

Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Safety

By JACK G. MERRELL, JR., Guest Editor

The older Beechcraft, both "V" and straight tail, are fantastic machines that are a pleasure to fly. They were delivered with a single "throw over" control wheel that provided extra space for the front seat occupant not actually flying the aircraft. The concept was simple: normally, the aircraft would be flown by one pilot with up to three passengers - and it worked. Times have changed. All aircraft that feature side-by-side seating now have dual controls and for good reasons.

While many pilots maintain an attitude of invincibility, as we age the possibility of becoming ill or incapacitated while flying increases. Also, since many of us now mount portable GPS units on the control arm, the throw over feature becomes more difficult, especially in an emergency. With dual controls it would be far easier for the right seat occupant to assume immediate control of the aircraft. Many of us, myself included, like to let friends, children and even grandchildren handle the controls. Again, dual controls allow us, the pilot in command, to have immediate access to flight controls. Lastly, FAR 91.109 is very specific, requiring dual controls for all flight instruction.

Remember the Biannual Flight Review is defined as an instructional ride.

I will acknowledge that this particular element of the FAR's allows instrument instruction to be given only when a single throw over control wheel is installed. Individual Certified Flight Instructors may gain a specific waiver to instruct in aircraft with only single controls, but these are exceptions not the rule. The bottom line is that there are many reasons to consider installing dual controls on a permanent or temporary basis in your beloved Beech. There are several options available.

There are used factory dual control arms on the market, but they have significant drawbacks. First, they are used, which means the chains and sprockets are worn to some degree. Second, they are expensive, and third, the small inspection hole on the backside makes it difficult to inspect, clean and lubricate moving parts.

A better option that overcomes these shortcomings is produced by Cygnet Aerospace (see ad, this page). It is a dual control arm, authorized as a direct replacement for the factory one, of complete new construction. It is machined out of a single piece of aluminum with all new

chains and sprockets. Its additional mounting set screws makes for a secure fit. The back removes for easy inspection and lubrication. Instead of a snap cover, like the factory unit, the back is mounted with machine screws. The powder-coated finish is durable and beautiful. Indeed, it is a very high quality product. I have had one on my Bonanza for over a year and wish I had made the switch earlier. My wife likes the secure feeling of controls readily at hand and she is not a pilot. Moreover, in rough air I can rest my arm on the right portion of the control arm to more easily change radio frequencies or GPS data.

Each of us make many decisions and choices concerning our aircraft, but I would recommend that dual controls be considered, if not for permanent installation at least for instructional flights. Anything we can do to make flying safer, even perceptually in the eyes of the public, keeps general aviation flying alive for us to enjoy. -✈

Jack Merrell has flown for over 34 years, 22 as a fighter pilot and instructor for the Air Force amassing over 4000 hours. He is a graduate of the Air Force safety program and a trained accident investigator with over

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