

Cessna Caravan:
A Legend

New Approach
at Teterboro

Owner's Corner:
Ronen Elefant

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STILL CRUSADING: CESSNA'S FINAL PISTON TWIN

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This “cruciform tail” arrangement on what, otherwise, has the distinctive look of a twin Cessna, can only mean one thing: It’s a Crusader.





Still Crusading:

CESSNA'S FINAL PISTON TWIN

by **Matt McDaniel**

As I approached from across the small apron of North Carolina's Elkin Municipal Airport (KZEF), the outline of the striking blue twin was unmistakable. In spite of its relative rarity today, it is a type many still recognize. Not because of some storied history or famous exploits. Rather, it is simply that tail. That tall vertical stabilizer and rudder, bisected by horizontal stabilizers and elevators, form a cross-like empennage. This "cruciform tail" arrangement on what, otherwise, has the distinctive look of a twin Cessna, can only mean one thing: It's a Crusader. Maligned by some, revered by others, it remains a pilot magnet on every ramp.

Clipped Wings

Between 1954 and the mid-1980's, Cessna was in continuous production of piston twins, usually with multiple models rolling off the assembly lines simultaneously. However, in spite of their dominance in the cabin-class piston twin market, Cessna all but gave up the light twin trainer market. The original 310 fit that market in its earliest 4-to-5 seat, normally-aspirated versions. Subsequent 310 models, on the other hand, quickly grew into larger and faster (and more expensive) machines than most flight schools could justify.

Through the heyday of general aviation piston twins, Cessna was the undisputed champion. Simply put, they won the game in terms of the variety of models certified and numbers produced. Although they did so mainly within the cabin class realm, with little influence on the twin trainer market. So, it's not surprising that, in the 4th quarter, they decided to try to capture some of that market, which Piper, Beechcraft, and even Grumman controlled. Thus, on Feb. 14, 1978, Cessna flew what would turn out to be their final clean-sheet piston twin design; the Model 303 Clipper. The Clipper was a 4-seat twin, utilizing 160hp Lycoming engines and a NASA-designed critical airfoil. Initial test flights were anything but trouble-free, with both performance and stability issues.

At the same time, Piper's latest twin trainer, the more modern, counter-rotating PA-44 Seminole, had just achieved certification. Plus, there were hundreds of Piper Apaches, Aztecs, and Twin Comanches already deeply entrenched in training school fleets. Similarly, Beechcraft's latest multi-trainer, the BE-76 Duchess, was also just entering the market, while many older Travel Airs and Barons were flying in trainer roles too. Finally, Grumman had recently introduced their GA-7 Cougar in hopes of putting a dent in the same market. The timing for the 303 Clipper was simply not optimal. With the disappointing initial test flights and the stiff competition, Cessna quickly reconsidered. They shelved the 303.

As an interesting side note, the name "Clipper" was also a misstep. Pan Am World Airways was protective of its marketing and had trademarked "Clipper" for their various uses of the name decades prior. It seems Cessna soon realized they might be stepping on toes and decided to discontinue any use of the Clipper name. Perhaps the powers running Cessna were reminded that Piper had fought (and lost) this same battle with Pan Am in the late 1940's. Piper's PA-16 was also named "Clipper" before Pan Am attorneys intervened. As a result, the Piper Clipper was only produced in 1949. Piper tweaked their Clipper design into the PA-20 and changed

its name to "Pacer," beginning Pacer production in 1950.

