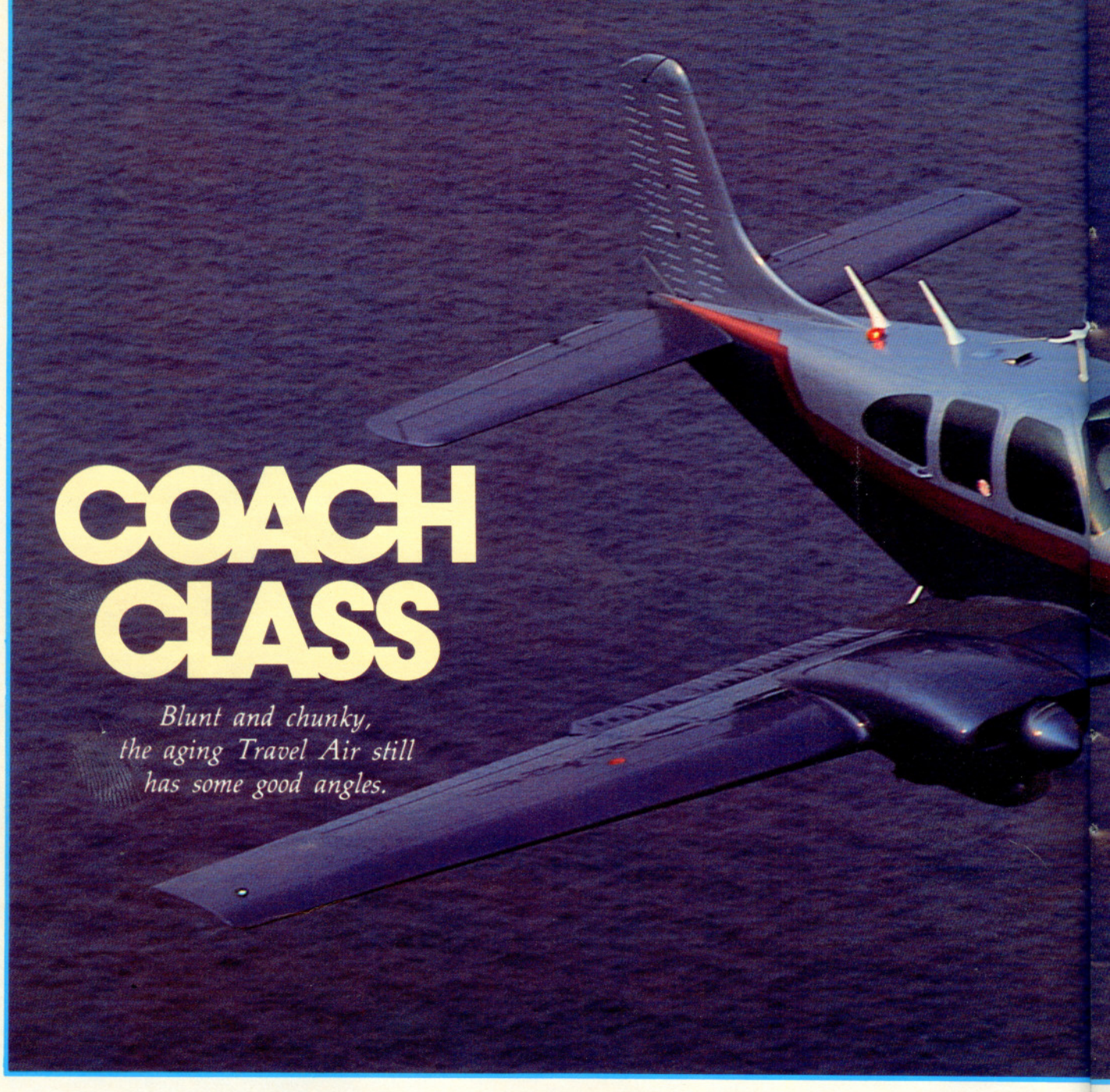


COACH CLASS

Blunt and chunky, the aging Travel Air still has some good angles.

BY THOMAS A. HORNE

The name Travel Air is an almost sacred one to the Beech Aircraft Corporation. Walter Beech, when he formed his first aircraft company with Lloyd Stearman and Clyde Cessna in 1924, called that company Travel Air Incorporated and named the first production airplane the Travel Air 1000. The Travel Air 2000, 4000 and 8000 followed.

