

Should I buy a Seabee?

If...

You are not willing to get your hands dirty or,

You don't want to get wet or,

You don't like talking to crowds of people around you at the gas pump or,

You want to go faster than 100 MPH or,

You don't like attention or,

You want a quiet cockpit or,

You don't drink beer or,

You don't want to work on your Seabee until the Annual Inspection or

You don't want to keep telling ATC what type airplane you are in or,

You don't like using the rudder pedals or,

You don't like a good challenge then...

NO! Don't buy a Seabee.

I get a lot of questions from potential buyers about the Seabee and what to look for in a perspective purchase. Below are some of the common questions asked to help you with your decision. I couldn't possibly list every question but this should be a good start for you.

Q: What does it take to fly a Seabee?

A: You need a seaplane rating, high performance, complex and tail wheel endorsement along with as much tail wheel time as you can get. At least 25 hours should do the trick. More would be much better. Get a good thorough checkout after your purchase. At least 10 hours with a qualified CFI with time in type. 3 or 4 days of constant flying will pay benefits later on.

Q: Is the Seabee difficult to fly?

A: If you are an experienced pilot, with many types of airplane time under your belt, it isn't difficult at all. The Seabee is a rather large General Aviation airplane that requires finesse. The most difficult aspect is the crosswind landing and taxi. With time and experience you will know your limits. Don't try a 15-knot wind on your first day with the Seabee! Keep your limits low for the first 100-200 hours. Once in the air it is just another airplane. It is a little heavy on the controls but is very stable in flight.

Q: How does the Seabee handle on the water?

A: I am biased but I think it handles better than any seaplane out there. You have to remember it is a flying boat hence the CG is very low giving the Seabee a very stable platform on the water. Unlike our "float" friends, the Seabee has wing floats that must be kept out of the water during takeoffs and landings.

Q: Are parts available?

A: Even though Republic is not making parts for the Seabee anymore, there are used parts available and some are even NOS (new old stock) parts. Some owners resort to having their own parts made. You must have drawings OR an original part that the machine shop can copy to be completely legal. You can make them yourself if you know what you are doing.

Q: What about insurance?

A: Amphibian insurance is probably the most expensive in the General Aviation community. Hull insurance can run \$5000 and up! "Liability only" is much cheaper. Your qualifications seem to make no difference in the premium. You could have two lunar landings and the price would be the same. Some Seabee owners opt for liability insurance only, which protects you if you hurt someone or damage property. Call around to different insurance companies to get an idea of what is covered and what is not. The premiums go down gradually if you don't have a claim and are very reasonable after you have 500 hours in your Seabee as PIC.

Q: What do I look for when finding a Seabee that looks promising?

A: Get a mechanic (preferably one with Seabee experience) to look at the Seabee with you. They know how to look at logbooks and should have a list of AD's that must be complied with before you take flight. Make sure it has a valid Airworthiness Certificate in plain sight. Ask if the Seabee has been in salt water and when it flew last. Even though the engine time may be low, if it hasn't flown in 8 years, this may be a red flag. Corrosion is always a concern with a seaplane and your mechanic should look closely (with a flashlight) at all the interior parts of the Seabee. The only difficult compartment to check is right under the fuel tank. It is not accessible unless the tank (bladder) is out. Take off all the access panels and look carefully inside for corrosion and any damage from salt water or incorrect installation of components (cables, wiring, hydraulic lines, etc.) Has the Seabee been in a hangar or has it spent its life outside? "Outside" Seabees should be heavily scrutinized. Check for cracks in the landing gear knuckles; usually on the underside of the knuckle where it goes into the cross-tube. A hard landing can crack them. If you can, jack the Seabee up and do a retract test to check for excessive wear of the landing gear system. Check under the rear floor as the gear is operated that the hydraulic actuator operates efficiently and the control horn on the cross tube is not corroded or cracked. Another important item is the control horn on the landing gear cross-tube; check that it is welded properly and not cracked. The fork attached to it should also be checked for cracks. A cracked fork is an indication that the landing gear was "in transit" when it hit something either in the water or a gear up landing! There are a lot more items to check but these give the most headaches. Obviously a compression check should be accomplished with the engine hot. Your mechanic should know what to look for.

Q: Where can I find a mechanic to inspect my Seabee before the purchase?

A: If you contact me at smestler@pbtcomm.net, I can usually point you in the right direction. You may have to pay travel and expenses but it is money well spent.

Q: Are there any AD's (Airworthiness Directives) on the Seabee?

A: Yes. There is a list of them on the FAA and Seabee website. Look for Republic, Sky Enterprises and Downer Aircraft for the list. Under that heading are all the AD's issued from Republic. Due to the wide variety of power plants and accessories, you or your mechanic must search specifically for those accessories. For example the engine; you have to search Lycoming or Continental or any other make of engine that is installed. It could be a time-consuming exercise to get all the AD's but compliance is mandatory.

Q: What engine should I look for in a Seabee?

A: The original engine was a Franklin, 500 cu. in. 215 HP. Even though there are many Franklin's still flying, parts and mechanics to work on them are getting scarce. I think most experienced Seabee owners will agree that the original engine was a little under powered for the Seabee. Later Seabees were modified with a Lycoming or Continental engine. Parts are still available for them and most engine shops can work on them. Some Seabees have been modified with a General Motors Corvette engine. This modification puts the Seabee in the "Experimental" category, which has its pluses and minuses. I personally would opt for the higher power engine.

Q: What is the useful load?

A: Depending on the empty weight, the useful load can vary from 700 pounds to almost 1000 pounds. Gross weight is 3150 for the Franklin powered Seabee and 3250 for the Lycoming powered Seabee.

Q: How are the maintenance costs?

A: If you are good with tools, maintenance is manageable. You can do an "owner assisted" annual inspection that reduces the cost dramatically. You must find a mechanic willing to assist you. There are other things you can do as an owner that will prevent the maintenance bill from getting too high but, you must have the "approved" procedure and make a logbook entry with the item you fixed and your signature and pilot certificate number. You can check the Seabee website for a list of those items under the "Maintenance" page. If you don't know which end of the screwdriver to hold it could get expensive. There have been \$6000 annual inspections! Ouch!

Q: How many Seabees are still flying?

A: I can only estimate the number. Out of the 1059 (plus two made from parts after Republic stopped producing them) there are about 150 still flying in the United States. Many Seabees are in Europe and South America. Some in Australia and New Zealand.

Q: I have heard the Seabee is a warbird. Is that true?

A: Well that is a bone of contention. It was issued a military designation YOA-15 by the Army Air Force at the time. The orders were canceled some time later so I suppose you could call it a warbird even though it saw no "action". The Israeli's bought three Seabees early on but they evidently didn't last very long.

Q: How do I know there are no mechanic or business liens on the Seabee I'm interested in?

A: **You must do a title search!** AOPA and the Seaplane Pilot's Association (SPA) can help with that. A clear title is a must because it could be very expensive to clear it up. Do this BEFORE you sign the check.

I hope this answers most of your questions about the Seabee. But if you have others please don't hesitate to ask. The Seabee Club website is full of information and you can always email me at smestler@pbtcomm.net with any question you have. The Seabee community is a small one and chances are that there is a club member that knows about the Seabee you are looking to buy. Ask the club and you are sure to get answers. There is always a Seabee owner willing to help. Thank you for your attention and I hope you find that perfect Seabee!