



Howard 500, the oil man's twin

Two-and-a-half thousand horse power a side, stand-up walk-about luxury for eleven passengers, and an over-the-weather pressurised cruise for 2,000 n.m. at more than 300kt. No current production aircraft has such an exotic combination of features, and if you want them you have to acquire an aircraft that harkens back to the the closing years of the pre-turboprop era.

Fuel, and lots of it, is the first and biggest item any Howard 500 operator has to bear in mind. In the cruise a 500 can burn about 200 US gal/hr (six times more than a Navajo). But it is some consolation that at around 20,000ft this will give you about 310kt TAS—a propeller-driven cruise only beaten by the very latest turboprops, and leaving behind most of those in current service.

Duncan Baker's 500, featured here, wears the logo of his fuel company and is currently the only one in Europe, with six flying in the USA. Out of its natural element, the one unmistakable feature about the big Howard is that it seems to be dragging its belly along the ground. If the tail-wheel ever gave way there would be some expensive noises from under the fuselage, but one advantage from such low ground clearance is that passengers can step straight into the passenger cabin via the rear door, without having to climb any steps.

Dee Howard is better known today for

Long-range, big-piston luxury can still be enjoyed in the mighty Howard 500. **Cliff Barnett** samples the businessman's ultimate piston twin, with pictures by **Stephen Piercey**.

his thrust reversers and subtle modifications to Learjets (and other types). He based the 500 on his earlier developments of the Lockheed Ventura transport, itself a descendant of the wartime Hudson. But the 500, with its pressurised fuselage, was in many ways a newly-engineered aircraft, although several major items come from other well-proven sources. Those massive propellers are really cut-down Constellation blades, with DC-7 spinners, and the two 2,500 h.p. Pratt & Whitney engines are very similar to those on the DC-6—hallmarks of the big radial engine era with 18 cylinders apiece, in two rows.

The fuel—all 1,560 US gal of it—is in

four main fuselage and two outer wing tanks. Tanks full, the Howard still has some 3,000lb payload, enough for, say, two crew, 11,180lb passengers, and 50lb of baggage each in the big belly hold which can take up to 1,600lb. Full-fuel range with IFR reserves is about 2,000 n.m.

As mentioned, you simply open the main door and step straight into the Howard, and the short walk up the slope to the cockpit passes through a cabin which could beat many a modern executive interior and has far more headroom than most. There is a comfortably appointed toilet in the aft section, and a large version of what modern brochures like to call a "refreshment centre" just ahead of the main spar. One of the Howard's many curiosities to modern eyes is an engine analyser just aft of the cockpit, with which it is possible to monitor engine ignition behaviour in flight—rather like an airborne Crypton engine tuner. It was often fitted to aircraft with engines of this type.

The cockpit itself is a fascinating mixture of the old and the new. Pressurisation controls are prominent on the big central console below the power levers, and the fuel selectors are Dakota-style

Leading Data

Wing span	70.4ft
Cabin width	5.5ft
Cabin height	6.2ft
Max t.o./landing weight	35,000lb
Max cruise	345kt
Economy cruise (21,000ft)	305kt
Approx range (with reserves)	2,000 n.m.
Price	\$1 million

Manufacturer: Howard Aero, International Airport, San Antonio 12, Texas.

Operator: Baker Petroleum, Exeter Airport, Devon EX5 2BA, telephone 0392 61088; telex 42711.