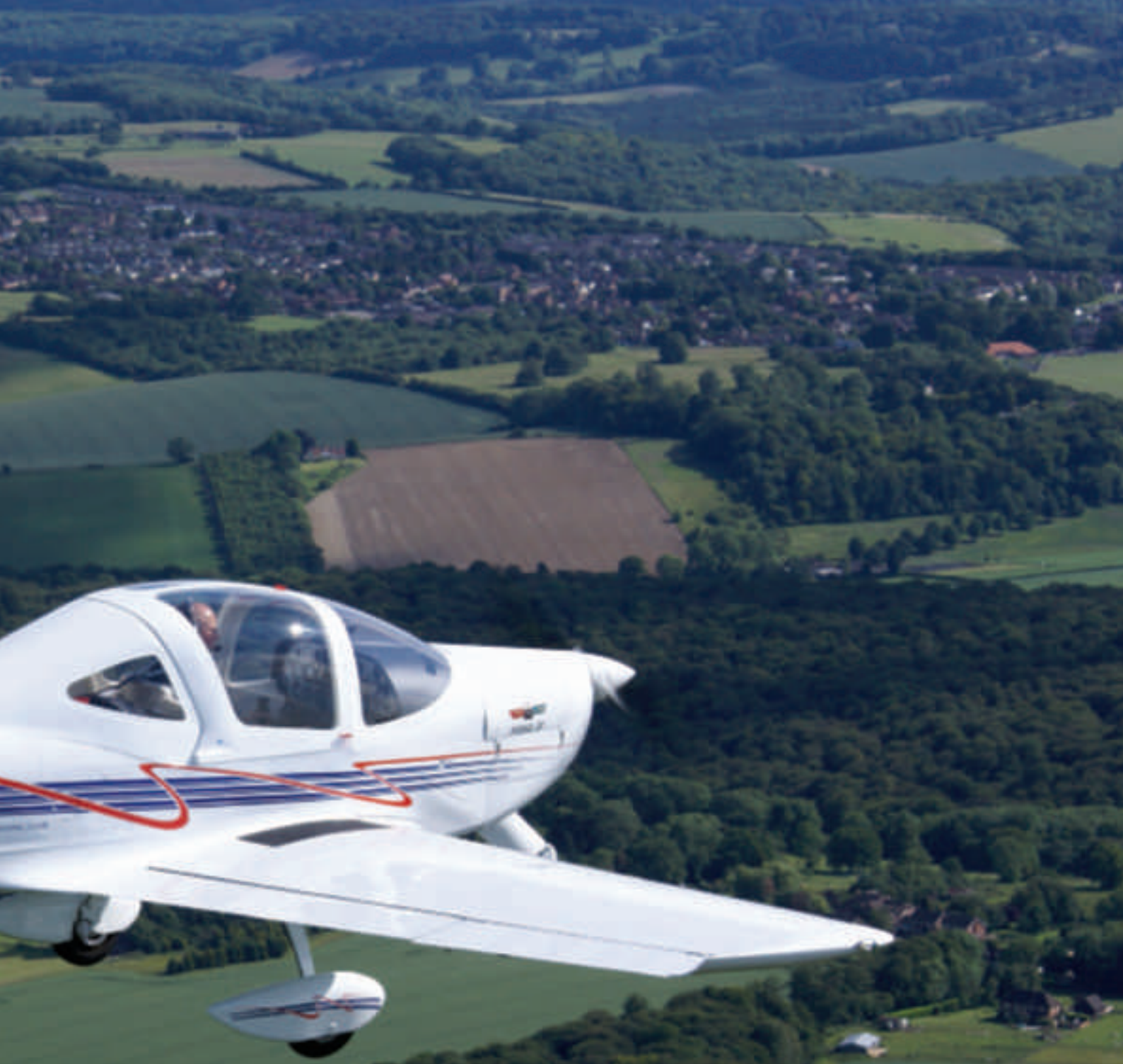
Tecnam P2002JF
Yesterday, meet tomorrow

A long-time PA-28 pilot comes face to face with a new kid on the block. By ***John Pett***
Photos by Dawn Couch

It's not often that one is given the opportunity to fly a new aircraft and asked to write up your comments on it, but I was the fortunate recipient of just such a request. I have been flying a Piper Warrior for the past 15 years and of course have got very used to its handling, both the positives and the negatives, and indeed I have not flown another type of aircraft in the meantime. So whatever I thought of the aircraft, the experience would be something to savour. I drove us from Dorset to Airways Flying Club at Booker in heavy rain, and it was not until early afternoon that the weather cleared. Accompanied by the very tall and well-experienced CFI, John Hartill, I went over to the hangar to get the aircraft ready for flight. John had actually collected it from Italy not long before and flown it back VFR. The aircraft is built in Italy by Tecnam, who have been building aircraft since 1948. Predictably, this aeroplane is known as the P2002JF (F for fixed-gear) since it went into production in 2002.

