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Cessna's post-war, art deco model 195 Businessliner neither outsold nor outran the model 35 Bonanza, but it outclassed practically every other light aircraft in the sky.

There's no defining taste, but it is possible to define class. OK, perhaps definitions of class can be difficult, too, but most of us feel it's easy to recognize. To paraphrase a totally unknown art critic/congressman/pundit, "I can't define class, but I know it when I see it." Most of us agree. When you see a new Mercedes S550 or BMW 740i, you recognize class even before you see the nameplate.

It's the same with the Cessna 195.

Born in the post-WWII rush to accommodate a market that never materialized, the Cessna 190 and 195 – same airplane, different engines – were designed to one-up the Beech Bonanza. The goal was never to outrun the jaunty V-tail but to provide ultimate, Packard-style interior comfort to a class of pilots who believed the race wasn't always won to the swift.

While there's no evidence Cessna designer Dwayne Wallace configured the 195 Businessliner around a Packard interior – as the Klapmeier brothers built their Cirrus around the BMW 5-series sedan's – the new airplane's mission was considerably more refined than the Bonanza's. The plane was more concerned about how you arrived, rather than how quickly you got there.

The 195 was essentially an Airmaster with a hormone injection. The notably smaller '30s vintage C-37 Airmaster flew with only 165 hp, and carried four passengers in "modestly cramped comfort" (that's what it says in my reference manual) at a speed of 105 knots.

The Cessna 190/195 was the same basic airplane as the C-37, except Cessna scaled it up in every department. This was a good thing since Cessna introduced the model 190 in 1947 at a base price of $12,750 – about $3000 more than a Bonanza. The Cessna 195's 300 hp Jacobs engine boosted its price an additional $1000. That was a pile of money in those days, but it bought a semi-cabin class airplane that was closer in comfort and performance to a Spartan

Executive than anything else.

In exchange for such a stipend, Cessna delivered a product that was definitely a cut above the late 1940s competition. With a huge Jacobs 755 cubic-inch, seven- cylinder radial out on the nose, the 195 translated most of the engine's 48-inch width to the cabin. The 195 was the last American airplane ever certified with a radial engine, and it carried off the job in style.

Even today, 195s seem to always attract a crowd on any ramp. Pilot and passengers enter through a left, aft, side door, and then walk forward to the front office. Seating is for five in a 2/3 configuration. Pilot and copilot climb forward to front seats that are perched behind a visually gigantic panel and a windshield that drapes well back over the cockpit.

The 190/195 sports a multitude of features not found on most other airplanes of the time. On the outside, the big 218 square-foot wing is full cantilever with no struts or braces to add drag. The Jacobs engine is hinged at the side, providing convenient service access to mag, distributor, starter and generator as well as the rear of the engine itself. The engine cover is so tightly fit that the cowling includes small bumps to hide the rocker arms.

The gear is Steve Wittman's patented design, and is constructed of chrome vanadium steel for strength. The baggage compartment is accessed through a flush, push button rather than a conventional handle. Landing lights are electrically activated and arc down out of the wings, a system that was later adapted to the Cessna 421.

Inside the 195 is a roll-down storm window on the pilot's side fitted with plate glass rather than Plexiglas. Just imagine anyone trying to certify THAT today! Front seats adjust fore and aft through a surprising 14 inches of travel to accommodate even the longest legs. A quartet of

windows stretches along each side of the airplane to provide plenty of light to passengers, despite the high wing. The parking brake has the added benefit of locking not only the main wheels, but the controls as well. The main cabin door also does double duty – it's directly connected to the boarding step which it automatically retracts when the door is closed.

The 195 is more of a Bentley touring car than a Jaguar XKE sportster, and that was exactly what Rick Farrow of Godfrey, Illinois was looking for. Farrow, a Snap-On Tools sales manager, had worked his way through several airplanes, and wound up in a Beech E55 Baron – the hotrod "little" Baron with a pair of 285 hp powerplants in place of the standard 260 hp mills.

About a dozen years ago, however, Rick stupefied his friends by trading the Baron for the Cessna 195 you see on these pages. "I think everyone was stunned," said Farrow. "The E55 is almost universally regarded as a 200 knot speedster, and no one ever expected me to trade for a classic Cessna 195." In fact, Farrow's airplane started life as a 190 with a Continental radial, but was later upgraded to a 300 hp Jacobs to make it a 195.

Farrow hasn't regretted the transition from hot-twin to classic-single, however. "The 195 certainly isn't one of a kind, but it's one of a few," Farrow explains. "There were just over 1000 of the type built, and probably half those are still flying, some of them overseas, but no matter where I go (except to airshows such as Sun 'n Fun or Oshkosh), I almost never see any other 195s on the ramp. It's a very unusual airplane."

Farrow flies his big Cessna all over the Midwest regularly. Just as with his Baron, he uses the airplane for corporate travel in pursuit of business for Snap-On Tools. "The company has a tool box plant in Algona, Iowa, 50 miles from Mason City, and there's no convenient airline service. With the 195, I fly out of my local airport near St. Louis and into the small, general aviation Algona airport. I get my business done and I'm home for dinner."

Farrow also makes the occasional weekend hamburger flight and regular vacation trips to the Bahamas. He's also an enthusiastic airshow fan, and that's where I caught up with him – at the 2007 Oshkosh AirVenture where I jumped at the chance to fly Farrow's near-perfect 195.

Engine start is a little different from firing up a standard Continental or Lycoming. After all the usual preliminaries, you engage the starter, and then flip the mag switch to "Batt" after six blades have rotated past. In typical radial style, the cylinders cough and sputter, voting on whether conditions are right to run, then gradually come on line until the "Shaky Jake" has all seven cylinders firing.