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HOT RIDES
FOR WANNABE
FIGHTER JOCKS

Plus

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WINTER DREAMS OF
SUMMERTIME FLIGHT

**FLY SAFER
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AVOID CRUISE CATASTROPHE

HOT RIDES

FOR WANNABE FIGHTER JOCKS

BY *FLYING STAFF*

Since shortly after World War I, civilian pilots have longed to recreate the exploits of famous aviators. Heroes and villains of the Great War, from the Red Baron to Eddie Rickenbacker, inspired people to fly and, in some cases, to fly like fighter pilots in military-inspired racing planes.

But it was in the three decades following World War II that wannabe fighter jocks had the opportunity to get their hands on private fighters — more so than they ever had before or ever would again.

Thanks to the march of aviation progress, some cutting-edge hardware has been relegated to the trash heap of history. With the advent of the jet age in the 1950s, tens of thousands of former piston fighters

and trainers were made available on the used market, often for a pittance. There were easy pickings for pilots looking for P-51 Mustangs, T-6 Texans, Vultee BT-13s and even WWII bombers.

Today, the market for warbirds is still going strong. There are a number of good warbirds or faux-birds available that can give today's pilots the best parts of the experience of yesteryear's flying heroes. The vast majority are piston-powered models, but there are jet fighters and trainers, from Grumman Panthers to Cessna T-37 Tweety Birds, in private hands too. With the addition of former Eastern Bloc aircraft, liaison and training models from the Vietnam era, and military-inspired homebuilts, the warbird scene is in full swing today. — **Robert Goyer**



JANGSU LEE





THE YAK 52 AND NANCHANG CJ-6 ARE HIGHLY CAPABLE BUT VERY AFFORDABLE WARBIIDS WITH LOW INITIAL PURCHASE COSTS AND MANAGEABLE FUEL AND MAINTENANCE BILLS.

NANCHANG CJ-6/YAK 52

You may not have the desire to imagine yourself as a communist fighter pilot, but the Nanchang CJ-6 and Yakovlev 52, or Yak 52 for short, are two terrific warbirds that are not only beautiful and fun to fly but also affordable. These former military trainers are popular on the airshow circuit, with groups such as the Aerostars performing formation aerobatics in Yak 52s. The Nanchang CJ-6 is a modified Chinese version of the Yak, which was produced in Russia and is still produced under license in Romania.

The low-wing configuration and full-window canopy of these airplanes provide terrific visibility around all quadrants, making both airplanes wonderful platforms for formation flying and aerobatics. Like the North American T-6, the Yak and CJ-6 are both equipped with roaring radial engines, though there is a difference in the amount of horsepower they each produce.

There are some fairly significant other differences between the Yak and the CJ-6 that you should

consider before committing to a purchase. If you plan to do a lot of heavy-duty aerobatics, you may want to consider the Yak over the CJ-6, as the design has a higher load limit, greater horsepower and an inverted fuel system. The CJ-6 was also produced only in the tricycle configuration, so if you are looking for a taildragger, you should go with a Yak.

However, if your mission is focused more on cross-country flight, the CJ-6 is a better choice. Although the power plant has just 285 hp compared to the Yak's 360, the CJ-6 cruises faster and has a greater range than its Russian sibling. With its bigger fuselage, the CJ-6 also provides more space for any gear you may want to take with you.

While the flight characteristics of the Yak and CJ-6 make them great warbirds, what makes them stand out as particularly good choices is their affordability. Nice examples of these fighters can be found for less than \$100,000, and the cost of operation is economical, with a fuel burn of around 15 gph, about half that of a T-6. — *Pia Bergqvist*

AVERAGE PRICE

\$70,000

SEATS

2

PRIMARY CONSTRUCTION

Metal

LANDING GEAR

Retractable

ENGINE

Vendeneyev M14P

HORSEPOWER

360

CRUISE SPEED

147 knots

NEVER EXCEED SPEED

230 knots

STALL SPEED (CLEAN)

60 knots

STALL SPEED (DIRTY)

54 knots

TAKEOFF DISTANCE

585 feet

LANDING DISTANCE

975 feet

RANGE

280 nm

USABLE FUEL

30 gallons

USEFUL LOAD

639 pounds

LIMIT LOAD FACTOR

+7/-5

VAN'S RV-4

Van's lineup of kitplanes might lack the military pedigree of some other airplanes on our list, but the legion of loyal owners known as Van's Air Force can tell you these sporting homebuilt models are all about pushing limits. And for the purest Van's Aircraft experience that you can share with a friend, the tandem-seat RV-4 taildragger is the airplane to have.