The next time the name was used came in 1958, when Beech Aircraft introduced its light twin—the Model 95 Travel Air. Before you become too sentimental about this hallowed resurrection, you should know that Beech originally intended to call the Travel Air, the Badger. But since this was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's code name for a Russian bomber, the idea was dropped. After all, this was in the middle of the Cold War.

It was also an age when every other major manufacturer had a light twin on the market. Piper's Apache had been around since 1954. Cessna's 310—granted, a larger, more powerful airplane, but the smallest of their twin-engine models—also came in 1954, and its sales were especially energetic.

With the Travel Air, Beech sought to ply the middle ground between the Apache's marginal performance (it came equipped with 150-hp, then 160-hp, Lycoming engines) and the 310's pitch to those wanting a light twin with as much pomp as power. The 310 used 240-hp Continental engines.

A compromise was made by choosing 180-hp Lycoming engines for the Travel Air—the same durable O-360s that soon would see use in the first single-engine Piper Comanches and would serve well a multitude of light airplanes in the future.

The first Travel Air was test flown on August 6, 1956. On June 18 of the next year, the Travel Air received its type certificate under the old Civil Aeronautics Administration regulations.

The Travel Air, simply put, is a Bonanza with two engines and a T-34 Mentor's tail, plus some special touches. You notice the tail and flaps first, though. The vertical tail is just that. It sticks straight up and reminds you of

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ART DAVIS

the much larger Twin Bonanza, a contemporary of the Travel Air. The flaps on all but the 95s and B95s attract attention because they extend beyond the rest of the trailing edge of the wing. More than a little engineering work went into the flap system because it was a Fowler design. When the flaps are extended, they not only go down, they move aft a bit, too—an advanced feature on a light airplane this old.

If you have any time in Bonanzas or Barons, you will find the Travel Air's cockpit and cabin remarkably similar. "Beech means business," the slogan goes, and Travel Air promotion of the day was quick to point out that this light twin had the kind of dimensions and appointments for which you would not have to apologize. Ambience was just as important to Beech then, as it is now. The seats are large and comfortable, you sit up high, and the visibility is very good. Twisting your head around, you actually can see back as far as the 4:30 and 7:30 positions, thanks to the rear windows.

The Travel Air's panel bears a large Gothic yoke, trim wheels and rudder pedals, another standard feature of all Beech products. The controls on the power quadrant are arranged in the manner of all the older Beech twins. The propeller controls are on the left, followed by the throttles and then the mixtures. Up until the D95 Travel Airs, the cigarette lighter is mounted inexplicably on the quadrant, just below the mixture levers. Off to the left of the quadrant is the friction lock.

Also on the left of the quadrant housing is the flap control, a large, paddle-shaped switch that moves through three positions in a large slot, free of detents. It is either Up, Off or Down. Two stripes painted across the leading edge of the left flap give visual confirmation of flap position. As the flaps are lowered, the stripes become visible. The first stripe is labeled 10 degrees, the next 20. There is no stripe to indicate the full-down position. With the 1964 D95 Travel Air came flap position indicator lights; a red one for the up position and a green one for full flap deflection.

The landing gear switch is located to

continued

the right of the power quadrant. Because the Travel Air was certificated under the old regulations, three green lights were not required. One green light, electrically connected to the nose gear, illuminates for a gear-down indication.

Critics of this nonstandard control arrangement point to its potential for what the National Transportation Safety Board, in one of its special reports, calls a "design-induced accident," one in which a pilot unknowingly retracts the gear instead of the flaps.

Likewise, the old regulations did not require a red radial indicating Vmc (minimum controllable airspeed with the critical engine inoperative) on the airspeed indicator. You will see a blue line, showing the best single-engine rate-of-climb speed (87 knots), but no graphic display of Vmc (73 knots). Although the Travel Air was produced long before anyone ever spoke of a minimum safe single-engine speed (Vsse), the speed below which no intentional engine failures should be simulated, the owner's manual points out that the pilot should consider the blueline speed of 87 knots as the Travel Air's safe single-engine speed.

