The interior is roomy, even if speeds are more like those of a Cessna 152.



was on Williams' short list. But the Sundowner's 116-kt cruise speed didn't seem all that much faster for the money. If Williams has any model envy, it would be for the Beechcraft Sierra 200, another refugee from the Musketeer family, with retractable gear and a 200-hp engine that produces 145-kt cruise speeds. But now you're talking twice the money.

Williams is quite happy with his Musketeer Sport. His work as a psychiatrist requires him to travel a circuit to several outlying hospitals ranging from 75 nm to 260 nm from Wichita. "Yes, it is relatively slow, but it is perfect for the distances that I fly." With winds typical of Kansas, Williams is used to seeing 85-kt groundspeeds in one direction and 140 in the other on most trips. He did take the Musketeer to Corpus Christi, Texas, once to pick up his two daughters: Although the aircraft carries a bladder-busting 57 gallons of fuel while only burning nine or 10 gallons per hour, Williams stopped both ways "just for safety."

Crisp turns

Williams offered a demonstration flight in his aircraft one gusty Kansas day last year. The first thing I noticed after entering through a Bonanza-wide right door was the expansive, postless windshield that not only offers a great picture-window view in flight, but also improves the pilot's ability to scan for other aircraft. The steeply sloping engine cowl made it difficult at first to visually set the correct attitude for level flight. I made several unintentional climbs while subconsciously trying to place the aircraft's nose on the horizon.

Williams had praised the aircraft's stability, and I found his praise was well placed. (Some owners have complained about poor longitudinal stability, blaming the use of a stabilator design.) While it has a crisp roll rate that makes for responsive fingertip turns, the Musketeer won't bank unless you want it to. I pulled the nose high and let go, discovering that the aircraft returned to level flight in four oscillations. It's a good IFR platform, as the saying goes. Williams has an excellent trainer to use for his instrument rating and for light IFR flying. As for other traits, such as behavior in stalls and slow flight, there is nothing scary to report.

Landings need a little discussion, however. Williams warned me that if I



landed with too much speed or without enough flare, the stiff rubber shock absorbers in the trailing-beam landing gear might set up an expensive porpoising incident that neither he nor I would soon forget. With that warning, I came in nose high on three landings and never had a problem. I was especially grateful for the Musketeer's nice manners in—by my East Coast standards—the gale-force crosswinds present that day.

Good as new

Williams is the beneficiary of improvements made by the previous owner, Frank Evanega, the technical manager of the American Bonanza Society and a mechanic.

The Musketeer was priced at only \$6,000 when Evanega found it on a ramp in Houston, half-stripped of paint and equipped with radios that barely worked. The engine was 1,000 hours beyond the recommended time between overhauls. Evanega, who owned the airplane from 1987 to 2001, overhauled the engine himself for \$5,000, finished the paint job for \$2,500, and invested \$8,000 in new avionics. The paint is in terrific condition, thanks to the fact that the aircraft was not only hangared, but also was kept covered with a fresh coat of wax.

In 1989 Evanega replaced the windows, floorboards, and side panels. In 1999 he added a King KLN 90A GPS and a two-place David Clark intercom. Other touch-ups included reupholstered seats and new Cleveland wheels and brakes.

Evanega bought the aircraft when he worked for Beechcraft, now Raytheon

Aircraft, and was looking for something affordable. "The airplane has the Beech feel and quality," Evanega said. "Is it a Bonanza? No, but you can tell it is a Beech when you close the door."

The baseline Model 23 Musketeer reached its first customers in 1962 as a 160-hp aircraft with a claimed cruise speed of 115 kt. In 1964 the model line was renamed the Musketeer II A23 and

had a 165-hp Continental engine and a third window on each side of the fuselage. The Musketeer III series, launched in 1965, comprised three models: the 165-hp B23 Custom, the 200-hp A24 retractable Super R, and the two-place 150-hp A23-19 Sport. The Sport was aimed at the flight school market and, with optional equipment, was available in an aerobatic model.