Enter The Crusader

A year after shelving the 303 Clipper, Cessna revisited the design with an eye on morphing it into an aircraft with a different, more marketable mission. Cessna wind-tunnel tested the design over and over again as changes were incorporated. The fuselage was stretched into a 6-seater. Club seating, plus a clamshell airstair door at the left rear, created a small cabin-class twin. Almost nothing from the original 303 design went untouched, as tweaks or total redesigns were applied to fairings, control surfaces, wings, airflow control devices, and the entire empennage. Power was greatly enhanced via turbocharged, counter-rotating, 250 hp Continental TSIO-520 engines, requiring redesigned cowlings and nacelles. The biggest visual change would be the repositioning of the horizontal tail to a mid-vertical position. This reconfiguration addressed prop wash-induced vibration issues with the original tail position, both reducing vibration and improving stability. The cruciform tail would become the defining feature of what Cessna would name the T303 Crusader ("T" indicating turbocharging, in Cessna-speak).

The first T303 prototype flew in Oct. 1979. During two years of development and certification flight testing, the two





prototypes accumulated over 1,000 flight hours. According to Cessna, this made the T303 the most thoroughly tested piston-engine aircraft they'd ever designed (single or twin engine). Deliveries began in Oct. 1981 (of 1982 models). Concurrently, Cessna discontinued 310 production. Whereas the 303 Clipper would have competed with the Seminole, Duchess, and Cougar, the T303 Crusader went head-to-head against Piper's recently upgraded PA-34 Seneca III. While the T303 was heavier and had 30 more horsepower per side, their useful loads were typically very close to one another (in the 1,800 lb. range, with basic equipment). Both certified to FL250, they shared almost identical performance, with the T303 using its extra horsepower (and slightly higher fuel burn) to balance its larger cabin and copious cargo space. That extra space and comfort came at a price well north of the Seneca III's. Nevertheless, in 1982, the new Crusader came within just a handful of airframes of matching sales of the already well-established Seneca.

In subsequent years, the Seneca bested T303 sales by ever-increasing margins. However, all piston twin sales were sharply declining in the early 1980's, and the numbers were relatively small for all manufacturers. By 1984 (the last year the Crusader was built in any large numbers), only 65 were delivered. Piper struggled as well, selling only 87 Senecas. From 1981 to 1984, Piper ceased production of the Aztec and Navajo, while Beech closed out both Baron and Duke production. Cessna didn't officially give up on the Crusader until 1986, but only 3 were sold in 1985 & 1986 combined. Sadly, production ended with only 297 Crusaders delivered.

Legend would have you believe the T303 was a sales failure because it was somehow an inferior product. Facts, on the other hand, reveal a more complex story. The entire piston aircraft industry was battling a struggling economy and a suffocating liability crisis in the early to mid-1980s. So much so that throughout 1984-85, Cessna ended production of their 335 and 340 models, their 402 and 414 lines, and their flagship piston twin,

the 421C Golden Eagle. This left the T303 as their sole piston twin model. In 1986, Cessna not only ended T303 production, but they also ended all piston aircraft production, including all single-engine models. They would not resume piston single production for a decade (in 1996), after the passage of the General Aviation Revitalization Act of 1994. However, piston twin production never resumed at Cessna. Instead, they focused on certifying and producing an ever-expanding array of Citation business jet models. It would appear that was a sound financial decision, with over 8,500 Citations (of all 30+ models) produced as of early 2026.

Operators and Caretakers

Back in 1983, Richard Nadeau of Wellington Aero Club Airport (FD38), in Florida, was ready to upgrade from his Piper Arrow to a twin. His research focused heavily on safety statistics, and he decided the T303 was likely the safest cabin-class piston twin available, with its dirt-simple fuel system, counter-rotating engines, Vmc speed very near stall speed, known icing certification, and rugged trailing link landing gear. A Cessna sales rep offered him an unsold 1982 model (#126). Nadeau agreed to purchase it with one caveat. He'd read about Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University being an early adopter of the T303 for multi-engine flight training and how the thousands of training hours they'd put on their T303s had led to over 100 Service Notes & Letters to improve both durability and maintain-

ability. All those minor changes were incorporated or retrofitted into '83 (and subsequent) models. Richard would only agree to buy the new '82 model if all those improvements were included. With both parties in agreement, N9RN was delivered fully conforming to the 1983 model standards.

