



Baby Boomers

Are you tired of flying a thirty year old aircraft? Want to fly for \$35 an hour, including maintenance costs? The new generation of light aircraft may be just the lift you're looking for. **Kerri Larkin** investigates.

The general aviation community in Australia has stagnated to the point of becoming an endangered species. Got your attention? Before you fire off that vitriolic letter to our Editor, let me acknowledge that up until now, there have been sound commercial reasons to stick with tried-and-tested GA aircraft.

When business survival depends on being compatible with the rest of the industry rather than being innovative, there is little incentive to bring new aircraft on-line, unless they are newer versions of what's already popular. Sure there are a few schools that fly less common types, but for *ab initio*, the choice is simple: Cessna or Piper.

The trouble is, with a new aircraft costing

upwards of \$300,000, who can afford to buy one? That's why most of us learned to fly the very same aircraft our instructors (and their instructors) did. So how would you like a brand-new, factory-built aircraft for around \$100, 000?

Introducing the Contenders

Pilots are typically a fairly conservative bunch, perhaps due to the fact that sales brochure promises don't count for much when they're all that's between you and the ground. To be taken seriously by the aviation community in Australia, it seems an aircraft must be made of metal, factory-built and fully certified. Although the Australian-designed and built Jabiru has enjoyed enormous success with Recreational Aviation pilots, it has been less successful at penetrating the GA market, perhaps due to its all-fibreglass construction.

Enter the baby boomers. We're now welcoming a new generation of light aircraft, like the Tecnam family. Designed and built in Italy by the Pascale brothers (formerly Partenavia), Tecnam offers both high and low wing aircraft which are fully factory built and certified. With solid design and construction credentials behind them, it was only a matter of time before they became big sellers.

Another company producing outstanding aircraft is Eveztor, a Czech company which manufactures the SportStar and Harmony aircraft. Again, these all-metal aircraft are factory built and fully compliant with Australian Regulations.

Why do you fly?

Before looking more closely at some of the newer aircraft, it's important to take a moment to review the log book to discover what most of our flying entails. When the ink was still drying on our licences, most of us entertained grand thoughts of taking the whole family on a flying trip around the country. In reality, how much of the last hundred hours has been solo or dual? Do you really need a four-seater?

If you could fly for a quarter to a third of your current aircraft hire costs, how much more flying would you do? Probably plenty more!

If the kids have left the nest or don't enjoy flying, there's a good chance one of these aircraft is for you. All are two-seaters, with room for enough baggage for a couple of days away, or lots of days away if you're not into regular changes of outfit. Bruce Stark, Australian agent for Tecnam, points out that most of the people buying aircraft are looking for something cheap to run but with plenty of features. For pilots who mostly fly alone, the fact that you can push down on the tail to lift the nose wheel off the ground and turn the aircraft in its own space is a bonus. No more pushing and pulling a heavy beast to get it in or out of the hangar.

Still Shopping?

The Czech Republic is fast making a name for itself as an innovative designer and manufacturer of light aircraft. The Evezor SportStar is no exception. The outrageous Southern Cross paint scheme (optional) makes sure this is an aircraft that will turn heads wherever it goes.

From the outside, the colour scheme heightens the feeling that this is a very small plane, but once you step inside, well, it's something completely different. In fact, this is one of the few GA aircraft where the pilot doesn't have to rub shoulders with the passenger. At 1.17 metres (46 inches) wide the cockpit is, in a word, roomy.

The huge forward-opening canopy makes entry and exit a breeze, and again, the sports-car seats feel great. Once settled in, the first concern on a hot day will be ventilation. Tinting of the canopy is standard, and Evezor have provided three large

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ABOVE: The three bladed prop is powered by a Rotax 912 which kicks the Sportstar along at around 105 knots on 14 litres an hour.

LEFT: Simple, elegant and comfortable. The SportStar's cockpit has plenty of room to upgrade to IFR standards if needed.



The big canopy of the SportStar is tinted, gives plenty of head-room and offers outstanding visibility in any direction.

vents. With the Rotax 912 running, there is no shortage of airflow in the cabin.

Taxying is a breeze, and with the run-up complete, the little SportStar also proved to be willing to climb at 1200' per minute. Once settled in the cruise, the GPS was indicating 105 knots, and the expected fuel flow is only around 14 litres

per hour, giving a 4.5 hour endurance (with reserves) or about 510 nautical miles. Nice!

The biggest difference between the Tecnam Echo and the SportStar is function. While the Tecnam is an outstanding no-nonsense aircraft suited for training or cross country, the SportStar is simply magic to fly. The huge bubble canopy gives virtually unrestricted visibility in any direction, and even though it's a low-wing aircraft, the stubby wings don't intrude on the view. Cruising with the nose low, it feels just like sitting on a cloud. Even this straight-and-level journo wanted to do rolls and loops just for the sheer joy of being in the air. If you fly to enjoy the view, this is the aircraft for you.

Handling is precise and rapid, although the controls are lighter than the Echo's, making it feel a bit more twitchy. Stalls are very benign, but the twitchy nature of the plane makes it feel a little less steady than the Echo. Even so, a full stall wouldn't wake a sleeping passenger.

Visibility in the circuit area is outstanding. It would be hard not to spot traffic with such a view. Landing was a different experience with that big canopy. Most of us are used to having the picture of the runway framed by the windscreen and nose. The SportStar gives a sensation of diving at the runway because the nose flies so low with the split flaps out.



Peter Harlow demonstrates how NAS friendly the view from the SportStar is. It would be hard not to see traffic with vision like this.

Choices, Choices

With more and more European aircraft arriving every day, the choice of a GA replacement aircraft is becoming harder. Both the Tecnam and the SportStar represent great value for money. Either would suit a training school environment, and both are very capable cross-country tourers. Both can be certified to IFR standards, and for much less than a new Cessna or Piper will cost. If you've been considering buying a second-hand plane, why not have a look at these two and just maybe you'll spend the same amount of money to fly away with a brand new aircraft. ■

Head to Head

TECNAM ECHO P-92S

Engine	Rotax 912S
Fuel	
Consumption	19 l/hr
Cabin Width	1.1m
Empty weight	299 kg
MTOW	544 kg (550 for P-92JS)
Useful load	245 kg
Fuel capacity	90 litres
Range	530 nm @ 65%
VNE	135 kts
Cruise (75% power)	105 kts
Service ceiling	14,800 ft
Rate of Climb	1260 fpm
Stall with flap	33 kts
Take off roll	100 m
Landing roll	100 m
Base price (excludes GST)	\$109,000
Contact	Bruce Stark Tecnam Australia tecnam@bigpond.com 0416 083 800

EVEKTOR SPORTSTAR

Rotax 912ULS
14 l/hr
1.17m
295 kg
544 kg
249 kg
68 litres
510nm @ 75%
146 kts
105 kts
14,000 ft
1200 fpm
36 kts
150 m
160 m
\$109,000
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