With handling virtually identical to that of the single-seat RV-3 (the airplane that put Van's on the map in 1972), the RV-4 is compact but comfortable inside, with fighter jet-like appeal. The flying is done from the front seat, although both occupants have controls — in the RV-4's case, stick and rudder.

The typical engine for the RV-4 is in the 150 to 160 hp range, though Van's says engines as small as 125 and as large as 180 hp have been tried since the first kits were sold in 1979. Cruise speed with a 160 hp Lycoming is estimated at 168 knots at 7,500 feet — blindingly fast compared with tricycle gear production airplanes

that fly with the exact same engine.

If you plan on building your own RV-4, keep in mind it will take longer compared with Van's more recent kit models that have parts that are pre-drilled and prefabricated to a higher degree. Van's estimates an RV-4 will take about 2,000 to 2,200 hours to build versus about 1,500 or so for an RV-7, RV-8 or RV-9.

Another possible drawback of the RV-4 is the tight fit. If you're taller than 6 feet, opt for the roomier RV-8, Van's other tandem-seat taildragger. The advantage of the smaller RV-4 is in its handling, which is more likely to induce the famed "Van's grin" than any other model, save the RV-3. The RV-4 also needs less room for takeoff and landing, a potentially important factor for pilots who fly out of their own small farm strips.

Buying a used RV-4 can be a real bargain, with prices averaging about half of a used RV-8. Asking prices are generally less than \$50,000. You can also get a steal of a deal on an unfinished kit, but beware of missing or damaged parts. — **Stephen Pope**

AVERAGE PRICE

\$40,000

SEATS

2

PRIMARY CONSTRUCTION

Metal

LANDING GEAR

Fixed

ENGINE

Builder's choice

HORSEPOWER

150-180 (typical)

CRUISE SPEED

168 knots

NEVER EXCEED SPEED

185 knots

STALL SPEED (CLEAN)

48 knots

STALL SPEED (DIRTY)

