SNEAK PEEK: HIGH-TECH PISTON ENGINES Emerge

CIRRUS SR22
Most Sophisticated Single ... Ever

Father and Son Fly the Alaska Highway
New Tools for Crosswind Control

Why to Turn Off That Can-Do Attitude p.26
ACK IN THE 1960S, the launches of a new model year’s airplanes used to be big things, because there were often important changes to the model lineups of the big three and their less established competitors. Sometimes the upgrades were minor, like new interior options, and sometimes they were substantial, like new engines or avionics makeovers.

The launch of the 2012 Cirrus SR22 is noteworthy thanks to a couple of new features but even more so because, in aggregate, this is the year that the SR22 has really arrived at the top of the heap.

As a journalist, I’ve learned over the years that it’s not wise to speak in absolutes. Any time you say that any airplane is the “most” anything, get ready for a hearty helping of crow, as there’s surely some model somewhere in history that you’ve forgotten that is even more than what you blithely claimed in the first place. But in this case, I’ll
break my unofficial rule and come right out and say it: The 2012 Cirrus SR22 is the most sophisticated single-engine civilian airplane ever built and by a long shot. While this statement could probably have been said of the SR22, with its remarkable suite of avionics and safety capabilities, for the past couple of years, the addition this year of a fifth seat option and a very capable satellite communications system with global weather, voice calling, texting and e-mail seals the deal. The rest of the market is playing catch-up. It’s not every airplane I fly that I get the chance to test by flying it hard over the course of many days. When I do I seldom learn entirely new things about the airplane. It’s more like getting to know a new friend. You get little insights here and there that add up to a sense of the character that feels somehow more authentic. That’s how it was with the latest SR22 I got to fly. I’m still flying it and I’m still feeling it. For those pilots who think they know the SR22 based on a flight seven or eight years ago or, worse yet, word of mouth, I’d urge them to re-think what they know about what has become far and away the most popular high-performance piston-powered airplane in the world. Today’s SR22 is a very different animal from the one Cirrus launched amidst much fanfare and controversy some 11-odd years ago. While the basic outline of the 2012 SR22 looks nearly identical to that 2001 model, the truth is that Cirrus has over the years updated nearly every bit of the airplane. In some cases, as with the adoption of LED exterior lights, those upgrades might be considered minor, while others, like with the all-new wing on the G3 and the launch of the Perspective cockpit, were clearly major improvements.

Five Seats: Big Deal?
How significant a feature is the five-seat option? Let’s put it into context. First, the five-seater is not a new airplane but simply an option that Cirrus is offering on all of its models. The latest edition of the SR22, which Cirrus refers to simply as the 2012 model, is the first to have the option for a fifth seat, but buyers can get that option even on an SR20.

In order to get a fifth seat in there, Cirrus didn’t have to change the airframe. It instead modified the interior side panels, making them slimmer and more tapered. This created a number of extra inches of effective width in back, which allowed Cirrus to perform a bit of magic by creating a bench seat with an extra small seat in the middle. Whether or not this is a big deal depends on the customer. It’s unlikely that many existing late-model Cirrus owners will be trading in their current rides for a five-seater, unless, that is, they have a need for a five-seater like the new SR22, a four-plus-one. The new option does allow room for five, but not for five adults. You can seat four adults and a small child, or two adults up front and a couple of midsize children and a smaller child in back. For three super-midsize kids, it might be a squeeze in back, but it’s doable and legal, and for short trips, sometimes that’s enough.

Though it’s a common approach in

The 2012 edition of the SR22 — the turbocharged version, the SR22T, is shown here — is the culmination of several years of improvement to everything from the landing gear to the ice-protection system. Opposite: This year’s model features the option for a three-place bench seat in back with a 60-40 split, allowing a great deal of flexibility in loading the airplane by folding down part or all of the seat backs.
For that flight, which we completed, our sales representative Adam Hahn and the first trip, which took us out to central real loading flexibility.

On the way back, however, our needs were very different, and the new seating option was a godsend. We had, in addition to Adam and myself, a passenger who would be riding back to Austin, Texas, with us plus all of his stuff, including his bags and some work materials. The load meant to make two fuel stops, one in Destin, Florida, and a second one in Louisiana — our eventual choice due to weather, timing and scheduling needs were very different, and the new seating option was a godsend. We had, in addition to Adam and myself, a passenger who would be riding back to Austin, Texas, with us plus all of his stuff, including his bags and some work materials. The load meant to make two fuel stops, one in Destin, Florida, and a second one in Louisiana — our eventual choice due to weather, timing and scheduling need was Baton Rouge. It was a long trip, but one that we accomplished in comfort. And the views along the Gulf Coast were gorgeous, which made the headwinds just a little easier to take. Our stop in Baton Rouge underscored the utility and safety available. We had originally intended to go to a small town in central Louisiana (served by a nice small-town airport) for an early-evening business meeting, but things weren’t looking promising. On the XM’s radar we could see bands of moderately powerful thunderstorms making their way east, moving across our intended destination. There were big breaks in the bands, so traversing them wouldn’t be a problem, but the forecast at our destination, which we derived using a forecast from a nearby regional airport, again via XM, was for storms upon our arrival. From the right seat Adam used the Global Connect phone (through his headsets and without disturbing my flying) to call his contact and let him know our plans had changed because of the weather. On the other side of the MFD, I was busy finding an alternate, Baton Rouge, which was clear and forecast to be so. I called the en route controller, negotiated the change in flight plan and entered it all into the Perspective flight management system using the keypad.

