

***Color Pictures Of The M-4-180V Are Located At The Bottom Of This Article***



by Jeff Moody

It seems that the longer you are in aviation, like fashion, everything that goes out of style eventually comes around and becomes the newest hit. One has to look no further in aviation than all the new or redesigned taildraggers that have come on the market within the last 10 years or so to prove that point.

After the advent of the Cessna 172 in 1956, taildraggers were written off as yesterdays news. Sure, there remained the purists that still operated out of grass strips or the true bush pilots that looked for every inch of performance and also the added benefits that taildraggers offered, but , in general, the aviation community embraced the easier to land, less demanding to taxi tricycle gear aircraft.

Ignored along the way were the advantages that tailwheel aircraft enjoyed over their new tricycle gear brothers. Prop clearance on rough terrain, a more rugged gear system that didn't succumb to potholes and the errant obstruction like a nosegear does, and a slightly faster cruise speed all seemed to play second fiddle to the "easier and safer" new design.

What was lost on many pilots that had earned their wings in tricycle gear was that they had just passed over a rather large segment of aircraft that was affordable, could fulfill a large percentage of flying missions, gave boundless options as to landing surfaces and, overall, made them a better pilot for having mastered the craft. Looking back over my experiences and the pilots I have met over the years, the ones that really stood out as exceptional pilots all had the common background of having cut their teeth in taildraggers. Maybe it was when they learned or the instructors they had, but the pilot that could feel every nuance of an airplane, taxi, takeoff, approach, landing, and taxing back to the tie down, just had a better grasp of all airplanes in general.

For years your choice of inexpensive taildraggers fell into the used and old category. J-3 Cubs and T-Craft were the favorites of the budget minded that didn't mind trading cruise speed for lower operating costs and the sheer fun of flying. Sure, there were a few exceptions to that rule such as Warbirds, cropdusters, aerobatic aircraft and other specialized birds, but they were just that, specialized. In the last decade, the options available to GA pilots that are looking for affordable aircraft with good manners in flight and on the ground have increased dramatically. Aviat with its very popular Husky and now the Pup come to mind along with the expanded offerings of American Champion that offers an aircraft for every budget and nearly every use. The venerable Cessna 180's and 185's continue to have a huge following in the used market and command prices well in excess of even some of the new airplanes available. Cub Crafters on the west coast has made a good living and gathered a great following with their Super Cub offerings as well.

The list goes on, but one name that hasn't been mentioned so far is the extensive offerings of Maule Air Inc. located in Moultrie, Georgia and the subject of this months aircraft preview in their newly reintroduced Maule M-4-180V.

The background to this preview begins with a visit to Nashua, New Hampshire where I was scheduled to do a test flight with Rob Holland, President of Aerial Advantage and member of the US Aerobatic Team. As the weekend we had chosen to test fly out of Nashua was also the same weekend as the Daniel Webster College Heritage Festival, getting into the air that day proved to be a series of false starts and stops due to traffic and shows. As luck would have it, during one of my more extended waiting periods, I had the good fortune to see Ritts Howard, President of Maule Northeast of Merrimack, New Hampshire.

As Ritts and I had flown together on several occasions and he had been gracious to arrange a test flight of another Maule last year, I took the opportunity to get up to speed on what was new at Maule and hope to get another test flight under my belt with him in the near future.

"Maule has some very interesting projects on the board." Ritts Began," I attended a sales meeting in the early Spring at the factory and between the new diesel they are testing and intending to build and their reintroduction of their newly updated M-4 they have got some great new products in the pipe line. Maule has always made, in my opinion, a great airplane that really fits the way I like to fly and when you look at the performance, price and lasting durability of the Maules' they are one of the best bargains available in today's market."

While I was familiar with the Maules' foray into diesels through press releases and other coverage, I was surprised when Ritts mentioned the M-4 series. When Ritts and I had reviewed the M-7-235 a year earlier I went through a self education session as to Maules product codes. Without reviewing the entire coding of landing gears, engines etc., one thing was consistent, they all were the "7" series. As Maule had refined and introduced new aircraft the series number was moved ahead to its present day "7".

“So”, I asked Ritts, “What’s the deal with a “4” series. I thought any new aircraft would have a higher series number.”

