

# The inside job

A custom leather-and-wool interior rounds out the Win-A-Twin

BY THOMAS A. HORNE

**Y**ou may have brand-new engines, a snazzy paint job, and an airframe logbook chock full of upgrade sign-offs, but none of that matters when you're in the cockpit. You can't see those things when you're

flying. And this was the situation with our/your Win-A-Twin Piper Comanche up until early July. That's when Airtex Products Inc. installed a brand-new interior. And boy did the airplane need it.

Ever since the sweepstakes refurbishment process began in November of last year, we'd flown the Win-A-Twin some 40 hours, shuttling the airplane from one shop to another as the airplane

accumulated new engines, airframe mods, a paint job, a brand-new instrument panel, and other improvements. And the whole time, we put up with what can only be called a sad-looking cabin.

What does that mean? For starters, the seats lacked any meaningful support. When you sat down in them, you sank about two inches—maybe more. The headrests, adapted from a set of old Mooney headrest frames, had covers that allowed its yellowed, dry-rotting foam to seep past their seams. The carpets had a tacky avocado color and were stained with, well, who knows what. Heels from thousands of pilot and passenger entries over the past 39 years had ground threadbare patches in the areas just forward of the front seats.

Then there was the headliner. It sagged down in longitudinal pouches. And yes, it rested on your head as you flew. Sigh.

#### On to Airtex

All of this came to an end after N204WT visited Airtex Products'

hangar at the Trenton Mercer Airport in New Jersey. There, under the direction of company president Dodd Stretch, Airtex installed a brand-new, custom-designed interior in a mere six weeks.

Airtex Products is a well-known name in the general aviation aftermarket industry. For 50 years, Airtex has been selling interior kits and delivering them to owners and their FBOs. While field installations represent the



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bulk of Airtex's sales (the company ships 400 to 500 kits per year), the company also does its own installations at its hangar at the Trenton Mercer Airport. Some 30 interiors per year are completed this way, and that's the route we took with the Win-A-Twin. This gave Airtex a chance to show off some of its best work.

### A custom fit

Airtex's kits are usually associated with a more prosaic look, standardized schemes, and less expensive materials, in keeping with a conservative pricing strategy. But the Win-A-Twin got a leather-and-wool interior that competes favorably with some of the best interior work in the business.

Work began with stripping out the bad old interior and taking the seats down to bare metal. It was at this stage that the seats' worn-out springs (the cause of the low-rider phenomenon)

were examined, then summarily thrown out. They were replaced with single taut canvas slings.

Then several of Airtex's 27 staffers went to work fabricating new seat padding and leather seat covers. Like the leather side panels, this was custom work. The only patterns used in the job were those for the carpeting and headliner. The glareshield was recovered, and some new hardware and other components were ordered so that the interior could be made as like-new as possible.

Webco Aircraft Company, of Newton, Kansas, provided a new cabin door handle, a new overhead trim crank, new rubber door and baggage compartment seals, new door locks, and four new Wemac-style adjustable air vents. Wentworth Aircraft, of Minneapolis, donated a new pilot armrest—another welcome addition, and another feature lacking in stock Twin Comanches of the Win-A-Twin's vintage. A new overhead console came from Heinol & Associates, of Tyler, Texas.

### Movies, anyone?

Equally impressive is the work Airtex did in building up the new headrests. Inserts in the headrest backs were created for high-resolution video displays, and a pair of Audiovox screens are now set up to show DVDs for back-seat passengers.

It's all part of the PS Engineering PAV80 entertainment system installed in the airplane. Sebastian Communication in Merritt Island, Florida, put the PAV80 on the left side of the instrument panel and, using its controls, pilot and passengers can configure the entertainment system to play a combination of audio and video. Front-seaters can listen to CDs or AM/FM radio, and backseaters can select (using a small remote-control unit) AM, FM, CD, or DVD modes. In DVD mode, the remote lets passengers start, stop, select, or rewind a DVD.

Meanwhile, those in front can choose audio sources of their own, and play them the same time the backseat passengers listen to, or watch, the entertainment they choose.



