

FASTER, HIGHER... SAFER

Cirrus has long been an innovator when it comes to safety, and the manufacturer's SR22T G6 has raised the bar again — as well as adding speed, range and technological bells and whistles

by Ben Griffiths — a private pilot and journalist specialising in aerospace and defence



SPIRALLING AROUND over my parents' house in the leafy Home Counties in a near-\$1 million Cirrus SR22T aeroplane was proving somewhat distracting. I barely noticed we were in a gradual descent or that our angle of bank — how far over the wings were tilted — was also increasing past 45°. If I wasn't careful we'd end up making a controlled flight into terrain — pilot-speak for an embarrassing and probably fatal crash.

Each time I dipped the wing to wave to Griffiths Sr below, the aircraft's intelligent autopilot, figuring out that I was clearly behaving oddly and didn't wish to die needlessly today, would apply opposite aileron to take us back to a more sensible attitude. An increasingly anxious female voice in my headset was also warning me we were rapidly approaching the ground (heading below 1,000 feet) with the words: 'CAUTION — TERRAIN!' Suitably chastised, I merely had to roll wings level and gently pull back on the aircraft's sidestick and we were cruising along happily again.

Thankfully, in this aircraft we were a long way from being out of control, especially with an expert demonstration pilot in the right-hand seat watching my every move. The

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Cirrus is an aviation thoroughbred and these are just two of the many safety features of this enthralling G6 upgrade to the renowned SR22T being displayed for my benefit.

The manufacturer is best known for its patented Cirrus Airframe Parachute System, which has already saved many lives by deploying a massive canopy to float the aircraft gently to earth if things go badly awry. From the outset, then, the company has been an innovator among light aircraft manufacturers, using advanced materials and design most often found in luxury cars.

There are many safety features, from the avionics to the design of the airframe itself, that enhance any flying experience immeasurably. The wing is a Nasa-developed 'cuffed' design, which means the leading edge is staggered and has two different angles of attack. This minimises the potential to enter a spin from an inadvertent stall. In fact it takes a conscious effort to stall this aircraft — that's no bad thing when stalls leading to developed spins remain a major killer of pilots.

What is it like to fly? Breathtaking. The Continental TSIO-550-K turbocharged engine kicks out a whopping 315hp driving a Hartzell

three-bladed propeller which enables a cruising speed of 213 knots at a ceiling of up to 25,000ft. That's a step change for someone used to a de Havilland Chipmunk, a 'tail-dragger' aeroplane designed in the 1940s.

GLASS CEILING

For someone trained on traditional 'steam-powered' gauges identical to those found in a vintage Spitfire, the cockpit instrumentation in the Cirrus is akin to the space shuttle. However, as a pilot, once you've trained and made the transition to a glass cockpit it's an intuitive way to fly, akin to cruising in your own airliner, so sophisticated a capability does it offer.

Features such as a Garmin GPS system, 12in digital displays, synthetic vision that shows you the path ahead with 3D terrain, and datalink weather streamed to the cockpit have been hallmarks of Cirrus. You even get alerts when other aircraft are nearby.

However, perhaps the most impressive features of this gorgeous aeroplane are its speed and range. It is designed to go places. Taking a typical flight from Biggin Hill in Kent to Geneva is a mere two hours fifteen minutes in a single hop. Or how about Barcelona in less than four hours, or the Channel Islands in 45 minutes?

The aircraft also offers full flight into known icing conditions, thanks to the inbuilt anti-icing system — so that winter escape to the ski slopes is a simple trip that would leave many older aircraft stuck in the hangar. Meanwhile, fuel consumption of just eighteen gallons per hour makes the cost of such a trip comparable to buying business-class seats for four people on a commercial flight, and is substantially cheaper than chartering an entire aeroplane for yourself.

Cirrus demo pilot and regional sales director Philippe Polman explains that more and more of his customers are people who are coming directly into the aviation scene when they buy their aircraft, rather than switching to a Cirrus from a different type of aeroplane.

It is easily possible to undertake your private pilot's licence intensively and to be taught how to use the digital systems on the Cirrus, thanks to an online learning package that works alongside the flight training. Once qualified, Cirrus pilots tend to use their aircraft more than average, embracing their ability to travel to far-flung places. The machine builds confidence in fledgling pilots.

That may be because it feels so much like a luxury car. Even walking

up to the aircraft feels familiar. There is even a key fob and the exterior lights flash when the doors are unlocked, just like your Bentley. Easing into the leather seats and firing up the engine with a simple turn of the key is a breeze, as is planning a complicated flight path at home which can be uploaded to the onboard computers in the blink of an eye.

If even that is too much trouble, Cirrus has paired with RocketRoute to create a concierge service for private owners that will handle planning, airport handling and landing permits as well as hotels and taxis.

All this makes it very easy to imagine strapping the children into the rear seats, streaming some soothing tunes over the airwaves and whisking your significant others off in style on a mini-break to the Alps or the beaches of the Mediterranean.

From day one, Cirrus Aircraft's founders set out to change the world of light aircraft, making them more modern, safer, faster and more comfortable than the legacy fleet of 1960s training machines. With the SR22T G6, they have taken this dream one step further. 📍

The latest Cirrus offers comfort reminiscent of a luxury car, as well as a host of hi-tech details