Nadeau initially based N9RN on FD38's then-grass runway, yet flew it nationwide. He used it to train for and earn his ATP Certificate and lovingly flew and maintained it for almost four decades. As time passed, he had the current custom two-tone blue paint scheme applied, replaced the interior, and had much of the current Garmin glass panel system installed. In short, he was the epitome of a dedicated caretaker, finally deciding to sell in 2022. The second owner had a new interior installed during his brief ownership. The third had the engines and props overhauled before being forced to sell for medical reasons.

What many would call an orphaned design (after only four years of actual production, with over half produced in the first year) has proven to be no flash in the pan. Forty years after production ended, about a third of all Crusaders built are still registered. Of those, around 55 are thought to be active within the U.S., with more flying internationally. Many found easy lives in personal transport or supporting small business travel. Others earned their keep in charter, flight training, cargo, or in specialized roles such as photo mapping.

It was in that photogrammetry role that recent T303 purchaser, Bryan Berry, was first introduced to the Crusader. Berry was attending Campbell University in Buies Creek, NC, in the mid-1980s, when the regular sight of small planes flying over his dorm caught his attention. Those planes turned out to be operating out of Harnett Co. Airport (now known as Harnett Regional Jetport – KHRJ), a mile away from campus. Intrigued, Bryan drove to the airport, took an orientation flight and was immediately hooked. Before graduation, he was a Private Pilot.

Returning home to the family business after graduation made Berry realize just how much he missed flying. He decided to move to Vero Beach, FL, and pursue advanced flight training in earnest. He returned to North Carolina with Commercial and Flight Instructor Certificates in hand. Soon after, he earned his ATP while also actively teaching single-engine students. Concurrently, the State of North Carolina was operating a Cessna Crusader and a Conquest for both VIP transport and photogrammetry missions. Via an internship with the N.C. Dept of Transportation, Berry was given the opportunity to fly both types. Each made a lasting impression on him.

With his 2-year internship complete, he continued to flight instruct while selling cars to make ends meet. Having accumulated the necessary flight times to realistically apply at regional airlines (at the time, minimums



Interior



Nose baggage

being 1,500 Total, 250 Multi, and 50 Turbine), he secured an offer from American Eagle. Before he could report for training, his father intervened, luring Berry back to the family business with both the typical amount of parental pressure and the promise of an opportunity to incorporate a small aircraft into their automotive business. Given the meager salaries of regional airline pilots at the time, he relented. With the career shift came access to a series of high-performance singles, which he used to fly the length of the East Coast, attending car auctions. After the family business was sold, Bryan reluctantly stopped flying in 2006, as he didn't feel justified to continue without a business need to do so.

For the next two decades, he busied himself building two companies and raising children. Approaching 60, he could no longer suppress his love of aviation. In 2024, he rekindled his passion with the purchase of a Piper Saratoga, renewed his medical, and hired a CFI to get him proficient again. One of his businesses required some travel, which, combined with pleasure flying, allowed him to log 150 hours in the Saratoga in a year. He was back! However, his lengthy business trips were slow going in a single day and often crossed the Appalachian Mountains. Multi-engine speed and redundancy were on his mind. After some sticker shock looking at some popular twins, he kept fondly recalling his time in the Crusader back in the 1980s.

Not believing all the negativity online, he did some deeper research on the current state of T303 ownership. He discovered parts more readily available than many "experts" advised. Continental assured him that they still offered full factory support of the engines. The T303 was on the approved models list for a variety of modern digital flight instruments and avionics. Finally, while small in number, he became familiar with a very active Crusader owner/pilot community that represents a vast amount of T303 knowledge. Through that group, nearly every ownership challenge can be addressed and solved. Thus, he began to search for a Crusader. After a couple of deals fell through due to pre-buy



