

What does that cost you?

By Rod Steiger, footnote by Dan Grunloh EAA UL 30

We all chose to fly and no matter the reason, cost plays a factor. It's interesting, hearing comments folks make about flying. I overheard someone say, "So, what's it cost you to fly that?" the response "Oh,...45 or 50 an hour...about the same as the Challenger", then more in the group stated in about all their costs. Hearing discussions like that have brought me to ask, "Are there some *big* misconceptions about the cost of *flying* and is this what inquisitive folks are being told about Ultralights and Light Sport?". They hear it is a cheap way to fly until they hear someone say "50 an hour" and that's not from those on the outside looking in, but from us.

So let's look at some of the costs. The purchase of the plane? This is truly not a cost in *flying*, it is *ownership*. What about hangar rent and insurance? Are these costs in *flying*? No, it's *ownership* again. I'll touch more on ownership in just a bit. We think of our costs in terms of the \$ per hour and that is fine, but some fixed expenses are not going to change whether we fly or not. What if the plane only flew an hour that year? Man, what an expensive hour that was! No that is the cost of *owning* a plane, not the cost of *flying*. What's left? Well, (PM) periodic maintenance and fuel.

So, let's look at PM, most inspection and repair we do on our own, but what about that 250 hr. TBO Rotax says our 503s need. I don't want to argue the 250 hrs, I will argue, what a TBO is (time before over-haul). It is not a process requiring all new pistons, crank, bearings, seals, and etc. TBO is an inspection and documentation of the wear that has transpired and to replace parts as required by its amount of wear, age or by directive. I recently had my 503 TBO'ed and the cost was under \$700. That's only \$2.80 per hour for the 250 hr period. Looks like I will need pistons at my next TBO, and that will increase my cost. So to go on the high side, let us say that over a 1000 hrs you have 2 TBOs at \$700 and 2 at \$1200, that's \$3.80 per hr. There are some other maintenance items like tires, brakes, and hardware. These can be added to the hourly cost and I'm going to give them a 50 cent per hr/\$500 over the 1000 hrs. Now we are up to \$4.30. Oh, sail cloth you say. Well it is going to be on the plane longer than 1000 hours, but we can throw it in here, \$2500. OK, now we are up to \$6.80 per hr. over the 1000 hrs. Now, we all know these numbers are intentionally high, let's remember that as we go on. For fuel, I burn 4 gals. Per hour and fuel is \$3.70 a gal. For mo gas, oil is 10oz. Per hr. at a dime per oz. That's \$15.80 per hour in fuel. The grand total \$22.60 per hour. A far cry from the 45-50 dollars I heard before.

Where did they get the rest of that 45 to 50 figure from? It comes from the cost of ownership. It is where we decide that we want to own instead of rent. This is not to say the cost is negligible, but ownership is no more if compared to owning a Harley or a sports car. Ownership stems from convenience. It is more convenient to own than rent? Just depends on the person and this is also true for those who have a hangar and strip at home or those who rent a hangar at the airport or even box it up to store in their garage. Convenience, it is what each of us define it to be. It isn't the cost of flying. We know what all the costs are, it's just how we think of those costs when we total them up that we need to examine. So the cost of flying really is not some astronomical number and it is the biggest reason many are attracted to EAA and what we fly. We can build and fly Experimental for far less than factory built planes and fly Ultralights for even less. When people stop and ask, "How much does it cost to fly that?" I can answer \$22.60 per hr. If they ask, "How much is the plane?" I can tell them that too, but like any good salesman will tell you if the price is too high, you lost the sale. We are salesmen for our hobby, let's not scare off the customers.

When comparing the cost of different kinds of flying, don't forget to take into consideration the "fun per dollar". You might rent an airplane, own an ultralight, go skydiving, fly sailplanes or hot-air balloons. Any method will cost money but some may give more fun per dollar. For an hour rent in a Cessna you can get three tows to cloud-base in your hang glider or three one minute free falls. Or two to three hours in an ultralight light sport aircraft.

I remember well a quote from our founding president Dale Meadors who said that flying is like any other hobby. You have to decide how much you can or will spend per year on the hobby. What is it worth per year for you to glide, freefall, motor or buzz? Aviation costs money and it's up to us to find the most "fun per dollar". I know I found mine.

--Dan Grunloh