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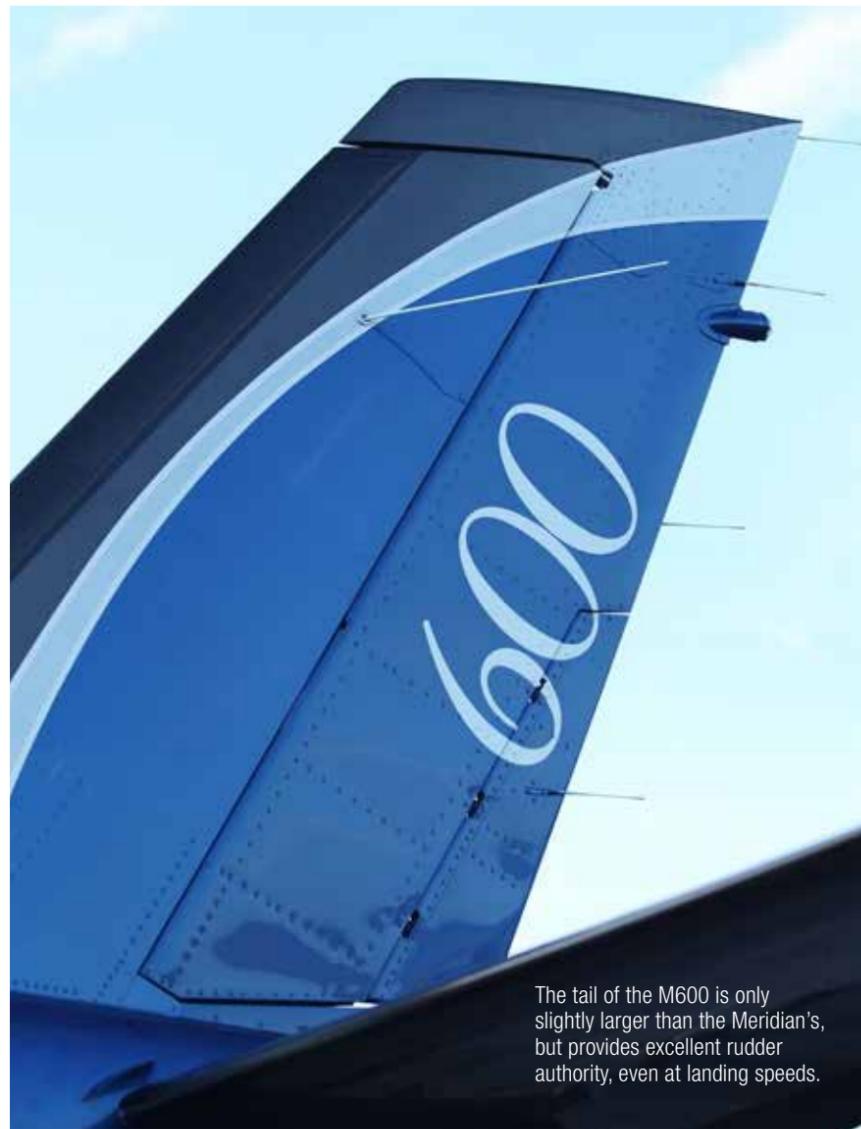


# Piper PA-46 M600



With more PT6 power and Garmin G3000 avionics, this new turboprop single goes far beyond the Meridian, literally and otherwise

**BY ROBERT GOYER**



The tail of the M600 is only slightly larger than the Meridian's, but provides excellent rudder authority, even at landing speeds.



The beefier, wider-set gear of the M600 makes for easier ground handling, better tracking on takeoff and less tendency to wander on rollout.

It's no secret that Piper recently earned FAA certification for its new M600, the next-generation PA-46 featuring an all-new wing and a more powerful Pratt & Whitney turboprop engine installation. I traveled down to Piper's Vero Beach, Florida, headquarters, situated at busy KVRB on the beautiful Atlantic Coast, to learn more about the new model and to be the first journalist to review it.

To be honest, I wasn't expecting much. I've flown the Meridian, the M600's predecessor, numerous times, including several long, multiday cross-countries, and while I liked the airplane, I was fuzzy on how Piper would add capability to the PA-46-500P, something it truly needed. After spending a day with the plane and the people behind it, my eyes were opened. Here's what happened.

When Piper launched the PA-46 Meridian turboprop single in the year 2000, many saw

it as a bold move for a company they'd come to regard as a maker of *piston* singles. Truth be told, Piper had a world of institutional knowledge about turboprops—it did produce around 850 Pratt & Whitney-powered cabin-class Cheyenne turboprop twins, ending production of that model in 1985 amidst the historic downturn in the GA market.

Piper's re-entry into the PT6 world a decade-and-a-half later was with a product, dubbed the Meridian, that made a lot of sense for a brand that was still regaining its footing. The PT6-powered single was clearly a Jet-A-burning version of its revolutionary and popular pressurized Malibu/Mirage piston single and an attempt to enter a market for a fast pressurized turboprop single that was then and now dominated by TBM and the Pilatus PC-12.

The Mirage was a great place to start. Along with the Cessna P210, the PA-46-350P

("P" for "pressurized") was one of two pressurized piston singles, and it was a tough act to follow. While a strong performer, the Mirage was limited by the power output of its gas-piston 350 hp Lycoming TSIO-540 up front. With Pratt power, the Meridian would offer all the comforts of Mirage flying, but with lots of added power, up to 500 shp, while bringing legendary PT6 TBOs (3,500 hours compared with 1,800 for the Lycoming) along for the ride. To top it off, it cruised at around 30 knots better than the Mirage, and it flew with the expected Piper flight control harmony, even if it was

a bit heavier on the controls than previous PA-46s—it was, after all, a heavier airplane.

