



ROBIN R-2160

*Now on approach from the north:
a sport aircraft you don't have to build yourself*

BY EDWARD G. TRIPP

The Robin Sport, originally a French design now being built in Quebec, was formally introduced to the U.S. market at last year's AOPA Convention in Orlando, Florida.

Back then, U.S. certification was expected by the end of the year (it already has received French and Canadian approval). The process—as usual—was quite a bit slower; but a company representative stated that final okay is expected by the beginning of November.

If the remaining steps go as expected, the U.S. light aircraft market will have another alternative for production, personal aircraft.

The Robin Sport is one of the latest developments in a family of piston singles from French designer Pierre Robin. It is an aerobatic (stressed for +6Gs and -3Gs), two-place, low-wing monoplane that has appeal as a personal, dual-purpose (touring and aerobatic) machine and that also might find a niche as an advanced trainer/basic aerobatic trainer.

It may very well be that one of the fundamental appeals of the Robin in the United States is its basic conventional arrangement and appearance.

This might make the aircraft's sporting appeal more accessible to a larger number of pilots.

At first blush, the Robin looks like a Cherokee with a canopy. Upon closer examination, the canopy is obviously a huge one that looks as though it covers a four-place cockpit rather than the two seats that are inside. The gear and gear-leg fairings are even bigger than those on current Cherokees, the rudder is enormous—three times larger in area than the vertical stabilizer—and there is a long, deep ventral fin.

The cockpit and instrument panel also are conventional in layout, save for the two sticks that replace the control wheels most of us are accustomed to these days and the two throttles operated by the left hand of each pilot. Full dual controls are standard.

Two *Pilot* staff members have flown a Robin equipped to the proposed U.S. specifications. I asked the other one, Tom Horne, if he had any impressions that remained from his brief flight of a year ago. His eyes lit up, a smile of pleasure remembered broke across his face. "Light, very light," he said, "and responsive." That was it.

No qualifications, no buts or ifs, and no negative memories or impressions.

His reaction pretty well sums up mine during a brief flight a few months ago. Before flying, I had asked Bill Rice of Blavat Advertising in Erdenheim, Pennsylvania (just outside of Philadelphia), who is the U.S. representative of the Lachute, Quebec, factory, for a typical walk-around. Again, the Robin is conventional. There are no particular tricks, although it is obvious that some thought has been given to accessibility for both pilots and mechanics.

The most different thing about the Robin in preparation for flight is the forward-sliding canopy, which juts out over the cowl to let the pilots into the cockpit. It is a feature that draws a crowd every time.

Entry is easy, unless you are accustomed to stepping down into the aft cavern of your limousine. The seats, semi-reclining, are comfortable, and there is sufficient shoulder, arm and hip room. (Both Rice, who was check pilot for my flight, and I are tall, robust—that means not svelte—pilots who would put any cockpit to the test.) A five-point harness for each

continued

seat is available on the aerobatic version of the Robin.

Start, taxi and pre-takeoff procedures are pretty standard. Our initial takeoff was at gross weight from a warm and relatively short runway. Acceleration and liftoff were positive. Elevator forces are very light and the surfaces are quite powerful.

The controls are well harmonized and very responsive. I expected a tendency to overcontrol with the large rudder surface, but it was the elevator that required the most attention during control input.

I was not able to try any aerobatic maneuvers during the brief flight (my aerobatic check pilot had to attend to other business), but I tried everything within the Normal category syllabus. In slow flight, steep turns, stalls and a few landings and takeoffs, the Robin appeared to be an airplane without tricks and without fuss.

It is delightful to fly, with skiesful of visibility fore and aft through the huge canopy. The crisp controls do not seem to have the usually concomitant tradeoff of instability that would make the Robin pilot work hard during long cross-country flights.

It is a very satisfying airplane to fly, and it appears to be a genuinely dual-purpose aircraft that very few pilots would have difficulty with during transition training.

I did not have a chance to compare the actual with the factory performance figures, but it does seem that the Robin has enough efficiency and a useful enough cruise speed and endurance to make trips to see mother-in-law or to close that big deal within a 400 nautical mile radius practical. (An optional 29-gallon long-range fuel tank, stored in the luggage compartment, is available, as well as a full IFR kit installed as a factory option.)

Another thing that makes the Robin practical is its price in comparison with other, available aircraft. It will sell, when certificated, in the same price range of the basic trainers built by Beech, Cessna and Piper. It has the advantage of higher performance and thus greater utility to go with its Gallic differentness.

A U.S. dealer has been signed up: Mira Slovak Aviation of Santa Paula, California (see "Partenavia P-68C," May 1981 *Pilot*, p. 92), which has six Robin Sports on order.

Rice said that current plans include the establishment of a U.S. (as op-

posed to a Canadian) delivery base to simplify the paperwork and a parts depot at Pottstown-Limerick Airport in Pennsylvania.

With the practically nonexistent ac-

tivity in personal, sporting—or any other kind of—light aircraft available for less than the sticker price of an exotic automobile, it would be good to see the Robin certificated and avail-



able to the market in the United States.

After all, a light single that could be equipped for cross country and light IFR operation that is also aerobatic would be a welcome addition to an anemic marketplace.

Just think of being able to do a victory roll (off airways, of course) after you had flown in to sign the contract for that big order. □

ROBIN R-2160 SPORT

Base price (est.) \$36,750

Price as tested \$42,100

AOPA Pilot Operations/Equipment

Category*: Cross country

Specifications

Powerplant	Avco Lycoming O-320-D2A, 160 hp @ 2,700 rpm
Recommended TBO	2,000 hr
Propeller	Sensenich 2-blade, fixed pitch, 72 in
Length	23 ft 4 in
Height	7 ft
Wingspan	27 ft 4 in
Wing area	140 sq ft
Wing loading	12.6 lb/sq ft
Power loading	11.03 lb/hp
Seats	2
Cabin length	6 ft 9 in
Cabin width	3 ft 6 in
Cabin height	4 ft 1 in
Empty weight	1,210 lb
Empty weight, as tested	1,350 lb
Gross weight	1,764 lb
Useful load	554 lb
Useful load, as tested	414 lb
Payload w/full fuel	359 lb
Payload w/full fuel, as tested	219 lb
Fuel capacity, std	195 lb (32.5 gal)
Fuel capacity, w/opt tanks	369 lb (61.5 gal)
Oil capacity	8 qt
Baggage capacity	77 lb

Performance

Takeoff distance, ground roll	754 ft
Takeoff distance over 50-ft obst	1,345 ft
Rate of climb, sea level	1,023 fpm
Max level speed, sea level	139 kt
Cruse speed/Range w/45-min rsv, std fuel	
@ 75% power, best economy	
8,000 ft	131 kt/363 nm
@ 65% power, best economy	
8,000 ft	122 kt/430 nm
Service ceiling	12,500 ft
Landing distance over 50-ft obst	1,361 ft
Landing distance, ground roll	722 ft

Limiting and Recommended Airspeeds

V _y (Best rate of climb)	73 KIAS
V _a (Design maneuvering)	127 KIAS
V _{fe} (Max flap extended)	97 KIAS
V _{no} (Max structural cruising)	127 KIAS
V _{ne} (Never exceed)	179 KIAS
V _{s1} (Stall clean)	55 KIAS
V _{so} (Stall in landing configuration)	46 KIAS

*All specifications are based on manufacturer's calculations. All performance figures are based on standard day, standard atmosphere, at sea level and gross weight, unless otherwise noted. *Operations/Equipment Categories are defined in June 1982*

Pilot, p. 93.