The first glimpse is quite a surprise (for those who are only used to a Warrior) as it has a "bendy" undercarriage, and the only words to describe it are 'streamlined' and 'sexy'. It is marketed as a trainer directly opposite the Cessna 152/162 and certainly looks ready for the 21st century. It is made predominantly of aluminium and, with a control column instead of a yoke, it feels like a real aeroplane. The panel is straightforward with minimal radios and a fitted GPS. The walk-around was, as with every aircraft, done with the check-list in hand, with no feature specially requiring attention. Pulling it out of the hanger is simplicity itself as it is much lighter than the Warrior, which can be difficult for one person to extricate from the corner of a hangar. It weighs in at only 390 kgs basic as opposed to the Warrior's 610 kgs and its wingspan is only slightly shorter (8.6 metres as opposed to 9.2 metres).

The aeroplane has no doors as such, only a large sliding canopy which can be opened on a hot day. Tthis could be an advantage in a barbecue summer (though



a bit drafty if fully open). The plane I was flying had an attachment to restrict the canopy opening to about 10 cms to provide simple air-conditioning. Unlike the Warrior, with only the one door, entrance is from either side. However I must say it was not too easy to get in the first time, until you master the knack of it – it is not for those of creaky joints or who may suffer from stiffness. Once inside, one enjoys comfortable – even spacious – seating with a full harness (rather than just the lap and shoulder strap on the Warrior). Indeed the cabin is 112 cms wide.

With the 100HP Rotax, engine starting is quite straightforward. However, when looking at the throttle quadrant, there is one control missing. There is no mixture control at all. When starting one uses the choke – the same as starting a petrol-driven lawnmower. The engine fired up first time and we taxied to the pumps to put 100LL into both tanks (although mogas is of course accepted and indeed expected in a Rotax). Having refuelled, it was time to taxi and do the normal checks after which we backtracked and turned at the end of the runway. Interestingly, the brakes are quite high up on the pedal bar, so you cannot taxi with the brake-pads being worn out quickly as you can in the Warrior. We were then cleared for take-off. The R/T button is very conveniently positioned at the front of the control column, with the elevator trim buttons also conveniently positioned on top of the column, the trim indicator being on the instrument panel. Applying full power, with plenty of rudder, we took off at 60 knots. The maximum crosswind component is 21 knots, but if the wind is from the left you will need a lot of rudder to keep the plane on the centreline. Even with quite a load of fuel on board, the take-off run was very short.

Immediately one notices that the view from the cockpit whilst climbing out was superb – climbing out at 500 feet plus per minute you would hardly know you were climbing at all because the view ahead was so good. Steep turns are easily executed, with no increase in rpm required as you tighten the turn. Indeed I

hardly touched the throttle during the whole flight except when turning finals to reduce the speed to 50 knots prior to landing.

We climbed to 4,000 feet above the airfield and prepared for the stall: the stalling speed with full flap is a very low 39 knots. Unfortunately, being used to the Warrior, I was expecting the benign stall that is a characteristic of the Piper series and, because it so reluctant to stall, one becomes blasé about the manoeuvre. However this aircraft stalls quite sharply and you have to recover quickly – an ideal characteristic for a trainer. I must confess that John took the controls during the standard recovery.

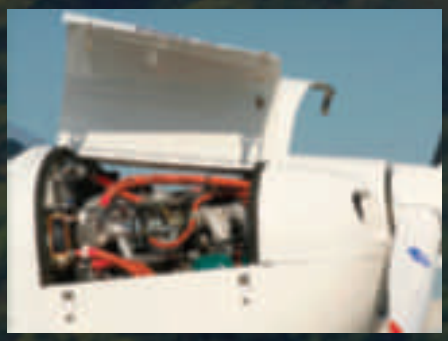
Returning to the field, flaps were applied as normal (though these are electric) on downwind and the landing was straightforward – again with superb visibility. I found it surprisingly easy to transition from the Warrior to the Tecnam 2002JF, and to having a control column rather than a yoke.

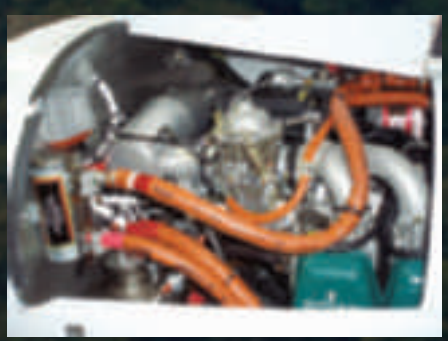
On landing and taxiing back to the hangar we discussed the performance of the aircraft. As a private owner, what would be the appeal? Firstly the endurance is about three hours with two average-weight folk and 15 kilos of baggage in the back. Cruising at just over 100 knots, places like La Rochelle would be an easy run. The visibility is outstanding and those professionals who have flown it all say that it 'feels' like a real plane.