The part of our earlier conversation that didn’t sink in was when Ritts said “reintroduce the M-4.”

“The M-4-180V is an updated version of the original M-4 that Maule had originally introduced back in 1962.” Ritts continued, “The original M-4 was very popular but Maule was looking at the 4 place market as their future and the two seater kind of faded away. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the success of the Husky, Maule began to take a closer look at the two seat market and see what they could offer. First, they had a proven design and second they had a good deal of new technology and airframe design modifications that could be adopted to the M-4 that would allow greater performance and really make it a better all around aircraft.”

Asked to elaborate, Ritts added, “Since the original, Maule had come out with flaps that not only had positive settings for short field and landing operations but also had a -7 setting to assist in higher cruise speeds that would allow the M-4 to cruise at approximately 138 mph. Next they had the side by side seating design that is favored by pilots, instructors and insurance companies. No blind spots while on the ground, no obstructed panels and an overall more roomy and comfortable arrangement. Finally they could now offer the M-4 with a 180 HP powerplant with either a fixed or variable pitch prop that, combined with Maule’s superior STOL design, made the M-4 a real top performer by anyone’s standard.”

While Maule had reached into their bag of updates to bring the M-4 into the current configuration, I was curious as to what they had kept from the original.

“People that remember the original M-4 will be happy to see that the great lines of the original remain on place.” Ritts continued, “The rounded tail and control surfaces bring back the days of its introduction and give the M-4 a real distinctive look. The addition of the half wheel fairings to reduce drag, the all metal wings and rear Ceconite covering with Maules attention to detail in the finish, they have produced a great looking aircraft.”

Like all the Maule’s available today, the M-4 promises great versatility. “Maules are made with multifunction in mind. Each aircraft is built to order at the factory so no two are exactly alike but they all arrive ready for a variety of environments. You can put the M-4 on skis or floats just like the rest of the Maule line. What is really impressive is the M-4 is going to have a useful load of over 900 lbs. That will ensure that M-4 owners won’t have to decide between leaving fuel or taking a passenger even when put on heavy amphibious floats.

With a 180 HP upfront and a mighty useful load the M-4 is also coming with an extensive list of standard features both in the panel and the exterior of the aircraft. As standard equipment Maule promises a full gyro panel, GPS/Comm with a moving map

display, digital transponder, intercom, full interior/exterior lighting package and a comfortable and roomy cockpit area. In the back, where traditional tandem seating loses space, the M-4 has up to 18 cubic feet of baggage area as well.

Should an owner require additional features, a full IFR panel is available along with an extensive list of other optional equipment. Overall, a fully customized Maule will be available in the M-4 model line.

As the cost of new aircraft has, in many cases, bumped up against the stratosphere, I was almost afraid to ask Ritts what the cost of an M-4 was going to be when deliveries begin in 2005.

“That’s the other good news.” Ritts explained, “The folks at Maule have managed to put this whole package together and still make it affordable to nearly everyone. The fixed pitch version with the standard equipment package will be offered at \$95,999.00 and the variable pitch will cost \$105,999.00. The pricing of the M-4 will give buyers a proven aircraft that will come in 30 to 40 thousand dollars under comparable equipped aircraft that share the same type construction and engine sizes. Plus they get over 40 years of experience from Maule in the construction of this type of airplane. Experience, performance and value make a strong argument for pilots looking to get into this type of aircraft.” Ritts concluded.

With Ritts having sung the praises of the updated M-4 from his vantage point at Maule Northeast, it was time to make a call to Moultrie and talk with Brent and Ray Maule. Ray, son of founder B.D. Maule and Brent, Ray’s son, not only had the vantage point that Ritts had shared but could also talk about the M-4’s flight characteristics and the process that led them to update the M-4 for reintroduction.

“We began development of the updated M-4 just about a year ago.” Ray began, “The original M-4 was the first type aircraft we sold back in April, 1962. Although we kept developing the Maule line up to today’s M-7 series, the M-4 was and is a popular two seater. What really prompted us to proceed though was the popularity of the Husky and the American Champion lines of aircraft. They proved that there is a real market for versatile two seaters and we knew we could produce a great airplane and give pilots another great choice. In addition, we have the added advantage of being able to provide side by side seating, which many pilots prefer to the tandem seating that all the others offer.”

