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TWENTY YEARS AGO

AgAir Update Conducts Evaluation Flight in CH701

by Bill Lavender

The Zenair CH701 without its spray gear in Mexico, Missouri, USA.

MEXICO, MO - After my visit at Czech Aircraft Works in the Czech Republic, my interest in the CH701-AG were enough that I decided to stop by the Zenith Aircraft factory in Missouri for an evaluation flight.

The Zenith Aircraft factory is located on the Mexico Missouri, airport. I was met by Sebastian Heintz, son of Zenair Aircraft founder Chris Heintz, who gave me a quick tour of the busy factory that is averaging delivering 150 Zenair CH701, Zodiac and CH801 kits per year. The CH701 is the aircraft used for the CH701-AG modification, which is basically the addition of a spray kit, wing tanks, corrosion proofing and a larger (100 hp Rotax) engine. The Zodiac is a popular, sporty two-place aircraft and the Zenair CH801 is much like the CH701 with the exception that it is larger and is a four-place version.

Sebastian introduced me to Zenair's demo pilot, Roger Dilbert. Roger and I did the walk around. I could not help noticing extraordinary things about this kit plane. The CH701 was outfitted with large ballon-style tires, undoubtedly making it easy to land on unimproved airstrips. The reverse-lift elevator really got my attention, a novel way to get the nose up and let those slotted leading edges do their thing.

The CH701 is a lightweight aircraft, weighing only 600 pounds, empty. But, by kit plane standards, it is a heavyweight. Its all-metal construction is corrosion-proofed, not unlike a ➤

The CH701 has a well organized and complete instrument panel for VFR flight. The slotted-leading edges and inverted-lift elevator enable the CH701 to rotate at 25 mph and climb at gross weight.

Part 23 certified ag aircraft. It should not be confused with ag aircraft built especially for that purpose. The CH701-AG is a dual-purpose kit plane the owner can build inexpensively for use around the farm or at the spraying operation as a spotter aircraft or one for touch up work. However, technically, the aircraft cannot be used for hire in the U.S. because of its experimental category.

Roger and I boarded the CH701. Naturally, I would have liked to have flown the plane solo, but because of insurance restrictions, that wasn't possible. While taxiing for departure, I noted the CH701 could be flown with or without its doors. We left them on.

Our takeoff roll was absolutely unbelievable. The only two other aircraft that I can think of that possibly could take off shorter would be a helicopter or Wayne Handley's Turbo Raven. With a high nose pitch (remember the reverse-lift elevators?), the CH701 literally climbed out with two adults and full fuel at 1,000 feet per minute with about 100 feet of ground roll, breaking ground approaching 30 knots indicated airspeed!

Now, I must comment that the CH701 was not outfitted as an AG version, so there wasn't the drag effect of the spray system, or the added weight. I could only guess at the aircraft's performance loaded and with a spray system. But, assuming this CH701 to be comparable, I believe almost any area that resembled a grass strip or any paved airstrip would easily accommodate the CH701-AG in its working configuration. I flew the CH701 over the treetops, as if I was going to a field to spray. Outside of the airport's traffic pattern I spotted a corn field. After an overflight to check for wires and other obstacles, I proceeded to make typical application runs. This got my demo pilot's attention; his first "crop dusting"!

With its slotted leading edges and clear sun roof, the CH701 makes for a good turning "ag plane". It's not really an ag plane, per se. But, it sure has a place in an ag operation. I suppose one could depend on it entirely for ag work, with consideration of its limitations for handling large acreage; that is unless you owned a fleet of CH701-AGs!

I really liked the CH701-AG. I wish I had the extra money to buy one and the extra time to build one, just to have around for general use. The CH701, by far, would be affordable to own and operate. Actually, the aircraft would fit where many ag av operations are now using aircraft like J-3 Cubs, Citabrias, C-150 Heavy (joke) and Super Cubs.

Flying over the corn at 100 mph, making 30-second or less safe turns, an exceptional climb rate and short takeoff and landing capability, deems the CH701-AG a viable aircraft for many spraying operations. When one of *AgAir Update*'s readers buys one outfitted for spraying, I hope you give me a call and let's go do some real ag flying!