The PAV80 silences the audio inputs whenever ATC makes a transmission, so there's no danger that you'll miss a radio call. It also pauses whenever there's an intercom conversation among the occupants.

The DVD screens are wired so as to plug into jacks in the sidewalls—an installation that Sebastian made. In all, it's a really neat system. It works great, and the DVD screens are as crisp as can be. We've been watching movies whenever we can, just to show it off. But we're tired of what's been playing—*A Beautiful Mind*—and frankly can't wait to pop *Top Gun* into the panel.

It's difficult to believe, but the bulk of the Win-A-Twin's restoration work has been completed. Yes, a few odds

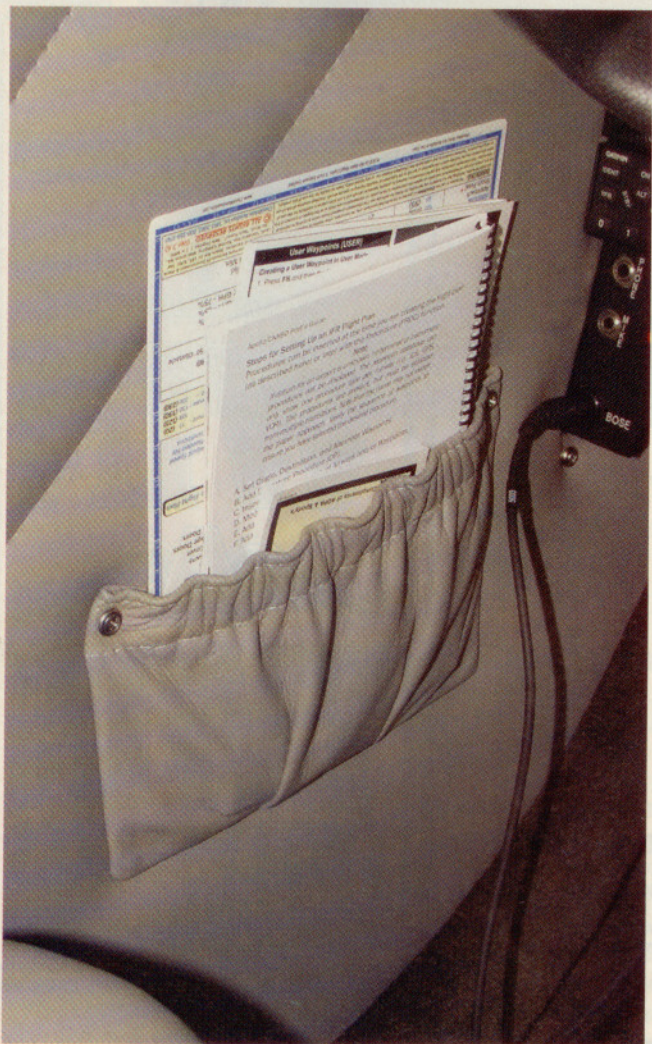
and ends need to be addressed, but these can be dealt with in short order. Now it's time to do some traveling. We'll have N204WT at the International Comanche Society's annual convention in Kansas City, Missouri, which runs from September 14 through 19. There, the airplane will be on display at the Kansas City's Charles B. Wheeler Downtown Airport, and AOPA President Phil Boyer will be a guest speaker at the society's Airport Marriott location.

After that, I'll have the privilege of flying the airplane to AOPA Expo 2004, in Long Beach, California, from October 21 through 23. There, the Win-A-Twin goes on display at the Long Beach airport from October 21 to 23. Please come by and take a look at one of the nicest Twin Comanches you'll ever see. And please stop by this space in next month's *AOPA Pilot* for more stories from behind the wheel of the Win-A-Twin.

**AOPA**

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**i** Links to additional information about the Win-A-Twin sweepstakes airplane may be found on AOPA Online ([www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml](http://www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml)). Keyword search: Win-A-Twin.



Out with the old, in with the new—the sagging headliner was replaced (far left, top). Webco and Heinol & Associates provided the new overhead trim crank (far left, below). A PS Engineering PAV80 entertainment system was installed and now movies such as *A Beautiful Mind* can play for passengers (center). Fine craftsmanship marks the leather work by Airtex (this page).