

# CESSNA'S 1995 SCORECARD

FIRST NEW



172



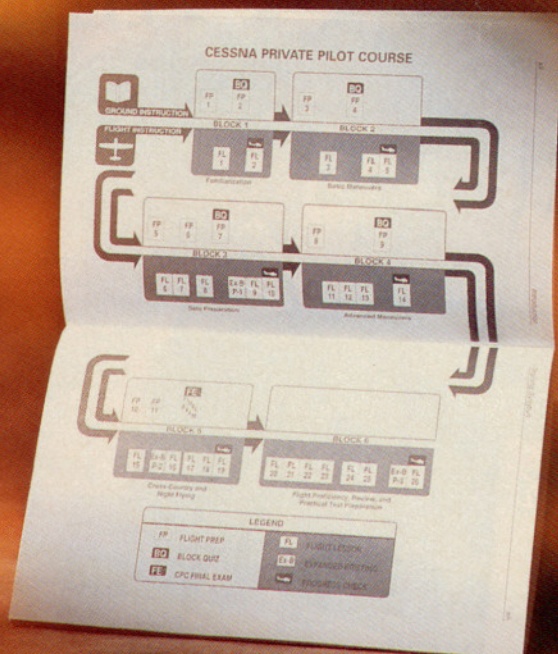
## *Cessna's single-engine restart involves Cessna Pilot Centers, too*

BY THOMAS A. HORNE

**AS** 1995 draws to a close, Cessna plods on with its efforts to resume production of certain piston singles. This spool-up has proven to be a task more formidable than many had originally thought. You don't just walk away from a line of aircraft for 10 years, then expect new models to roll out the factory door at the flip of a switch. ■ First off, the factory isn't even built yet. Sure, Cessna bought the manufacturing site at the Independence (Kansas) Munici-



# New airplanes and modern teaching materials—basics for a renewed single-engine market.



The syllabus that trained thousands. The CPC's six learning blocks take neophytes to the private pilot certificate in a highly structured flow of events.

pal Airport earlier this year. And yes, that land has been graded and footings have been laid. But there have been delays. Until engineers and construction teams put in the fixes, drainage problems put dents in construction timetables. A long stretch of wet weather didn't help things, either. However, now we're told that those difficulties have been overcome and things are back on track. By July 1996, Cessna says, the plant will be open for business. By this time next year, Cessna says, the Independence factory will be humming. And the first new Cessna 172 to come off the assembly line will go to the lucky AOPA sweepstakes winner selected in a drawing next month—just a few short weeks away.

AOPA Pilot's last update on the single-engine restart (see "First New 172: Cessna Meets CATIA," October Pilot)

discussed Cessna's conversion of its 40-year-old designs into creatures of the computer age. Hand-drawn blueprints and diagrams are things of the past. Cessna's new singles will be designed and built with the help of the same software used by Dassault Falcon Jet, Bombardier, and Gulfstream.

So much for design. As for construction procedures, those too will take time to perfect. Most of the employees who built the last Cessna 172s, 182s, and 206s in 1986 have moved on to other careers—or retired—in the intervening years. For 1996, a brand-new workforce has to be hired and trained.

That's another process under way. In September Cessna began hiring new employees for the Independence plant—beginning with 10 Indepen-



dence natives. The first batch of new hires is destined to become supervisors on the assembly line. But first, the supervisors have to learn all the tasks they'll be supervising.

To do this, Cessna has established an assembly pilot project. This program teaches supervisors- and employees-to-be how new Skyhawks, Skylanes, and Stationairs will be built. It's a hands-on project that lets new employees practice building a real airplane—from subassemblies on up. The teach-the-teachers project, begun in early October, is now in full swing at Cessna's Pawnee Plant in Wichita. Two airplanes of each type will be built under this initiative.

So far, work has concentrated on subassemblies and other smaller parts. When asked if the results of this work could be readily identified as components of a Cessna single, Pat Boyarski, general manager of Cessna's single-engine business unit, said "Oh, no. Not yet. But by late January we should have a fuselage and wings to look at."

At this point, some readers may wonder if the first Skyhawk now being assembled by hand will be the airplane AOPA will give away as the First New 172 Sweepstakes airplane. That's a negative. These completed airplanes will serve as certification and flight test aircraft. They'll be sold later, but only after going through refurbishment.

