

COURTESY AIRCRAFT



Mark Clark

President and Owner
Courtesy Aircraft
Rockford, Illinois

A youngster when his father founded Courtesy in 1957 as a Cessna dealer, Clark grew up with the scent of avgas and the sound of spinning props. He was thoroughly smitten with aviation, after a 35-min. ride in a P-51 Mustang at 14, with warbirds in particular. He earned his pilot's license at 16, began flying a North American T-6 Texan two years later, and sold his first surplus military bird as well. After graduating with a marketing degree from Bradley University in downstate Peoria, he began selling airplanes in earnest, and has been doing so ever since. He bought Courtesy from his father in 1983 and focused on marketing exotic machines along with standard civilian birds. He holds a Commercial license and an unlimited letter of authorization in all makes and models of high-performance former military aircraft, type ratings in the B-24 and A-26 and numerous other warbirds, along with an A&P certificate. He has logged some 7,000 piloting hours, more than 1,500 in high-performance ex-military aircraft, and owns a Cessna Conquest.



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Questions for Mark Clark

1 Courtesy's well known for moving warbirds — how many?

Clark: In a typical year, we'll be involved in 40, 50 and upward of 60 transactions. About 80% of those will be former military aircraft, from SNJs and P-40s to B-17s. Over the years I've sold 80 Mustangs. But we sell everything, from J3s through Citations. Right now our inventory includes an AirCam on floats, a P-40, Harrier jump jets and a ski-equipped Noorduyn Norseman. All totaled we've sold and delivered over 3,000 aircraft, many of them multiple times.

2 What kind of restrictions are imposed on former warbirds?

Clark: That depends. For a variety of American-built models including the Beech T-34, Piper L-4, Stinson L-5 and North American T6 and SNJ, their manufacturers applied for and received standard civilian type certificates. So, their TCs are no different than those for a Cessna 172 or Beech Bonanza and have no restrictions. However, all the others, including all the jets and foreign-made aircraft, go into the Experimental category. Also, all the foreign aircraft must receive an import permit from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. All aircraft must be certified as airworthy and then are issued a special airworthiness certificate, usually with several pages of operating limitations. Of course, all weaponry and targeting equipment must be removed and any drop tanks secured so they cannot be jettisoned.

3 And the pilots?

Clark: Anybody with enough money can buy one of these things, but if you don't have a lot of experience, you won't be allowed to fly those in the Experimental category. The FAA watches that closely. Consider the T-28 Trojan. It's a trainer but with retractable gear, a 1,425-hp Wright radial and a max takeoff weight of over 8,000 lb. So, if you don't have a lot of time in complex, heavy aircraft you'll have to get it. There's instruction available and you'll need to safely operate the aircraft. Most of the maneuvering skills demanded are of ATP tolerances. And keep in mind, insurance companies have their own requirements and they can be even more rigid.

4 Production of many of these airplanes ended 60 to 80 years ago. What about maintenance?

Clark: There's actually a pretty good network out there. This is a small community and I can help point owners in a direction. For example, I know of a half dozen shops that work on P-40s and P-51s. The support is actually quite good. The fact is the people in those places love working on warbirds, especially World War II aircraft. They have a passion for them.

5 That war's veterans are disappearing; what's the impact?

Clark: I knew you'd ask that. We're still close enough to World War II so the buyers are still connected but through their fathers' or grandfathers' service. One customer wants to buy an AT-6 because that was the aircraft his grandfather trained in before moving into a P-51. The buyer said he can't afford a Mustang but can learn like his grandfather in a Texan. And beyond that, there are Corsairs, Skyraiders and Bird Dogs from the Korean War and beyond. So, this will continue. **BCA**