Asked what market Maule was looking to capture with the M-4 both Ray and Brent had their own thoughts. Brent began, “It seems like everywhere you look today, people are excited about the retro look. Cars and pickups have gone that way. When I looked at the M-4 and the classic rounded lines of the tail section, the M-4 just really looked like a great profile that would grab pilots eyes. The addition of the improvements to the original airframe and powerplant allowed us to keep it classic on the outside and offer pilots the best under the cowl and in the panel. All of the advantages of a classic design combined with the performance and durability of modern components.”

Ray soon added, “we knew that side by side seating in a two place aircraft would be popular for a variety of uses. For the private owner, behind the seats is 18 cubic feet of storage room that will hold enough for an extended get away. For the commercial operator the payload will be in excess of 900 lbs and still provide the STOL capabilities that all Maule’s are famous for. For flight schools, the seating is more convenient and insurance companies favor that type of arrangement. Plus, we looked at both Husky and American Champion in the cost area. For the same equipment we are \$30,000.00 less than American Champion and \$40,000.00 less than a Husky and will be able to perform with the best they can offer.”

Turning our conversation to the flight characteristics, both Brent and Ray could offer their impressions as both have flown the M-4 as it progresses to certification that is expected in January or February of 2005.

“The M-4 really compares in performance to the MX-7 that we build.” Ray continued, “Although we don’t have the final numbers yet I can give you some very close estimates on what the M-4 will do. Stall with flaps is 45 mph and clean at about 55 mph. Cruise speed is 138 mph and the average fuel burn at cruise is about 9 gph. We are expecting a VNE to be certified at 180 mph. As far as takeoff and landing performance, the M-4 will continue to be a STOL aircraft. Takeoff roll at gross weight, which we expect to be certified at 2350 lbs, is between 350 and 400 feet. For landings the same numbers apply. 600 feet over 50 foot obstacles for both landing and takeoff is what we are seeing in our certification phase.”

Brent added, “The M-4 is great to fly. The controls are light and the airplane responds great to pilot inputs. In cruise, the cockpit is very comfortable and large for that class of airplane. With 42" at the shoulders and 39" at the hips the M-4 is about the same size as a Cessna 172. Other tandem airplanes don’t have the added storage room that we have either and I loaded the M-4 up with an unbelievable amount of luggage. A couple of folding chairs, three backpacks, a day pack, two sleeping bags and assorted other items easily fit in the 18 cubic feet and my dad and I took off in under 400 feet. I would have to say we are producing a great flying and the most versatile two seater on the market.”

As with every preview I have written in the past, the talk of another great airplane being available to test fly prompted my question as to when the M-4 could be expected to be available.

“As I said earlier, we are fully expecting certification to be complete in January or February at the very latest and should be able to fill orders in April. Right now we have another M-4 under construction that we hope to use as a demonstration airplane once it is certified. We have one sold already and a good number of people ready to place orders once we are in full production. The prototype that we are using for certification is spoken for as well.” Ray concluded.

#### Summation

Maule has an over 40 year history producing both two and four seat STOL aircraft that have been successfully and profitably used in every facet of aviation. From personal

aircraft, flight instruction, law enforcement, bush applications to all round fun to fly float and ski planes Maule has pleased them all.

Both Ray and Brent Maule know their airplanes and they also know their market. With Husky and American Champion the current kings of two seaters, the Maule's are right when they say many pilots will prefer having an airplane with the same performance plus the advantages of side by side seating. The added cockpit room, unobstructed panel from both seats and the advantage of reaching behind you for a jacket or bag should make the M-4 a favored design for many pilots.

When it comes to performance, Maule nearly wrote the book and coined the phrase "STOL aircraft." With the expected numbers that Ray and Brent provided it appears that yet another chapter will be written along those lines.

As for the value for the dollar, well, that one seems to answer itself. At under \$110,000.00 for a nicely equipped VFR panel and a 180 hp engine with constant speed prop bolted up front, the M-4 may end up leaving Husky howling at the moon.

For further information on the new Maule M-4-180, please contact Ritts Howard at Maule Northeast 603-424-1818 or visit their website at [www.maulenortheast.com](http://www.maulenortheast.com) or email [info@maulenortheast.com](mailto:info@maulenortheast.com).

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