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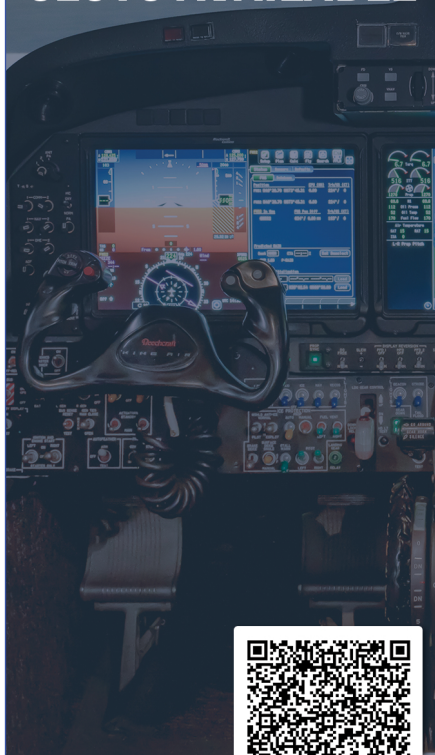
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gotchas, he came across N9RN. The same 1983-conforming, 1982 model Richard Nadeau had taken delivery of 43 years prior. Checking all of Berry's wish-list boxes, it featured fairly low airframe time, no corrosion, a modern panel, a fresh interior, and nearly new engines and props. A deal was struck, and he became only the fourth owner of Crusader #T30300126.

Cruise-ader

After connecting with Mr. Berry, we departed Elkin with full tanks (153 gallons usable), two adult males, and 100 lbs. of cargo in the cabin and aft baggage area. It was a beautiful Spring day with temperatures in the low 80s (F). Yet, the nimble T303 accelerated quickly and was airborne

1982 Cessna T303 Crusader N9RN Data [Table 1]

Wing Span/Area	39 feet, ½ inch / 189.2 feet ²
Length	30 feet, 5 inches
Height	13 feet, 4 inches
Cabin Dimensions	Width: 47.75" Length: 138" Height: 47.5"
Engines	Continental TSIO-520 & LTSIO-520, Turbocharged, 250hp each.
Baggage Capacity	Wing Lockers: 120 lbs. each Nose Compartment: 150 lbs. Aft Cabin Compartment: 200 lbs. Total Cubic Area: 53 feet ³
Empty Weight	3,670 lbs. (as equipped)
Max. Gross Weight	5,150 lbs.
Useful Load	1,480 lbs. (as equipped)
Fuel Capacity	155 Gallons (930 lbs.), 153 Usable
Fuel System	77 Gal. Per Wing Tank Right Tank Feeds Right Engine Left Tank Feeds Left Engine Crossfeed Available for Emergencie
Electrical System	28 Volts 1 x Battery 2 x Alternators (95 Amps each)
Avionics System & Equipment	Garmin G600 PFD/MFD Garmin GI-275 Backup Flight/Nav Instrument Garmin GTN-750Xi & 650Xi Nav/Comm/GPS Garmin GTX-330 Mode-S & ADS-B Transponder Avidyne EX-500 MFD S-TEC 3100 Digital Autopilot Sandia Aerospace SAI-340 Co-Pilot PFD Insight GEM 1200 G-4 Dual Full Engine Monitor System CiES Digital Fuel Gauges & Sending Units Factory Deicing Equipment Installed Oxygen System All LED Exterior Lighting

and climbing steadily well before the mid-point of ZEF's 4,000-foot runway. Reversing course, we headed southeast and climbed to 5,500 feet. There, we could overfly both the Greensboro and Raleigh Class Charlies, enroute to Berry's home field of Wilson Industrial Air Center (W03) in Wilson, NC.