Our arrival at KBTR was in the dark, and there were multiple taxiway closures there, so I flipped on the EVS to taxi while flipping back and forth between that and SafeTaxi to make sure we were where we wanted to be on the airport. A couple of weeks later, I flew the new SR22 on a third trip, up to Dallas Love for Heli-Expo. I had a number of bulky items, including a couple of large trophies for presentations at the show, so I folded down the rear seats and treated the SR22 like a station wagon. To accommodate the new seating layout, Cirrus did some things differently in back, including relocating the headset jacks so they’re no longer plugged into the back of the console — where the plugs can be accidental-ly bent or broken if a heavy bag is laid atop them. Cirrus also added automotive-style inertial shoulder harnesses to all three positions in back, a big safety upgrade for those rear seats’ occupants. Also new are improved anchors for car seats, smart for an area that’s likely going to be used by folks with kids in child seats. The overall effect is a cleaner, sleeker rear seating area that makes for improved comfort, loading flexibility and safety.

Communications Breakthroughs
If you’re worried about cell phones and texting breaking into the pilot’s last bastion of privacy, namely the cockpit, worry away, but there’s not much you can do about it. It’s coming. As far as I’m concerned, I welcome it wholeheartedly. There are things that voice calling, e-mail and Internet can do to improve the safety of flight that we’ve only begun to dream of. With the new SR22, I got a chance to witness first-hand some of those capabilities. In addition to the five-seat option, the SR22 offers a brand-new communications option, called Perspec-tive Global Connect. The system offers global weather, satellite phone piped through the audio panel (more on that in a bit), texting through the MFD and even e-mail.

The weather available through Global Connect is similar to XM WX, but you can get it anywhere in the world (though product varies by geographic location). There’s also a big difference in price. While XM costs a reasonable flat rate for whatever usage you want, Global Connect is pricier. Then again, it does more than XM, which is an always-on receiver that simply listens for the latest XM updates beamed down from the system’s geostationary satellites — it’s just available in North America. Global Con-nect, on the other hand, makes use of the Iridium satellite system, which provides global coverage. This means that wherever in the world you are, you’ve got coverage. You can specify the weather coverage area you want to receive. Whereas with XM you get all of its data all the time, with
Global Connect, you can specify only what you need, so there’s much less data getting sent down, which can help lower the cost. (Plans and rates vary; check with Cirrus for detailed pricing information.) In North America there’d be little reason to use anything but XM, but in other parts of the world, Global Connect will be a must-have option. Even in the States, the ability to make voice calls, text and e-mail will make it a popular choice as well.

I tried every function of Global Connect. It all worked right off the bat every time. I tested my wife, “Guess what, honey, I’m texting from the bathtub every time. I texted my wife, answering apprehensively, apparently leery of the long, strange number that must have popped up on our home phone’s caller ID. I was clearly in an airplane, she admitted, and confirmed the voice quality was very good. She sounded great. A few moments later, trying her patience, I e-mailed her, promising I’d stop annoying her soon. She responded with a quick “Love you” and my test was done.

**Host of Features**

There are groundbreaking features galore on this airplane, all of which we’ve written about in recent years and many of which Cirrus came up with through innovative initiatives with its partners. Chief among these is Garmin, with whom Cirrus has been working from its inception. Innovative Garmin products include the Perspective avionics suite with 12-inch displays, integral alphanumeric keypad, the industry-leading GFC 700 dual-channel digital autopilot, active traffic, synthetic vision, enhanced vision systems, and anti-ice and hypoxia protection via Garmin’s ESP system. This is not to mention a host of non-Garmin-related features, such as single-lever (no pop-up lever) mechanical power control, the whole-airplane recovery parachute system (WARPS), the high-performance fixed-gear design approach, the incredibly roomy interior, the built-in O2, approved flight into known icing and more. The X-Edition interior is reminiscent of a luxury sports car, with two-tone leather, contrast stitching, carbon fiber trim and suede-like headliner.

The SR22 has the high-performance piston single market largely to itself. And that’s not to say that Cirrus isn’t offering a strange flex—it’s always been a nonissue on that day under those conditions. And that’s not to mention the synthetic vision, which I love having when the weather is low, the excellent autopilot, the envelope protection and, yes, the chute. It all adds to the SR22’s safety and utility.

The SR22 has the high-performance piston single market largely to itself these days. With Mooney on an extended production hiatus and with Cirrus not yet up and running with the new Corvalis, the Beechcraft Baron is the SR22’s only in-production high-performance rival. Cirrus has capitalized on the dearth of competition by holding prices and adding features. There are still a couple of desirable options buyers will be asking about and that Cirrus isn’t offering, but there’s no one here, and the G2000 touch-screen control avionics suit. Cesna has announced G2000 on its four-seat Corvalis TTX, which Cesna has not yet started delivering. Is the SR22 loaded with bells and

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**Cirrus SR22T**

The Cirrus SR22T flown for this report was outfitted with the five-seat interior, the Perspective avionics suite with 12-inch displays, Garmin SVT synthetic vision, Jeppesen electronic charts, SafeTaxi, Perspective, Global Connect with SMS and voice calling, as well as global weather, WAAS, GFC 700 auto-pilot, active traffic, FIKI, five-place oxygen, front AmSafe seat-belt airbags, air conditioning and more.

**Performance is stellar, with 200-plus-knot cruise speeds at less than 18 gph. The factory turbocharged Collegial is smooth, simple to manage.**