The rest of the Travel Air's cockpit is a collection of all those good—and bad—things that aviation writers love to talk about, but that make for the character of the airplane. Here are a few. The propeller controls block the pilot's view of the fuel gauges. The control yoke's massive bar prevents easy access to the gear and flap switches. You inadvertently can cut off the right engine's ignition with your left knee, if you bump the protruding switches on the left subpanel.

The older Travel Airs do not use the standard T display of flight instruments: a drum-style, wartime directional gyro is located where most of us expect to see the attitude indicator.

When you switch fuel tanks, the gauges will not show automatically the fuel quantity in the newly selected tank. You have to flip a separate toggle switch, just above your right knee, to find out the quantity in each tank. In some Travel Airs you might inherit antiquated avionics, which are spread confusingly all over the right side and trail over to the underneath of the pilot's side. There, the yoke's bar blocks the view of your redundant gauges.

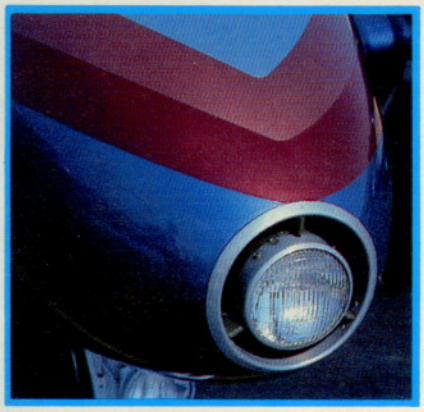
In the 95 and B95, there is that little panel of toggle switches off on the right side, just waiting for you to hit the wrong switch and put the lights dark. And how about those eight fuel drains, not to mention the fuel sloshing/unporting problem in the Travel Airs that do not comply with Airworthiness Directive 68-26-6. This AD requires a placard warning against fast turns while taxiing prior to takeoff or the installation of internal baffles to prevent fuel unporting.

And there are those allegations that the Travel Air likes to wallow in turbulence, just like the V-tail Bonanza.

All levity aside, there is one concern that has been the ongoing subject of some recommendations by the National Transportation Safety Board. The NTSB thinks it would be a good idea for the Federal Aviation Administration to convene a special certification-review team. The purpose of the investigation would be to test disposition of the Travel Airs and Barons to flat spin out of a low-airspeed, high asymmet-

ric-thrust condition. A study conducted by the NTSB found that, between March 1978 and March 1980, there were eight fatal flat-spin accidents involving Travel Airs and Barons. Beechcraft has denied that there is any special inclination for the Travel Air or the Baron to flat spin and has stated that the accidents were the result of improper flight instruction. These accidents, the company believes, happened because instructors intentionally rendered an engine inoperative at airspeeds near or below Vmc.

In an NTSB special report entitled "Light Twin-Engine Aircraft Accidents Following Engine Failures, 1972-1976," it was noted that the Travel Air suffered a per 100,000-hour engine-failure accident rate of 2.87, placing it above the Twin Comanche's 1.98 but way below the Apache's rather high 6.91. Since the board's report lumped the Baron in with the Travel Air when the number of fatal accidents were listed, it is impossible to tell exactly how many Travel Airs were involved. But the Travel Air/Baron series was involved in a total of 16 fatal engine-failure-related accidents in that time period, second only to the Apache/Aztec series' total of 21 fatal accidents.



COACH CLASS

The Travel Air bears the look of the fifties and a spacious panel.

And now for the good aspects. We already have mentioned the visibility and roominess. But how does 16 to 21 gallons per hour (yes, that is for both engines) sound at cruise settings between 60 and 75 percent? The Travel Air can maintain 65-percent power up to 10,000 feet, where, at this setting, it theoretically will cruise at 166 knots and have a no-reserve range of 1,160 miles if equipped with the optional 112-gallon fuel tanks. Its published maximum cruise speed, according to the flight manual, occurs at sea level, where you never fly. But if you could, the Travel Air would get you there at 182 knots. With 75-percent power and 2,450 rpm at 7,500 feet, expect a true airspeed of 174 knots and a fuel-consumption rate of 21 gallons per hour. Not bad performance, though some have criticized the 174 knots figure as being more than a trifle optimistic.