44 knots

TAKEOFF DISTANCE

450 feet

LANDING DISTANCE

425 feet

RANGE

685 nm

USABLE FUEL

32 gallons

USEFUL LOAD

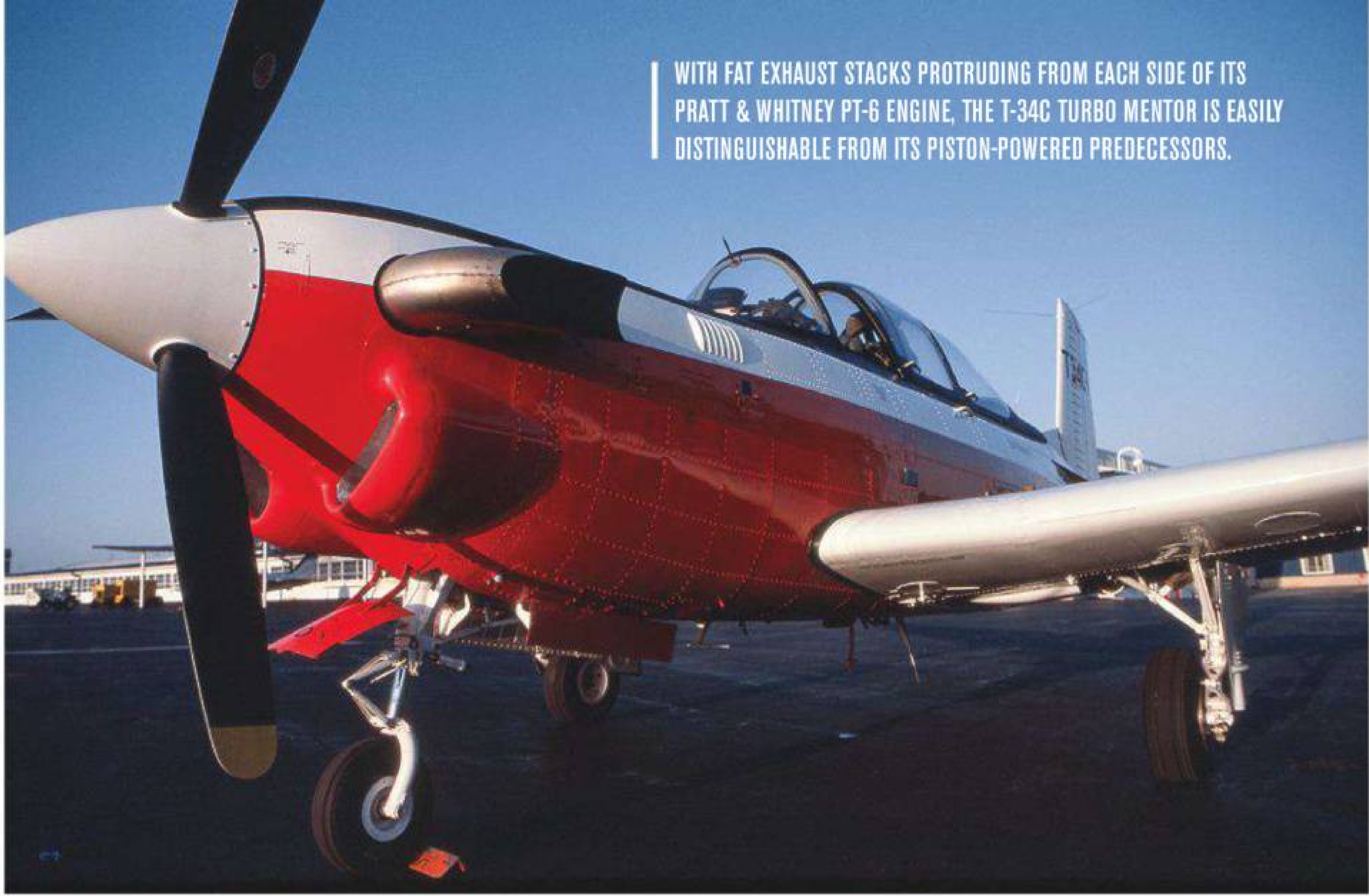
615 pounds

LIMIT LOAD FACTOR

+6/-3

WHILE MANY OF VAN'S DESIGNS ARE CONFIGURED WITH SIDE-BY-SIDE SEATING, THE RV-4 IS A TANDEM-SEAT TAILDRAGGER, MAKING IT A BETTER PLATFORM FOR FORMATION FLIGHT.





WITH FAT EXHAUST STACKS PROTRUDING FROM EACH SIDE OF ITS PRATT & WHITNEY PT-6 ENGINE, THE T-34C TURBO MENTOR IS EASILY DISTINGUISHABLE FROM ITS PISTON-POWERED PREDECESSORS.

BEECHCRAFT T-34 MENTOR

Developed as a derivative of the Beech Bonanza, the T-34 Mentor trainer might have been built with a V-tail if Walter Beech had his way. But with the military having the final say, the T-34 incorporated a conventional tail to go with a narrow fuselage, bubble canopy and tandem seating. The result is an enduring U.S. military primary trainer that occupies a place in history alongside icons such as the Piper L-4 Grasshopper and North American T-6 as the piston airplanes that taught fighting men to fly in both the Navy and Air Force.

Still, the T-34 almost didn't make it off the drawing board. After a lengthy selection period during which the Air Force grappled with the decision to train new pilots in jets or piston airplanes, the T-34 finally won out, making its formal debut in 1953, five years after the prototype's first flight. The Navy soon followed with a sizeable order for the more powerful T-34B and would eventually place an order for the turboprop T-34C Turbo Mentor

after a 15-year production hiatus.

Today, the Mentor is prized among private owners for its maneuverability, comparative economy and striking looks. The original T-34 rolled off the production line with the 225 hp Continental O-470, although a number have since been upgraded with larger IO-520 and IO-550 engines. The difference between the A and B models generally center on the A model being certified in the Aerobatic Category and the B model in the Utility Category. Handling is superb, and thanks to its Beech pedigree, the T-34 Mentor lands like a baby carriage.

All told, Beech built more than 1,300 T-34s, about 100 of which remain in service with various militaries around the world and another 100 or so in the hands of private owners. Asking prices currently range from about \$140,000 up to \$350,000 for a fully restored example. Thanks to its commonality with the Beech Bonanza, parts are easy to come by, making this a warbird that's easier to live with than many. — *S.P.*

AVERAGE PRICE

\$265,000

SEATS

2

PRIMARY CONSTRUCTION

Metal

LANDING GEAR

Retractable

ENGINE

Continental O-470-4

HORSEPOWER

225

CRUISE SPEED

150 knots

NEVER EXCEED SPEED

243 knots

STALL SPEED (CLEAN)

63 knots

STALL SPEED (DIRTY)

53 knots

TAKEOFF DISTANCE

820 feet

LANDING DISTANCE

420 feet

RANGE

670 nm

USABLE FUEL

50 gallons

USEFUL LOAD

740 pounds

LIMIT LOAD FACTOR

+6/-3