SPECSHEET

Musketeer III A23-19 Sport IFR-equipped Vref price: \$32,800 Price as tested: \$28,000

Specifications

Powerplant	Lycoming O-320-E2C, 150 hp
Recommended TBO	2,000 hr
Propeller	Sensenich 76-in dia
Length	25 ft 1 in
Height	8 ft 2 in
Wingspan	32 ft 7 in
Wing loading	15.41 lb/sq ft
Power loading	15 lb/hp
Seats	2-4
Cabin length	7 ft 11 in
Cabin width	3 ft 8 in
Cabin height	4 ft
Standard empty weight	1,502 lb
Empty weight, as tested	1,439 lb
Max gross weight	2,200 lb
Max useful load	953 lb
Max useful load, as tested	760 lb
Max payload w/full fuel	611 lb
Max payload w/full fuel, as tested	418 lb
Fuel capacity, std.	60 gal (57 gal usable)
	360 lb (342 lb usable)
Baggage capacity	270 lb, 28.8 cu ft

Performance

Takeoff distance, ground roll	885 ft
Takeoff distance over 50-ft obstacle	1,320 ft
Max crosswind component	17 kt
Rate of climb, sea level	700 fpm

Cruise speed/endurance w/45-min rsv, std fuel (fuel consumption) @ 75% power, best economy, 7,000 ft	114 kt/4.9 hr
	(60 pph/10 gph)
@ 65% power, best economy, 10,000 ft	
	107 kt/5.4 hr
	(54 pph/9 gph)
Service ceiling	12,950 ft
Landing distance over 50-ft obstacle	
	1,220 ft
Landing distance, ground roll	590 ft

Limiting and Recommended Airspeeds

V _X (best angle of climb)	65 KIAS
V _Y (best rate of climb)	72 KIAS
V _A (design maneuvering)	115 KIAS
V _{FE} (max flap extended)	96 KIAS
V _{NO} (max structural cruising)	133 KIAS
V _{NE} (never exceed)	152 KIAS
V _R (rotation)	65 KIAS
V _{S1} (stall, clean)	51 KIAS
V _{SO} (stall, in landing configuration)	43 KIAS

All specifications are based on manufacturer's calculations. All performance figures are based on standard day, standard atmosphere, sea level, gross weight conditions unless otherwise noted.

The Musketeer Custom was later renamed the Sundowner 180, while the Super became the Sierra 200. Although Beechcraft renamed the Custom to distance it from the unsuccessful Musketeer marketing experience, it is still listed in FAA records as the Beechcraft Musketeer Sundowner. The Sundowner gained a second door on the left side, while the Sierra's glareshield was lowered 1.5 inches—a change adopted by the Sundowner and Sport in 1973. Beechcraft stopped using the 165-hp Continental IO-346 engine in 1968 after reports of overheating.

The 23 and A23 have the highest useful load of 1,000 pounds (1,025 pounds for the A23). The useful load of the A23-19 Sport is 875 pounds, while that of the B23 and C23 Musketeer is 975 pounds.

There are 498 Sport aircraft registered with the FAA (out of 905 built), according to the AirPac Plane CD database. There are 2,423 Musketeer 23 models of all types still on the books and 190 A24 aircraft. Finally, there are 719 Sundowners listed.

Some things to watch for

Evanega suggests caution for those considering one of the Musketeer models with the 165-hp IO-346 engines. Parts are difficult to find, including the crankshaft and cams.

Still, Evanega generally has nothing but compliments for the Sport. "I had family seating in the airplane," he said, which explains why Williams now has a Musketeer with an optional bench seat in the rear. "I would not attempt to fly it with four grown adults in it. Some of the models had a 160-hp engine, and that was a good, honest four-place airplane."

Evanega also recommends that owners and buyers pay close attention to the landing gear. Parts are difficult to find. The gear itself is magnesium and therefore subject to corrosion.

Service difficulty reports and airworthiness directives over the years have included landing gear problems, including cracked or broken housings, attach bolts, trunnions, and forks. Owners responding to a survey for *The Aviation Consumer* seemed satisfied with overall maintenance requirements, but they complained about leaky windshields and doors, and about water getting into the vacuum pump or air filter and shutting down gyro-driven instruments.

The Musketeer may experience fuel-tank unporting during slips or takeoffs, according to an AOPA Topic Sheet, *Beech Musketeers*, available on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/members/files/aircraft/b19.html). Therefore, slips are limited to 30 seconds, and takeoffs may not be made with less than 11 gallons in each tank. Also, there are reports of inaccurate fuel gauges that indicate full when the tanks are actually only two-thirds full. Call the AOPA Pilot Assistance Hotline

i Links to additional information about the Beechcraft Musketeer may be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml).

(800/USA-AOPA) for a free subject report on the Musketeer.

Williams benefited not only from Evanega's modifications, but also from all of you. Used aircraft buyers have taken little note of the Musketeer, and that has kept sale prices low. So don't pass this article on to a friend until you've had time to evaluate it for yourself.

AOPA

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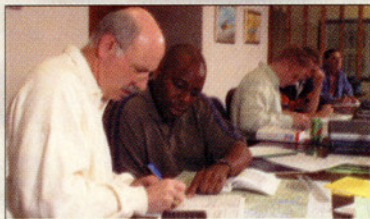
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