With the standard, 84-gallon fuel system, you can pick up an extra 168 pounds of useful load. The standard system has two, inboard main tanks, which hold 25 gallons each, and two, 17-gallon auxiliary cells in the wing panels outboard of the engine nacelles.

continued

COACH CLASS

It is the marriage of a Bonanza with a T-34; the cabin is so roomy it tempts some into overloading.

The optional system uses 31-gallon auxiliary fuel cells. Fuel cannot be transferred from one cell to another, but fuel can be drawn from any cell to either engine by using the fuel boost pumps if crossfeeding is necessary.

The panel, nonstandard though it may be, definitely has some attributes. The gauges are large and easy to read. The power instruments—rpm, manifold pressure and fuel flow—are arranged above their respective controls. But, perhaps most important to the psyche is that the panel is big and conveys the impression of a much larger airplane's cockpit.

No doubt about it, of all the older light twins on the market, the Travel Air gives you more of that big-airplane look and feel. None of that reduced visibility, cramped feeling and skittery responsiveness of the Twin Comanche. No antiquated aura or racket-induced feelings of imminence that you experience in an Apache. It is true that the Twin Comanche is a faster, more economical airplane, but it also has less shoulder and headroom and has a useful load 150 pounds or so less than the Travel Air.

The Travel Air seems to age well, too. Walk around any airport and you will see Apaches, Twin Comanches and older Cessna 310s. Some of their interiors look as though a wolverine had been set loose inside. You can see the same thing in an aging Triumph or MG sports car. But the Travel Airs seem to keep their looks longer, though I do not know why. Maybe it is because the panels seem newer since they so closely resemble the Baron's. Or, maybe they just were built better than the rest. The Travel Air series, to date, only has 10 ADs issued on its airframe. There are, however, a number of ADs on accessory items, especially the Bendix fuel-injection system.

All of this objective evaluation is well and good, but what really interests you is how the airplane flies. So let us hop right in and take a jaunt. Getting to the pilot's seat can be awkward; but once in position, you sit in stately grandeur, high above the rabble. When the lineman approaches, you look down on him. What did he say? Oh, of course we want the chocks removed.

Runup calls for 2,200 rpm. If the airplane creeps forward with the brakes fully depressed, you probably have the old Goodyear brakes. By now,

continued

however, many Travel Airs have had their brakes changed to the more effective Clevelands.

Takeoff target speeds are 78 knots for lift-off and 87 for the initial climb-out. To break ground at the desired 78 knots, you should apply gentle back pressure at about 61. This begins the rotation. By the time you have 78, the mains should be leaving the ground. Keep shooting for blueline—87 knots (Vyse, best single-engine rate-of-climb speed). Gear retraction takes only four-and-a-half seconds. *Vvwhe-e-e-w, Ka-thump.* I like that sound, and the retraction looks good from the ground.

To hold 87 knots with the neutral pitch trim we have set for takeoff, it takes some forward pressure to maintain the recommended profile. Acceleration from Vmc (73 knots) to Vyse (87 knots) takes about six seconds, and in this time the rate of climb is not very impressive. So it is advisable to leave the gear down for a few seconds after lift-off, especially if there is adequate runway ahead. In the unlikely event of an engine failure at this critical time, we will just land straight ahead, and the gear will be ready.

The average single-engine rate of climb for Travel Airs is a meager 205 fpm. And this is on a standard day at sea level, with gear and flaps up and the inoperative engine feathered. And an experienced test pilot at the controls. If this sounds like your normal operating circumstances, you might, *might,* be able to climb away after an engine failure on takeoff—if there are no obstructions in the way, and if you stubbornly hold your 87 knots. As an operating rule, though, assume that you will not make it. This is where you find the trade-off for all that Beech solidness and weighty construction. A 180-hp engine will not support a 4,000-pound airplane very well. Bear this in mind so you will not become overconfident, and remember those accident statistics.

For short-field and obstruction takeoffs, Beech says you can use 20 degrees of flaps and lift off at 61 knots. I think they would have to be shooting at me to get me to try this procedure.