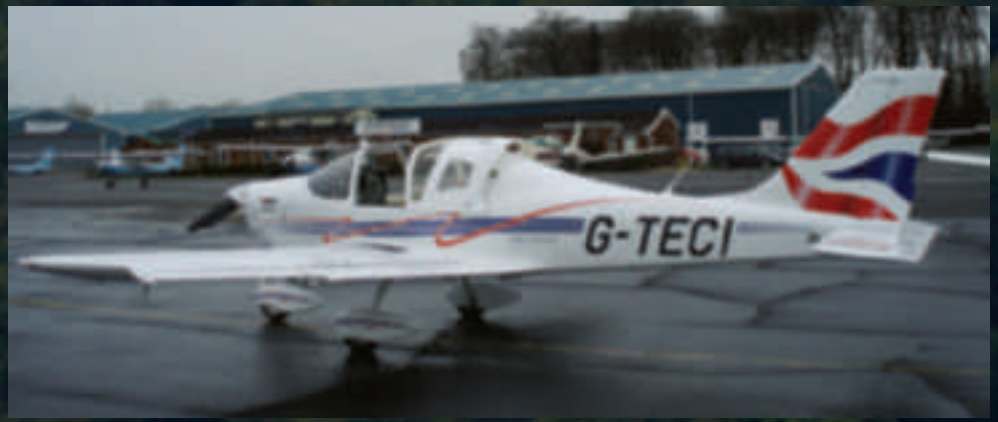
Engine oil quantity is a frugal three litres and being a modern engine, oil consumption is negligible. It has a pressurised crankcase dry sump oil system with oil being stored in an external tank. You need to "blow back" any residual oil from the crankcase into the oil tank to get an accurate quantity reading on the dip-stick and this involves turning the propeller. Not a complicated procedure and it does give you a bit of exercise! Being a pressurised system you do need to check for oil leaks that would indicate a potential problem. The Rotax engine stops almost immediately- which is unnerving to the older pilot – windmilling is not an option. The engine itself runs around 5000 rpm but the propeller is geared down to around the usual 2000+ rpm.

For those that want a little extra zip, there is a 115hp turbo version available. From a price perspective, the current price for the well equipped 100hp model hovers around the £90,000 mark, depending on exchange rates, and is a definite challenger to the Cessna 162 Skycatcher.

If I had to learn to fly again – and bearing in mind that the modern generation is brought up on computer games and anything over five years old is considered totally outdated – I could well see myself choosing to fly this kind of



