COMING SOON

Cessna C-165 Airmaster

Carcedo de Bureba, Spain



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#168	#140	Cessna	Aircraft

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DESCRIPTION

Long before the Cessna 172 became the best-selling airplane in history, there was the Cessna Airmaster — a strut-braced, high-wing cabin monoplane that quietly out-flew and out-efficiencied nearly everything else in the sky during the mid-1930s. It's an easy aircraft to overlook today, and an entirely unfair one to.

Cessna Aircraft Company was fighting for its survival when the Cessna Airmaster arrived. The original Cessna company had folded during the early Depression, and it was young engineer Dwane Wallace — later the company's longtime president — who helped refine the Airmaster line into one of the most efficient light aircraft of its era. The result was a genuine business success story built on a genuinely well-engineered airplane.

Quick Facts: Cessna Airmaster

Spec

Detail

Aircraft

Cessna Airmaster C-165

Type

Single-engine, high-wing cabin monoplane, taildragger

Engine

Warner Scarab 165 hp

Cruise Speed

approx. 140 mph

Seating

Pilot + 3 passengers (4 total)

Landing Gear

Fixed conventional (tailwheel) gear

Airframe

Welded steel-tube fuselage, wood-and-fabric wings

What made the Cessna Airmaster C-165 stand out in the 1930s?

Efficiency, mostly. The Cessna Airmaster C-165 was engineered to do more with less horsepower than most of its contemporaries, and it proved it by repeatedly winning efficiency-focused air competitions against larger, more powerful rivals. For a company trying to survive the Great Depression, an airplane that could out-perform bigger, thirstier competitors on a fraction of the fuel was exactly the reputation Cessna needed.

For collectors and pilots searching for a taildragger with genuine Depression-era engineering pedigree, the Cessna Airmaster remains one of the most historically important classic aircraft in general aviation — a tube-and-fabric design whose efficiency-first philosophy quietly shaped the single-engine Cessnas that followed it for decades.

2. Powerplant, Systems & Technical Highlights

The Cessna Airmaster C-165 was built around getting genuine performance out of a modest, reliable radial engine — a philosophy that still resonates with pilots today.

- Engine: 165 hp

- Cruise speed: approx. 140 mph
- Construction: Welded steel-tube fuselage covered in fabric, with wood-structured, fabric-covered wings — classic tube-and-fabric golden-age engineering
- Wing configuration: Strut-braced high wing, favoring visibility and short-field manners over outright cabin size
- Landing gear: Fixed conventional (tailwheel) gear, often fitted with streamlined wheel pants
- Seating capacity: Pilot plus three passengers

How does the Cessna Airmaster compare to a contemporary cabin monoplane?

Feature

Cessna Airmaster

Typical Contemporary High-Wing Cabin Monoplane*

Engine power

165 hp

225–290 hp, depending on model

Efficiency reputation

Multiple national efficiency trophy wins

Generally not marketed on efficiency

Market focus

Economical, efficient touring aircraft

Larger executive/cabin transport

Cruise speed

approx. 140 mph on modest horsepower

Often similar or only modestly faster, despite far more power

*Representative of period rivals such as the Stinson Reliant series; specific figures vary by model and engine fitted.

Honest ownership note: As with any surviving golden age radial-engine airframe, prospective owners of a Cessna Airmaster should budget for the realities of vintage radial maintenance and expect parts sourcing to lean on the type-club and warbird restoration community. A pre-purchase inspection from a mechanic experienced with Warner Scarab-powered aircraft is strongly recommended before any acquisition.

3. Exterior & Cockpit

The Cessna C-165 Airmaster has a look that's unmistakably 1930s — trim, purposeful, and just a little bit rakish for an airplane built to survive the Depression on fuel efficiency alone.

Exterior highlights:

- Strut-braced high-wing monoplane silhouette, distinct from the biplanes that dominated the same era
- Fabric-covered fuselage and wings over a steel-tube and wood structure — genuine tube-and-fabric construction
- Streamlined wheel pants over the fixed taildragger gear, a signature styling touch of the line
- Clean, tightly cowled Warner radial engine installation
- Period-correct two-tone paint schemes typical of classic aircraft from the golden age of general aviation

Cockpit highlights:

- Four-seat cabin — pilot plus three passengers — laid out for genuine cross-country touring rather than pure training duty
- Dual controls suited to the airplane's role as both a personal and a light-business transport
- Analog, period-style instrumentation reflecting mid-1930s cabin-aircraft design
- A cabin that trades size for efficiency and honest, functional simplicity — exactly what made it a survivor of its era

Stand next to a well-kept Cessna Airmaster and it's easy to see why it won so many efficiency contests: nothing about the airframe looks wasted.

4. The Perfect Airplane For

Who is the Cessna Airmaster C-165 best suited for?

The Cessna Airmaster C-165 rewards buyers who care as much about engineering history as they do about flying character — this is a classic aircraft built around doing more with less, not around raw horsepower.

- Experienced taildragger pilots comfortable with fixed conventional gear and vintage radial-engine operation
- Vintage and Depression-era aircraft collectors drawn to a genuinely significant chapter of Cessna's company history
- Efficiency- and economy-minded enthusiasts who appreciate an airplane engineered to outperform bigger, thirstier rivals
- Fly-in and airshow participants looking for a distinctive, lesser-seen general aviation classic
- Aviation history buffs interested in the aircraft that helped keep Cessna Aircraft Company in business through the Great Depression

Good fit if...

Worth a second thought if...

You appreciate efficiency-focused, Depression-era engineering

You want maximum cabin size or four-seat load capacity

You have taildragger and radial-engine experience (or a solid transition plan)

You're a low-time pilot with no tailwheel time

You value a rare, historically significant classic aircraft

You need a simple, low-maintenance daily flyer

You're buying for the long-term collector and type-club community

You want the lowest possible acquisition and running cost

For the right owner, a Cessna Airmaster C-165 isn't just a well-preserved antique — it's a working reminder of the engineering discipline that helped one of general aviation's biggest names survive its hardest years.

SPECIFICATIONS

General Information

Year	1940
Empty Weight	1,300 lb (590 kg)

Engine & Power Systems

Engine	1 × Warner Super Scarab
Engine Type	7-cylinder radial engine

Airframe & Exterior

Length	24 ft 10 in (7.57 m)
Wingspan	33 ft 10 in (10.31 m)
Height	7 ft 3 in (2.21 m)

Performance & Specifications

Cruise Speed	143 mph (230 km/h, 124 kn)
Range	550 mi (890 km, 480 nmi)
Passengers	3 + Pilot
Fuel Capacity	35 US gal (29 imp gal; 130 L)
Service Ceiling	18,900 ft (5,800 m)

PHOTOGRAPHS

7 of 8 photographs reproduced here. The complete gallery is on the listing page.

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