Once established in a climb, the Travel Air will produce a standard-day climb rate of 1,360 fpm. First, reduce power to 25 inches of manifold pressure and 2,500 rpm. And do not pull back the propellers instead of the throttles. Most owners prefer to use an en-route climb airspeed of 104 to 113

COACH CLASS

BEECH AIRCRAFT CORPORATION

Vernon Lundell, AOPA 126303, of Cherokee, Iowa, takes delivery of the first B-95 Travel Air. Lundell (second from left) purchased the airplane for his industrial machinery business in 1958.

continued

knots. While the rate of climb is somewhat lowered at these speeds, there is better forward visibility and the increased airflow helps keep the engines from overheating.

Cruising at 23 inches of manifold pressure and 2,300 rpm, you should see about 143 knots indicated airspeed. This would be roughly 65-percent power. Yes, the controls feel solid and responsive, but heavy. More of the big-airplane aspect; and because of this stability and feel, the Travel Air makes an outstanding instrument platform. Noise levels are lower than any of the Travel Air's contemporaries and seem lower than many of today's aircraft.

The landing gear can be lowered at speeds up to 130 knots; however, to preclude an excessive speed build-up in an extreme emergency, you can lower the gear right up to 174 knots. Emergency extension is by 50 turns of a handcrank. The maximum flap-extension speed is 113 knots, and, unless the airplane has had the marks painted over, you will see those 10- and 20-degree stripes; full deflection is 33 de-

COACH CLASS

Modern, light-twin performance at a much lower cost.

BEECHCRAFT B95A TRAVEL AIR

Base price $49,500 (1963)
Current market value $28,000 to $35,500
AOPA Pilot Operations/Equipment Category: IFR

Specifications

Powerplants	2 Lycoming IO-360-B1A, 180 hp @ 2,700 rpm & full throttle
	Recommended TBO 1,200 hr
Propellers	2 Hartzell 8447-12, constant-speed, full-feathering; 2 blades, 72 in
Wingspan	37 ft 10 in
Length	25 ft 4 in
Height	9 ft 6 in
Wing area	199.2 sq ft
Wing loading	21.1 lb/sq ft
Power loading	11.7 lb/hp
Seats	5
Cabin length	8 ft 6 in
Cabin width	3 ft 6 in
Cabin height	4 ft 2 in
Empty weight	2,555 lb
Useful load	1,645 lb
Payload w/full fuel	973 lb
Gross weight	4,200 lb
Fuel capacity, std	516 lb (504 usable), 86 gals (84 usable)
Fuel capacity w/opt tanks	678 lb (672 usable), 113 gals (112 usable)
Oil capacity ea engine	8 qt
Baggage capacity	270 lb, 33.5 cu ft (rear)
	270 lb, 12 cu ft (nose)

Performance

Takeoff distance (ground roll)	1,000 ft
Accelerate/stop distance	2,600 ft
Takeoff over 50 ft	1,250 ft
Rate of climb, sea level	1,250 fpm
Single-engine ROC, sea level	205 fpm
Max level speed, sea level	183 kt
Cruise speed, 75% power	
7,500 ft	174 kt
4,000 ft	167 kt
Fuel consumption, ea engine	66 pph (11 gph)
Cruise speed, 65% power	
7,500 ft	162 kt
10,000 ft	167 kt
Fuel consumption, ea engine	52 pph (8.6 gph)
Cruise speed, 55% power	
7,500 ft	150 kt
14,000 ft	157 kt
Fuel consumption, ea engine	44 pph (7.3 gph)
Economy cruise speed, 45% power	
14,000 ft	137 kt
Fuel consumption, ea engine	38 pph (6.3 gph)
Range @ 75% cruise w/45-min res, std fuel, best economy	
5,000 ft	1,040 nm
Range @ 65% cruise w/45-min res, std fuel, best economy	
10,000 ft	1,100 nm
Range @ 55% cruise w/45-min res, std fuel, best economy	
15,000 ft	1,130 nm
Service ceiling	18,100 ft
Single-engine service ceiling	4,400 ft
Absolute ceiling	19,700 ft
Landing distance (ground roll)	980 ft