AOPA's First New 172 will indeed be the first production airplane off the Independence line, and it will bear serial number 4.

Speaking of production airplanes, Cessna has been taking deposits, at \$2,500 a pop, for the first airplanes. Company officials count about 250 deposits so far. The best customer to date? A recent press release indicated that Cessna's authorized sales representative in Brazil—TAM/Transportes Aereos Regonais—made an order for 100 Cessna singles and has options for 100 more.

Cessna's decision to resume production wasn't the only big news in the company's 1995 single-engine saga. As if the restart program wasn't enough, the company is also embarking on major upgrades to the pilot training materials issued by its Cessna Pilot Centers.

Cessna Pilot Centers (CPCs) were introduced in 1971, with the dual purposes of training more pilots and

seeding the single-engine market with sales prospects. At the core of the CPC concept is a highly structured, integrated private pilot flight training program that uses texts and other instructional materials developed for Cessna by Jeppesen-Sanderson. In those days, students received their first texts, workbooks, logbooks, sectional charts, and E-6B flight computers in a bright red vinyl carrying case emblazoned with Cessna's old three-pennant logo.

Back then, CPCs kept a series of filmstrips and audiotapes that complemented the briefcase materials. All course work was organized in stages called "blocks," and each set of flight lessons within a block was backed up with ground school assignments called "flight preps." In each flight prep, students read about subjects such as airplane systems, aerodynamics, weather, and navigation theory; test their ground school learning in the workbook; then watched the filmstrips and listened to the audiotapes for previews of what would happen in the next flying lesson. It was—and still is—a comprehensive, no-surprises approach to flight training.

It was also a wildly successful approach. During general aviation's salad days of the late 1970s there were some 900 CPCs in the United States and Canada alone. Just over 500,000 student pilot briefcase kits were sold in CPCs around the world. Many of the thousands of pilots trained in CPCs went on to buy brand-new Cessna singles—from the CPCs that trained them. CPCs were also Cessna dealers, in case you hadn't guessed.

That was then. Today there are fewer than 400 CPCs left in North America; student starts are way, way down from the 1970s; and the old filmstrips and audiotapes just don't hack it any more.

To change all this, Cessna has introduced videotapes for the audiovisual components of the flight preps. These tapes, like their filmstrip predecessors, are meant to stay at the CPC, where they are loaned out for students to view on the premises. Right now, the tapes feature Cessnas, as well as Pipers and other singles; in the 1970s, all visuals depicted Cessna 150s or 152s.

"This is really just the first generation of tapes," said Russ Watson, Cessna's manager of CPC sales. "The second





*The Independence construction site. Footings are in and the assembly plant's steel framework is in place. Company officials say that by winter the building will be enclosed, allowing interior work to progress. By July 4, the plant should be open for business.*

generation will come out next year and will show the new Skyhawks. After that, we'll have a third generation of audiovisuals that use computer-based, interactive materials on CD-ROM."

Jeppesen has yet to finish the CD-ROM conversion, but Watson indicated that the decision to go with this technology is a done deal. "Videotapes may be state of the art for showing flight maneuvers right now," Watson said. "But not for long."

As for the kits, they've already undergone changes. The old vinyl bags are gone—replaced by fancier, deep burgundy variants, complete with handles. Inside, the textbook and workbook have been updated to stay



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current with regulatory and other changes. For example, the new METAR and TAF weather-reporting formats are covered in a weather data supplement. The basic kit and its contents sell for a suggested retail price of \$100.15. If you want a kit with study guides for the private pilot written and practical tests, the price goes up to \$105.65. For the deluxe kit—one with all the above, plus a book containing the Federal Aviation Regulations and an *Aeronautical Information Manual*—the price is \$133.85. Not bad when you consider that you've bought virtually everything you need to study for the private pilot certificate.

The improvements to the CPC curriculum dovetail nicely with Cessna's single-engine restart. With product liability reform, new airplanes, new approaches to pilot training, and programs like AOPA's Project Pilot, the general aviation community has a lot more going for it now than it had just 18 months ago. "Build it and they will come," went the mantra in the movie *Field of Dreams*. Well, Cessna's building them, and we'll see how many respond. One thing's for sure: Some lucky person will walk away with the First New 172. And he or she will soon learn the good news. □