

One Size Fits All, or Does It?

By Scott Bengtson

When McDonald's came to my home town in the 70's it always amazed me at the speed they could deliver a hamburger. This was long before the Happy Meal had been invented and the menu selection was burgers and fries "the McDonald's way". If you wanted to disrupt the process and create frustration in the customer service line, you just had to ask for something special. My Dad could not eat onions and when he would ask to hold them from his burger, the entire order process became a train wreck and there we were, waiting for that special order while everything else was getting cold. While McDonald's was providing it to us their way, the aircraft industry was offering products that would fit any appetite. Cessna was by far the most prolific in models, in 1979 just the single engine line alone Cessna offered the 152, 172, 172XP, 172RG, 182, 182RG, T182RG, 180, 185, 188, T188, 206, T206, 207, T207, 210, T210 and the P210. Not to leave out the twins, these products were all available: 337, P337, 310, 335, 340, 402, 404, 414, 421 and 441. Within each of these models there were avionics options from no radios to full IFR with several autopilot choices. Some might argue that the low reliability ARC radios Cessna was installing would be the same as a no radio airplane. The airframes had endless selections of options, openable windows, strobes, adjustable seats, wheel fairings, skylights and extended range fuel tanks, and the list goes on.

In those days the manufacturers had to be everything to everybody, there was not a niche that could be left unfulfilled. The competitors were always trying to find the weakness in each other's model line to get their foot in the door. Cessna owned the two place trainer with the 152. The Skyhawk (the most produced aircraft in the world) kept Cessna the king of the 150/160 hp four place singles, but Piper always gave Cessna fits in the 180 hp class. Piper built the Cherokee 180 under multiple names, but Cessna never got any traction on multiple attempts at offerings in that horsepower range.

Looking at the product year 1979, one of Cessna's most successful years in volume (8400 units), using the basic Skyhawk airframe Cessna created three models, the standard Skyhawk, the 195 HP Hawk XP and the retractable gear Cutlass that all used the 172 airframe. Any one of these could be bought without radios or a full IFR package. The ability to create and meet wide market needs with the same basic airframe was a large part of the Cessna single engine success story. Schools all over the world still use the 172RG as a complex trainer for commercial students.

The story line continues with the 182 series, using the same airframe that has its roots back to the 180. Cessna created a family of 182 models that meet a wide profile of performance and a wide profile of wallets.



1956 172

The basic 182 gave the world a “fill the tanks and fill the seats” four place airplane. From this, came a high performance retractable gear, great cross country airplane the Retractable Gear R182, which was then followed by the ultimate low cost speed machine the Turbocharged TR182. Cessna turbo-normalized the basic RG and made a great performing aircraft. Both the R182 and the TR182 out perform any Cessna single made today.



1960 182

What a utility line up, the 180 was the fourth post war design by Cessna and was a big brother to the 170. This classic conventional gear model stayed in production in the larger engine version the 185 until the last handful were delivered in 1985. These airplanes are still considered favorites around the world, operating in remote unimproved airfields serving mankind. The 206 was the genesis of the big cabin nose gear airplanes, starting as the 205 and sharing all the same parts of the 210 except for the retractable gear and grew into the 206 with the installation of the bigger IO-520 engine and a change of flap and aileron configuration. Cessna grew the 206 into the 207 by increasing the cabin length approximately three feet and pushing the firewall forward balancing the big machine. Both of the models were available with turbocharging and they also featured a large cargo door for convenient loading. Once again even in the utility market, Cessna made airplanes for every potential customer, even the 188 agricultural airplane was available.

The ultimate high performance line up was the 210 family, Cessna pioneered high wing retractable gear aircraft and created a high performance 6 place travel machine. The standard 210 would cruise at 170 knots while carrying aloft 1600 pounds. If you wanted more performance and were willing to go up, the T210 would do 195 knots at 20,000 feet.



2006 T182

If you willing to go up but didn't like using oxygen, then the P210 would be for you. The P210 was the very first commercially successful pressurized single and after 1978 all of these models were certified for icing operation if so equipped. Cessna offered their customers three six place models capable of over 200 mph and all weather aircraft.

Jump forward to today, I am now able to order my McDonald's any way I want it without having to wait, but now when I order a new Cessna, it is only the way "Cessna" wants it. Cessna's selection was limited after the restart of production in 1996 to three models, all fixed gear, and basically two radio packages. These were the 172 Skyhawk, 182 Skylane and the 206 Stationair all of which had been outstanding aircraft in their previous life. The 182 and 206 were both offered in turbocharged versions and the Skyhawk started offering two engines, one with 160 hp and the other 180 hp.

Along came Garmin, revolutionizing the avionics industry and Cessna started offering the G1000 package as an option in 2004, but within a few years made it the only avionics available. The new base price included equipment and features not available to some of the Citation products at that time. Gone seemingly forever, was the ability to buy a training airplane that only needed a nav/com and a transponder. This is in no way to diminish the outstanding technology that came to the cockpit with G1000, but the system does not scale down well leaving

manufactures without the ability to create a less expensive aircraft that serves as a trainer without the burden of the additional weight and cost of a fully equipped airplane not to mention the repairs, additional insurance costs and the additional finance burden. There is no way to quantify the additional hours that are required for student pilots as a result of the complicated cockpits, ask a glass panel instructor what kind of hours it takes student pilots solo in today's world and then compare it with the students that learned on "steam gages". The hours are more expensive and it takes more of them.

Today, Cessna's product line is down to the Skyhawk, only one engine offering, the Skylane has become Cessna's guinea pig for the diesel development. Because they stopped all other models, diesel becomes your only choice, if one is a choice, and the Stationair is available only as turbocharged. In a world that technology allows McDonald's to bring it to you "your way" the aircraft industry is befuddled by variation. Low production

numbers are not the result of lack of variation alone, the outrageous prices are the biggest driver. The insult to injury is paying a high price, but not being able to get what you want. Apparently one size fits all in aircraft while McDonald's has figured out how to give us what we want.

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