Limiting and Recommended Airspeeds

Vmc (Minimum control w/critical engine inoperative)	73 KIAS
Vsse (Minimum intentional one-engine inoperative)	87 KIAS
Vx (Best angle of climb)	83 KIAS
Vy (Best rate of climb)	91 KIAS
Vyse (Best single-engine rate of climb)	87 KIAS
Va (Design maneuvering)	113 KIAS
Vfe (Max flap extended)	113 KIAS
Vle/Vlo (Normal max gear extended/operating)	130 KIAS
Vle/Vlo (Emergency max gear extended/operating)	174 KIAS
Vno (Normal operating)	160 KIAS
Vne (Never exceed)	208 KIAS
Vr (Rotation)	73 KIAS
Vsi (Stall clean)	70 KIAS
Vso (Stall in landing configuration)	61 KIAS

All specifications are based on manufacturer's calculations. All performance figures are based on standard day, standard atmosphere, at sea level and gross weight, unless otherwise noted.

Operations/Equipment Category: see June 1981 Pilot, *p. 103.*

continued

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Pattern entry speed is 104 knots, with a speed reduction to 95 on base. Go to full flaps when your judgment dictates, and keep your final approach speed at 78 knots. It is best to maintain that airspeed until over the threshold; remember that the Travel Air is a heavier light twin (the original 95s have a gross weight of 4,000 pounds, and the last model—the E95—goes up to 4,200 pounds) and will need that speed for good control. Hold the yoke back while power is reduced, and you should arrive in a proper, mains-first attitude. If you are accustomed to light, light twins, you will be surprised at how much back pressure will be required. But on the whole, the Travel Air is an airplane that forgives the inexperienced their lapses in landing technique. To land with a minimum ground roll, the manual suggests an approach speed of 70 knots with full flaps.

For an airplane that was in production for 10 years and that went through four different model designations, there were very few amendments to the original design.

The plain Model 95 Travel Air had carbureted engines, four seats, a useful load of 1,465 (standard fuel tanks), a gross weight of 4,000 pounds and a smaller rear window than the Travel Airs that were to follow.

The 1958 through 1960 Model 95s have a passenger-assist step that retracts when the gear do. Another oddity is the evaporative cooler, located overhead, above the gasper vents. Mineral wicks, resting in a pan of water, filter pollen and dust from the incoming ram air, and as the water evaporates the air is cooled. "In average summer weather, the water supply will last up to four hours," the owner's manual states. This is the same manual that fails to list all the airplane's V-speeds and neglects a check-list presentation of emergency procedures.

The 95 was in production for only two and a half years, but in that period of time 301 were sold. Back in those days, you could buy a new Travel Air without options from $49,500 (1958) to $51,500 (1960). Today, if you can find one, a 95 will run you from $23,000 to $29,000 depending on its condition. Do not expect too much for $25,000. Many Travel Airs see extensive use as multi-engine trainers. When

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Vso (Stall in landing configuration)	61 KIAS

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Operations/Equipment Category: see June 1981 Pilot, *p. 103.*

continued

you see an ex-trainer, you will know it, and this will be your bargain-basement, wolverined-out Travel Air.

The 95's O-360-A1A engines have a 1,200-hour recommended time between overhaul (TBO), because they used $^{7}/_{16}$-inch valve stems. This probably should not concern the prospective purchaser these days, because by now those engines most surely have been overhauled and fitted out with the more durable $^{1}/_{2}$-inch valves.

The B95 was in production only one year—1960—and 149 were built. This model received some major alterations. For one, the wing area was increased from 193.8 to 199.2 square feet. The area of the tail structure also was increased. The rudder's size was enlarged from the 95's 6.63 square feet to 7.18, the elevators increased from 15 to 16.2 square feet, and the horizontal stabilizer went from 27.4 to 48.6 square feet. Perhaps because of these changes, the B95 has a 4,100-pound gross weight, 100 pounds more than its predecessor. The cabin interior was lengthened by 19 inches, and a fifth seat was added.

Deicing options were offered for the first time on the B95, though no Travel Airs ever received certification for flight into known icing conditions. Price new? $51,500 sans options and $66,950 for an average-equipped model. Now they are worth from $25,000 to $31,000.

Then, from 1961 to 1963, there was the B95A, a fuel-injected version with an even higher, 4,200-lb gross weight and six seats. The horizontal stabilizer was reduced in area but its span was widened to 13 feet, nine inches. Aileron area also was reduced from 11.5 square feet to 10.1 square feet.

