



GIANT STEPS

Robin's all-metal tourer flies for eight hours on full tanks, is exceptionally comfortable and gives its occupants panoramic views

Words Peter Lawton Photos Keith Wilson

If it's long cruising holidays you have in mind, add the HR100 Royale to your list. Highly regarded when it came out forty years ago, the Royale has a performance that is competitive even today, which makes a secondhand one a good buy in these recessionary times.

Peter Fenwick loves the independence and freedom that his metal Robin has afforded him over the past ten years. There are few European countries that he has not flown to, the 400-litre fuel capacity providing eight hours' worth of airborne time (no reserves). His most memorable trips have included north Norway,

Rome, Portugal and Copenhagen.

Not especially quick, the Royale is no sluggard either. Peter's cruises today at a respectable 120kt (which keeps the distance/time maths nice and simple). It may have been even faster when new: Avions Robin gave the maximum level speed of a new Royale as a speedy 148kt. With a moderate wing loading, this aircraft rides the bumps well, and provides the pilot with the degree of stability you would expect from an out-and-out tourer.

All models in the HR100 range were built to a high standard. To quote 'Bunny' Bramson, writing in *Pilot* in 1977: 'There is a complete

absence of rivet heads... the fuselage side panels feel as if they were destined for a Chieftain tank... Robin's export manager tells me he frequently does aerobatics in one at air displays'. Considerable attention was paid during construction to keeping corrosion at bay.

Cockpit roominess and comfort are on a par with a PA-28 Warrior, but with much better all-round visibility. A genuine four-seater, the Royale will cope with four adults and their luggage and still carry four hours worth of fuel.

Easy and straightforward to fly, the Royale reveals no vices in the air or on the ground. On the apron, the Royale is a handsome beast.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO FLY?

As with the more familiar (and numerous) wood-and-fabric Robins, the canopy and windscreen are combined into one forward-sliding assembly, providing easy access into all four seats. Boarding is simply a matter of stepping up onto either wing walk, placing one leg at a time over the cockpit rail, onto the floor and lowering yourself into your seat.

Both front seats are adjustable fore and aft, and once enthroned, the canopy can be drawn forward and locked. The locking lever is underneath the left hand instrument panel and pivots down then forwards, finally disappearing upwards into a slot. This slightly eccentric arrangement is typical of French engineering – they do like to be different. However, I felt it could be fiddlesome to locate and operate, especially in an emergency when lives could depend on the speed of getting the canopy open and the occupants out.

Much better are the engine controls, which follow Piper's example: levers on a little pedestal with knobs coded by shape as well as colour. These do give a quicker response in

OWNER

We spoke to Peter Fenwick, 73, a consultant neuro psychiatrist

Your Royale's history?

It left the factory in 1971 and I bought it in 1999. I was its third owner. It is currently up for sale and I'm hoping to get £32,000, which I hope is realistic in today's economic climate.

Your Royale flying?

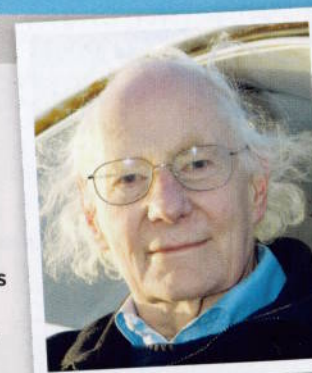
During the last ten years it has averaged 50 hours a year and we have toured Europe extensively, mainly flying IFR.

Runway limits?

The Royale is happy with concrete or grass runways of at least 700 metres. It's not really suitable for short strips.

How close is it to original?

In 2002 I had intended to have the aircraft smartened up, as it was a bit tatty. I ended up with a complete rebuild, re-upholster and a repaint at the Pierre Robin facility. The engine was showing



signs of wear, so I had it zero timed in 2007.

What next?

I've satisfied my desire to tour and I'm flying less these days, so I intend to make do with club aircraft and sell the Royale - I'll be sad to lose it, though.