

functionally than bungee gear, since there are no elastic cords to replace regularly there is no question that spring steel gear require less maintenance. And, the standard (but unofficial) method of checking the condition of the “box” in the fuselage in which the gear are bolted is simply a hard kick to the rear of each gear leg during each annual inspection.

Rather than a trainer with tandem seating (front and back), Cessna decided to produce an airplane with a wider fuselage and side-by-side seating. This would eliminate problems with CG changes, and was thought to allow easier communication between student and instructor.

In those days, of course, almost all airplanes were “old fashioned” tail-draggers so it is unlikely that anything else was even considered. And besides, tail-draggers are lighter, faster, and less expensive to manufacture (two wheels and gear legs produce less drag, weigh less, and cost less, than three). Thoughts about higher insurance expenses (as compared to the tri-gear trainers that came along later) were probably never considered. But the Cessna engineers did elected to up things engine-wise to an 85 HP Continental, which would provide a better climb than the smaller engines that were then widely used, and would give a cruise speed of about 100 MPH.

It was decided to put bottom-hinged wing flaps on the new airplane. These are operated by a long, spring loaded Johnson Bar (lever) between the two seats. Flaps were not available on most of the competitor’s airplanes, and Cessna undoubtedly added them to gain a sales advantage. As it turned out, (very much unlike the Fowler-types to come along later) these bottom-hinged flaps are very ineffective. It’s a 140 pilot’s joke that since they do very little in allowing a steeper approach or in reducing stall speed, the primary benefit of the flaps is mostly a matter of arm exercise.

Figuring that most people didn’t want the hassle of propping their engines (as was necessary, for example, with all standard J-3 Cubs, and Aeronca Champs and Chiefs), it was decided to go with a complete battery/generator-powered electrical system, which would allow the use of a starter. This also made it possible to install landing and panel lights, and an on-board intercom system and radio (as opposed to hand-held carry-ons).

While, at that time, most of their competitors supplied either no brakes, or heel brakes (which are more difficult to use and are relatively ineffective),

Cessna decided to go with the more modern toe brakes. These brakes were standard on the left, but could also be obtained on the right as an option.

And thus the Cessna 140 came into existence! This attractive little tailwheel airplane, with rounded wing tips and a pleasingly-shaped vertical tail, would eventually prove to be the common ancestor of two major lines of Cessna’s vastly successful General Aviation offerings: the 150, 152, 172 and 182 line of tri-gear aircraft on the one hand, and the 170, 180, 185 line of tail-draggers on the other.

According to an article in the Aug/Sept 2009 issue of the International Cessna 120/140 Association’s magazine, between 1946 and 1951 the Cessna Aircraft Company manufactured more than 7,000 of the 140s, in three variations: the standard 140, the less expensive 120 (no flaps, no side-rear D-windows), and eventually the 140A (with a less attractive, all metal wing, and a 90 HP engine).



In 1946, the price for a standard 140 was \$3,385! Production ended in 1951 probably because the expected demand had not materialized and sales had become sluggish. The increasing demand [by sissy pilots] for tri-gear aircraft (if nothing else because of their lower insurance costs) must certainly have played a role in this. But what ever the reason, it was certainly not because of any deficiencies of the aircraft in the aviation roles for which it was designed, nor from any serious competition in these roles from other manufacturers.

Of that total of 7,000 or so C-140s, an amazing number are still flying. While certainly not like the 150s, 152s, 172s, and 182s, and so forth, which occur at every airport in the World, Cessna 140s are not at all uncommon. For example, locally there are six or seven at Ryan Field, one at La Cholla Air Park, one