Eighty-one B95As were built. Base price of a new B95A was all of $49,500. An average-equipped B95A (this means dual nav/coms, glideslope receiver, automatic direction finder, marker beacon, transponder and two-axis autopilot) would have cost about $68,000. Now it could sell for between $26,000 and $36,000. As with any used airplane, expect to pay more if it comes equipped with distance measuring equipment, encoding altimeter, area navigation (RNAV) or deicing.

The D95A had its production run from 1964 to 1967, in which time 169 were sold. With the D95A came a lengthened nose cone, making the airplane seven inches longer and giving the nose baggage compartment larger dimensions. The flaps, which were enlarged to protrude beyond the trailing edges of the ailerons on the B95s, were enlarged once more. The windshield and panel were redesigned, and the air-vent scoop was moved from the top of the fuselage into the dorsal fin. The D95A's rear baggage compartment had its weight limit raised from the earlier 270 pounds to 400 pounds.

In 1966 the D95A started using the IO-360-B1B engines with $^{1}/_{2}$-inch valves, boosting the TBO to 2,000 hours. Inflation sets in as we see the base prices climb from a 1964 model's $49,500 to a 1967's $52,000. Average-equipped price jumped from

COACH CLASS

Overweight? Underpowered? Perhaps, but the Travel Air is the most comfortable of the vintage light twins.

$67,000 to $71,000 in that same period. Now they are worth from $31,000 (an older one) to $45,000 (a real clean 1967, with an updated panel).

Sales dropped to what must have been a record low for any Beech light airplane, when only 13 E95s rolled out in 1968. The E95 has its flight instruments arranged in the T display, and like that year's Bonanza, the windshield was enlarged, changed to a one-piece construction and slanted forward, giving this model the best visibility of all the Travel Airs. In 1968, a standard- and an average-equipped new Travel Air E95 cost $53,500 and $73,000, respectively. Today, they can be had for between $37,000 and $46,000.

Thus ends the history of the Travel Air. To a great extent, the demand for more speed and power probably did in the Travel Air. The Twin Comanche started selling in 1963; and at a very competitive price, it could deliver an honest true airspeed of 174 knots at cruise. For a little bit more, you could buy an Aztec, with greater load-carrying ability and 250-hp engines. And the Cessna 310 was still going strong. If only the Travel Air had slightly more powerful engines and got rid of that blunt appearance, it could carry slightly more weight and look more modern. And this is exactly what Beech did. In 1961 the firm introduced the B-55 Baron, essentially a worked-over Travel Air with 260-hp Continental IO-470 engines. The Baron's sales were strong from the start, which was just when the Travel Air's began to drop off. The marketplace was voting, and the Travel Air lost.

Taking in all the pros and cons, you might think that the Travel Air is an ideal, used light twin, were it not for the slight imbalance between power and weight. It is certainly the most luxurious of the aging light twins, but like an old Mercedes, there is the argument that it is overweight and underpowered. The large, white, ram's horn yoke even reminds me of the huge white Mercedes steering wheels.

Actually, the Mercedes analogy, while perhaps stretching the point, holds up pretty well for the Travel Air. There is marginal acceleration from a standing start, but a respectable top-end speed. At the same time, there is that comfort, not to mention the image.

It is an airplane with class. They all are, you know: the Apache, the Twin Comanche, the Twin Bonanza, the old Rockwell Commanders and the Aztecs—even the Champion Lancer has a style of its own. All these airplanes have definite personalities. Relating to them is easy. Today's light twins are noteworthy for their lack of individuality. Line them up, and it is like going to a party where everyone talks about real estate. And buying a new light twin is at least a $150,000 proposition.

Roll up in a Travel Air, though, and the conversation is likely to change. You have arrived in a vintage Mercedes-Benz of the air, a symbol of the days when our economy could promote character in its light airplanes, and ease of production was not the burning necessity that it is today. The Travel Air flies at speeds comparable to today's light twins, carries—in many cases—more weight, burns roughly the same amount of fuel, performs just as well on one engine and has a comparable range and endurance profile. But it will cost you $100,000 less to buy. And with the savings you might, *might,* even be able to buy some real estate. □