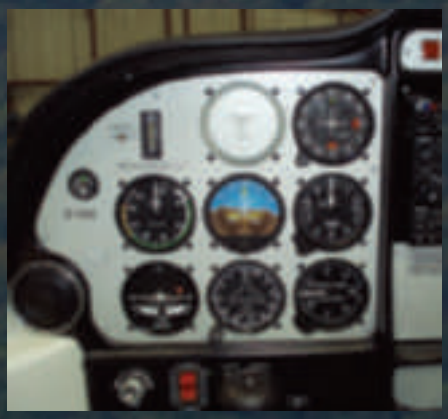


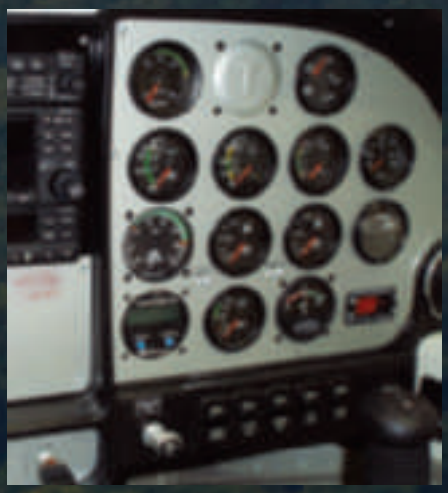


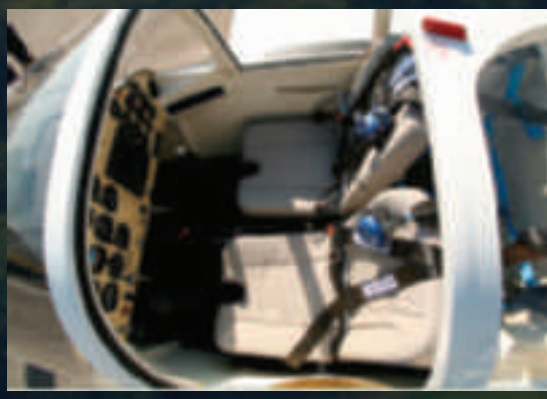
modern plane as opposed to the older Cessnas or Pipers. It will have a place in the modern flying school, though I would still say that you have to be quite athletic to get in and out of the plane: but once settled in the cockpit it is really a joy to fly and while it does feel like the next generation of training aircraft, it would be equally at home as a light tourer for a couple who just enjoy visiting France from time to time, or exploring the UK. It will certainly turn a few heads on landing. Although it is not aerobatic, it does have the advantage of being able to run on mogas if required.

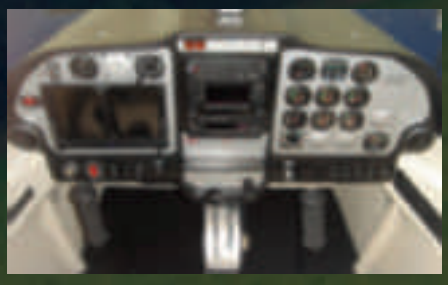
As an *ab initio* trainer, it is nice to see a comparatively new entrant into the market place and I am sure it will be successful. Some ultra-modernists might feel that it ought to have an all glass cockpit. I I would disagree – you need to learn to fly using the basic instruments as currently manufactured and then after 'graduation' you can easily transfer to the Cirruses of this world. However if you do need to have one with an all singing and dancing instrument panel, it can be yours for an additional £30,000.

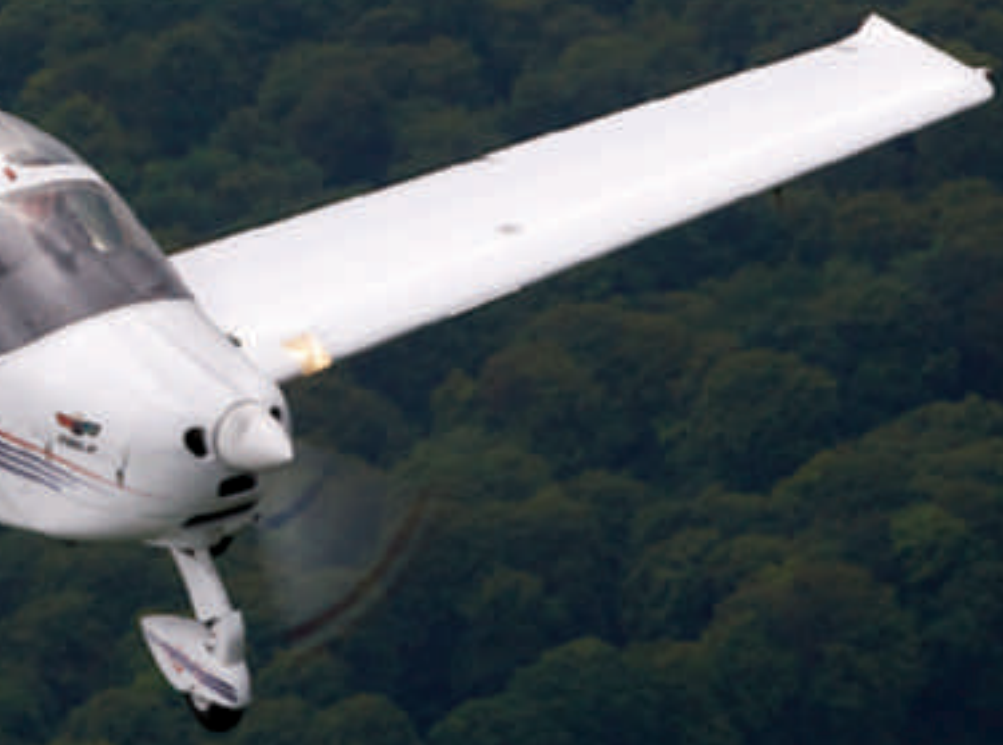
Overall, a most enjoyable experience, and to fly a new aircraft which has that tight and responsive feel to it gives one an adrenalin rush. My sincere thanks go to Airways Flying Club for allowing me the opportunity of flying their new aircraft. ■











From the top: the panel is clean and uncluttered, and definitely not glass
Engine instruments occupy the right side of the panel
Entrance is from either side. However, it is not for those of creaky joints or who may suffer from stiffness
A glass cockpit is available for an extra £30,000
From the far left: neat little 100 hp Rotax prefers mogas but must use avgas for training
The rain cleared by afternoon to allow us to flight-test the aircraft
The Tecnam 2002JF – 'streamlined and sexy', unlike the name