This first exposure to the T303 was pleasant, a straight line cross-country of 140 NM. Along the way, we cruised at 170-175 KTAS, at 2400 RPM and 24.0" MAP, while burning a total of 29 GPH. Very respectable numbers for a twin with a roomy cabin and comfortable flight deck. In less than 45 minutes, we were entering the holding pattern/procedure turn, beginning the RNAV Runway 21 approach. Navigating the approach with 9RN's Garmin G600 panel, GTN-750Xi & 650Xi NAV/COM/GPS combo, and Avidyne EX-500 moving map was a breeze. The trailing link landing gear made for an equally positive first impression at touchdown.

In Wilson, the Crusader currently resides in a large mid-century community hangar. A standard T-hangar isn't quite adequate for a T303 due to the tail height (which rises almost 13-½ feet). While that easily fits into most modern box hangars and T's designed specifically for twins, use of older T-hangars intended for medium to large singles is generally out of the question.

The next morning's weather at Wilson was blustery and cooler. We loaded up with a final destination of Charlotte's Douglas Int'l Airport (KCLT) in mind. Taking the Crusader into the primary airport of a busy Class Bravo would be a great litmus test of its real-world capabilities. First, however, I wanted to sample the T303's maneuvering manners, one engine inoperative (OEI) capabilities, and its pattern particulars. Initially, we climbed to 6,500' for a repeat of yesterday's cruise test. While we were 1,000 feet higher and slightly lighter (with only about 120 gallons aboard), cruise numbers were almost identical. The increased climb rate, however, reflected the cooler air and lower density altitude than the day prior.



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Bryan Berry & Matt McDaniel

Slowing to a bit below the published maneuvering speed (V_a) of 148 KIAS, I sampled medium and steep banked turns. The ailerons are light and responsive and provide a crisp roll rate for a twin this size. Banks of 45 to 50 degrees were easy to stabilize with only an inch or two of additional manifold pressure required to prevent speed decay. Slow flight and stalls (both engines operating) were absolutely benign. The fluid and well-balanced control feel of the aircraft is even more impressive considering it

has no artificial control feel devices whatsoever (something few cabin-class piston twins can claim). Entering the OEI regime, I pulled the left engine to a zero-thrust setting to simulate a secured engine and feathered prop. Since the T303 has counter-rotating props, there is no critical engine.

Initially, I slowed to a speed that would maintain altitude on the operating engine alone. That speed turned out to be about 10 KIAS above the published Vyse of 97. From there, I continued to slow into what was

intended to be a minimum control (V_{mc}) demo. When the clean stall arrived, the Crusader was still firmly in control and holding heading. Even with full power on the operating engine, the aircraft stalled before reaching V_{mc} (at that day's weight, C.G. and density altitude, in clean configuration). By the worst-case book numbers (MGW, aft C.G. limit), the T303's V_{mc} of 65 is slightly higher than its landing configuration stall speed (V_{so} : 53) and two knots above its clean stall (V_s : 63). At the forward C.G. limit, stall speeds increase to 58 and 66, respectively. However, all those numbers are so close that variable loading and flight conditions could easily influence any one of them enough to close the small gaps between them. The point being, the T303 remains controllable during OEI operations down to speeds very close to stall. That is a fantastic trait for any twin to exhibit.

Like most twins in the category, the T303's OEI performance drops off precipitously as drag increases. While



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it was easily holding 6,500' at Vyse+10, while clean, the equation changes rapidly when flaps and gear come out. Still clean and slowed to hold Vyse, we were able to achieve a 500 FPM climb. Lowering flaps to 10° negated that climb, allowing level flight at exactly Vyse only (net drag loss, -500 FPM). Lowering the gear put us into a 300 FPM descent, while maintaining blue-line (-800 net). Flaps 20° cost another 200 FPM (-1000 net), while lowering flaps to full set up an 800 FPM descent (net loss, -1300 FPM). Even in the best of scenarios, light twins are not meant to linger with OEI. Instead, flown properly, they get you safely to the nearest suitable diversion airport.

