



In the August issue of ULTRAFLIGHT I wrote an article entitled, "How To Find A Good Ultralight Manufacturer." In the article I mentioned that the SportPlane Resource Guide was a good reference for an unequivocal critique of manufacturers and their products.

The article generated numerous responses, both positive and negative. The negative comments maintained that the poor ratings received by some of the manufacturers in the Resource Guide were the result of the personal bias of the Resource author, and were not indicative of the actual rating that the manufacturer should have received. When I spoke to the author of the Resource Guide, he claimed that he was objective in his ratings.

It seems to me that anyone consulting the SportPlane Resource Guide will need to decide for himself if the reference is objective or not. In the August article, I suggested several means for a potential customer to determine if he would be satisfied with a particular manufacturer and its product. The Resource Guide is but one of many investigative tools.

The comments on my article have led me to conclude that it would be beneficial to the ultralight and experimental aircraft community if there existed a "clearing house" for complaints and compliments about manufacturers and dealers. The "clearing house" could be called something like, "The Light Aircraft Manufacturer's and Consumer's Data Network."

Other possible names could be, the "Aviator's Research Network," or the "Aviator's Independent Research Council" (AIR Council). In the interest of brevity for this article, I'll just call it the "Aviator's Network."

The way that I envision the Aviator's Network is that it would be a site where a consumer could direct his complaint about a manufacturer if he were unable to resolve his problem by interacting with the manufacturer directly. The Network would forward the complaint to the manufacturer, and also keep a copy on file.

The manufacturer could then address the complaint by mailing a response to the customer and sending a copy to the Network. The manufacturer's response would be placed in the Network file. The final resolution to the dispute (if any) would also be kept in the file.

Over a period of time, the Aviator's Network would establish a file on manufacturers which contained all the complaints and responses to the complaints. Hopefully, the file would also contain compliments and testimonials on behalf of the manufacturers by satisfied customers. A similar file would also be maintained on various dealers.

If a prospective buyer were interested in a particular manufacturer he could contact the Aviator's Network and request a copy of the items in the manufacturer's file. The customer would pay a fee for

the file, which would cover the Network's costs.

It is important to note that the Network would NOT annotate the file or comment on it. Nor would the Network rate the manufacturer's service as "Excellent," "Good," "Poor," etc., as is done by the SportPlane Resource Guide. The Network would strictly be a repository for comments, compliments, complaints and responses. The data would be forwarded on request to customers, manufacturers, dealers, pilots, flight instructors and prospective buyers.

I believe that reputable manufacturers would welcome the concept of an Aviator's Network, because a manufacturer with good service would have a Network file filled with satisfied customer's comments. After providing good service, a manufacturer could encourage its customers to turn in a comment form to the Network. The Network could even provide such forms for manufacturers to distribute when its product is delivered.

Conversely, the disreputable persons in the light aircraft community would be exposed by negative comments. This would steer people away from troublesome manufacturers, and toward the reputable ones. Even manufacturers with a questionable reputation should welcome the Network concept, because it would provide a forum for them to respond to negative rumors and possibly unjustified complaints.

If the Aviator's Network expanded its services, it might someday develop a list of aviation-knowledgeable arbitrators who would mediate the differences between disputing parties, if the persons so requested. The Network could also contract with an escrow company to hold deposits until aircraft kits were delivered, or hold funds pending the resolution of a dispute.

ULTRAFLIGHT would like your comments about the Aviator's Network concept. Do you feel that there is really a need for such a service? How much should a consumer pay for the information? Can you suggest someone to establish such a Network? Can you think of a better name for the concept?

How can the Network guard against being tricked by bogus compliments or complaints? For example, a single disgruntled person might write several complaints using a different name, or have several friends write a complaint.

These are questions which need to be addressed before pro - gressing further into the formation of an "aviator/manufacturer clearing house."

Please direct your comments to ULTRAFLIGHT MAGAZINE at 2167 14th Circle N., St. Petersburg, FL 33713. Tel: 727-894-4636 Fax 727-327-1461.

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