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Mitsubishi MU-2B Short-Body

Fast, efficient and very affordable, but potentially unforgiving

By Fred George

Want King Air 200GT cruise speed plus VLJ fuel efficiency for the price of a late model Bonanza? The Mitsubishi MU-2B short-body series may be the only aircraft that fills these three requirements. It's one of the

best buys in a used aircraft market chock-full of bargains. Eight models were produced from 1967 through 1981, including the first-generation MU-2B, D, DP, F, K and M, plus the second-generation P and MU-2B-40 Solitaire.

All the short-body aircraft share virtually the same airframe, featuring a relatively small, highly

loaded, top-mounted laminar flow wing with full span double-slotted flaps, rugged landing gear attached directly to the fuselage and Honeywell TPE331 direct-drive turboprop engines. The main differences between the various models boil down to fuel capacity, engine output, props and weight ratings, along with different type

certificates for the first- and second-generation aircraft.

MU-2B and D models, built in 1967 and 1968, are powered by TPE331-25 engines having a standard-day rating of 575 shp and turning Hartzell three-blade props at 2,000 rpm. The B and D have 9,350-pound MTOWs and a 1,916-pound fuel capacity; maximum cruise speed is 260 KTAS.

Three DP aircraft, equipped with 665-shp TPE331-1 engines, also were built in 1968. The -1 engine was flat-rated to 665 shp from 724 tshp, enabling the DP to cruise 10 knots faster. Maximum IFR range of B, D and DP models is 1,100 nm. Retail prices for such aircraft range from \$200,000 to \$250,000, assuming mid-time engines and excellent paint and interior.

Next in the first-generation series was the MU-2F, produced from mid-1968 to early 1972. It also was fitted with -1 engines, but it was equipped with larger tip tanks that increased fuel capacity to 2,250 pounds and MTOW was upped to 9,920 pounds. Top speed is 265 to 270 KTAS and maximum IFR range increased slightly to 1,150 nm. F models command \$250,000 to just over \$300,000.

The K model debuted in mid-1972 and it was built through 1974. Fitted with 840-tshp -6 engines, flat-rated to 665 shp, K models can cruise up to 300 KTAS. Fuel capacity was increased to 2,450 pounds, increasing range to 1,250 nm. Retail

prices range from \$250,000 to just under \$400,000.

From 1974 to 1976, the M model was built, offering a 10,420-pound MTOW that improved tanks-full payload. These aircraft command as much as \$350,000 to \$400,000 in today's market.

The second-generation aircraft started in early 1977 with the P model. It was equipped with slower turning -5 engines and smaller diameter, four-blade, counter-clockwise rotating props that reduce interior sound levels. MTOW increased to 10,470 pounds. Maximum cruise speed dropped slightly below 300 KTAS because of the four-blade props. Fuel capacity was increased to 2,700 pounds, bumping maximum range to 1,400 nm. Asking prices for P models range from \$380,000 to \$450,000.

Last in the series is the MU-2B-40 Solitaire, introduced in 1979 and produced through 1981. The Solitaire was fitted with 940-tshp -10 engines, flat-rated to 665 shp, that restored 300-plus TAS cruise speeds and that significantly improved hot-and-high climb performance. Solitaires command \$450,000 to \$625,000 at resale time.

Pilots of MU-2B aircraft haven't earned a good safety record. The MU-2B isn't particularly difficult to fly, but based on our experience, it must be flown precisely according to flight manual procedures and speeds to preserve safety margins

and assure book performance.

The FAA's SFAR 108 now requires MU-2B pilots to successfully complete approved initial and 12-month refresher training courses. The SFAR almost is like a mini pilot type rating and it's in addition to the regular FAR Part 61.56 BFR proficiency checks. Notably, recurrent flight into known icing training also is required by an AD. This resulted from the FAA's special certification review of the MU-2's flight into known icing certification in 1997.

If you start shopping for an MU-2B, your pre-buy inspection should include a close look at the engines. A thorough power check can save thousands in remedial maintenance costs. Basic HSI intervals are 1,800 hours and TBO is 5,400 hours. Plan on \$70,000 for a pair of hot-section inspections, \$350,000 to \$400,000 for two engine overhauls and \$36,000 to overhaul both props. Aircraft fitted with -5 engines may be upgraded to the -10 configuration for \$485,000 at TBO. When fitted with -10 engines, early lightweight models with three-blade props can speed along at 325 KTAS. The engine upgrade can add \$100,000 or more to the resale price.

When it comes to price/performance ratio, it's tough to beat a short-body MU-2. For a more thorough look at the MU-2, read *Business & Commercial Aviation's* 2006 report at www.AviationWeek.com. ■