For our simulation, that airport was Moore Co., NC (KSOP). After the first landing, with only Flaps 10, resulted in a smooth arrival with too much float, we stopped and taxied back. Resuming standard operations, we flew the

circuit twice more, landing with Flaps 20, then full flaps. The robust trailing link gear, with its heavy-duty wheel and brake option, is ego-boosting, to say the least. Climbing again, we contacted departure and began making quick work of the 77NM remaining to CLT. Cleared into Class Bravo, ATC provided vectors to the ILS 18L. Sequenced between two business jets, but also held high, we were cleared for the approach well above the glideslope. The Crusader proved capable of playing catch-up by simply introducing drag. Its very high gear extension speed of 175 being tailor-made for our situation (once down and locked, speed may be increased all the way to Vne).

Quite Enough

By today's standards, nothing about the Crusader is revolutionary. It was a good twin, introduced at a bad time. Built in larger numbers, I'm sure it

would remain a popular option today for anyone in the small cabin class market. Plus, it lends itself very well to modern advancements in avionics, engine monitoring, and cabin materials. Its cabin is remarkably roomy and comfortable for the aircraft's overall size and weight (especially when configured for five, rather than six, as Berry prefers to keep N9RN).

The baggage space is even more impressive with four large areas to choose from. The two nacelle wing lockers can accommodate 120 lbs. each, while the nose compartment can hold 150 lbs. The aft cabin baggage area is rated for 200 lbs. 1983 models and subsequent were offered with a cargo door option, aft of the airstair door, which expanded that opening from 24" to a whopping 56" and moved the aft bulkhead back 6.5", making for an even larger cabin-accessible baggage area.

No, it's not as fast as a C-T310R (the final and ultimate 310 model, which the T303 "replaced"). However, the 310 cannot boast an airstair door, cabin class comfort, or even close to the cubic baggage capacity. It's not a 400-series twin Cessna, nor a pressurized 300-series. Nor should it be compared to those models or judged as such, as it was never meant to compete with them. In the end, it simply is what it is: The Crusader. Unique good looks and solid performance in a safe, simple, and comfortable package. Which, upon arrival at the destination, seems to be quite enough. **T&T**

1982 Cessna T303 Crusader N9RN V-Speeds [Table 2]
All Speeds In Knots Indicated Airspeed, Per Original POH, Unless Noted

Rotation (Vr)	80-90
Best Angle of Climb (Vx)	77
Best Rate of Climb (Vy)	103
Best Rate of Climb, Single-Engine (Vyse)	105
Min. Control, Single-Engine (Vmc)	97
Min. Safe Single Engine (Vsse)	80
Min. Control, Single Engine (Vmc)	65
Maneuvering (Va) @MGW	148
Normal Cruise (Vnc)	170 True
Max. Structural Cruise (Vno)	150
[aka: Max. Normal Operating]	175
Never Exceed (Vne)	210
Max. Landing Gear Operation (Vlo)	175 Extend
150 Retract	69
Max. Landing Gear Extended (Vle)	210
Max. Flap Extension (Vfe)	175 – Up to 10° 150 – 10° – 20° 125 – 20° – Full
Landing Reference (Vref – Final)	90 – Full Flaps
Clean Stall (Vs)	63-66 (based on C.G. position)
Stall in Landing Configuration (Vso)	53-58 (based on C.G. position)

Matthew McDaniel is a Master & Gold Seal CFII, ATP, MEI, AGI, & IGI and Platinum CSIP. In 34 years of flying, he has logged nearly 22,000 hours total and over 5,900 hours of instruction given. As owner of Progressive Aviation Services, LLC (www.progaviation.com), he has specialized in Technically Advanced Aircraft and Glass Cockpit instruction since 2001. McDaniel is also a Boeing 737-series Captain for an international airline, holds eight turbine aircraft type ratings, and has flown over 135 aircraft types. Matt is one of less than 15 instructors worldwide to have earned the Master CFI designation for 11 consecutive two-year terms. He can be reached at matt@progaviation.com or 414-339-4990.