To customers looking to step up, it sounded like a great deal, and it was. Piper owners who were looking to graduate from the Mirage or maybe the Seneca twin and wanted to savor the aroma of kerosene saw Piper's new Jet-A-powered bird as a natural destination.

The model has been a big hit. Piper delivered the 500th Meridian recently, and the new M500, which I flew last year and liked very much, is a nicely updated version of the Meridian, with

the best G1000 suite in a Piper yet.

But the Meridian in all its iteration is limited in both payload and range. While the Mirage was famously long-legged, with 120 gallons of 100LL for an engine that burns around 20 gph, the Meridian had about a third again as much fuel (50 more gallons) with an engine that burns nearly twice as much fuel as the Lycoming (and heavier fuel at that). With full tanks, it's a 1,000 nm no-wind airplane with three slightly less than FAA-regulation people and a few light bags. For some owner-operators, especially those who fly with youngsters in back or on shorter

legs to begin with, that's all they need, and at around \$2.25 million, the M500/Meridian is a great solution in a niche of its own.

Still, the question of how Piper would improve upon the model was a vexing one. For more range, you'd need more fuel, and to carry that fuel, if you could find a place to put it, would mean increasing max weight, so there would need to be more structure to support that weight, and that structure would, of course, weigh more and so require more power—it's the same multilevel vicious circle that airplane designers have been battling since Kitty Hawk.

The hard truth was that as much as customers were requesting it, and they were, a *simple* upgrade to the Meridian was, from an engineering perspective, not in the cards.

So Piper did the hard thing and did a major overhaul, creating the M600, a super-Meridian, if you will, that overcomes all of the objections to the original model with the kind of magic conjured up by years of engineering, many tens of millions of dollars invested and a new round of approvals by the FAA. Easy? No. The right path. Doubtless.

### IT'S THE WING

The new model, announced last year after Piper had already been at work on it for years, is sometimes talked about as a clean-sheet product, but it's not. The fuselage is essentially the same as the Meridian's, but the wing is indeed all-new, designed from a clean sheet of paper, if you will. The rumor is that Piper took the wing of its Piper Jet (which it wisely abandoned in 2011) and mated it to the fuselage of the Meridian for, voilà, the M600. Not so. It's true that in creating the M600 wing, Piper did use some of the expertise it gained in designing the jet's wing, but they're not the same.

One thing they do have in common is room for fuel, thanks to a long span and a fat chord. The wingspan of the M600 at 43 feet, 3 inches, is only a few inches longer than that of the M500, but it carries 260 gallons of fuel, 90 gallons more than the Meridian/M500. The M600 also has a max weight of better than 6,000 pounds, 900 pounds more than the M500, thanks, again, to the beefier wing (with much stronger gear and brakes, to boot).

Perhaps the reason for the speculation on the genesis of the wing has to do with the slightly swept leading edge, which gives the M600 the look of an even faster airplane than it is. Perhaps more important is the new flap configuration. The straight flaps are nearly 15 feet long, covering more than two-thirds of the span of each side of the wing, and as I'd find, they're very effective.

**TOP:** The fuselage of the M600 is essentially the same as the Meridian/M500, which isn't a bad thing. With a bifold airstair-style door and club seating, you get a real cabin-class experience.

**RIGHT:** The cabin features a club configuration with the rear-facing seats divided for access to the flight deck. Piper upgraded the interior with new fabrics, improved armrests, more storage and LED lighting throughout.



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## Piper PA-46 M600

The airplane we flew for this report was Serial Number 3, a factory demonstrator. It was outfitted with a three-screen (12.1-inch) Garmin G3000 avionics suite with two GTC 570 touch controllers, Garmin GFC 700 autopilot, Aspen EFD multifunction standby instrument, Garmin ESP envelope protection, crew alerting system, integrated digital pressurization, Garmin 10-inch digital color weather radar and more.

- » **PRICE AS EQUIPPED:** \$2.85 MILLION
- » **ENGINES:** PRATT & WHITNEY PT6A-42A
- » **PROPELLER:** HARTZELL FOUR-BLADE CONSTANT SPEED, FULLY REVERSIBLE
- » **SEATING:** 6 (PILOT/CO-PILOT/PAX PLUS FOUR IN CLUB SEATING)
- » **WINGSPAN:** 43.1 FT.
- » **LENGTH:** 29.9 FT.
- » **HEIGHT (AT TAIL):** 11 FT.
- » **CABIN LENGTH:** 12.4 FT.
- » **CABIN WIDTH:** 4.1 FT.
- » **CABIN HEIGHT:** 3.9 FT.
- » **BAGGAGE CAPACITY:** 20 CU. FT.
- » **BASIC EMPTY WEIGHT:** 3,650 LBS.
- » **MAX. TAKEOFF WEIGHT:** 6,000 LBS.
- » **USEFUL LOAD:** 2,350 LBS.
- » **FUEL CAPACITY:** 260 GAL./1,820 LBS.
- » **FULL FUEL PAYLOAD:** 658 LBS.
- » **PRESSURE DIFFERENTIAL:** 5.6 PSI
- » **TAKEOFF DISTANCE (50-FT. OBSTACLE):** 2,635 FT.
- » **LANDING DISTANCE (50-FT. OBSTACLE):** 2,659 FT.
- » **MAX. RATE OF CLIMB:** 1,556 FPM
- » **MAX. SPEED:** 274 KTAS
- » **RANGE AT MAX. SPEED:** 1,085 NM
- » **RANGE AT LOW CRUISE (184 KTAS):** 1,484 NM



**ABOVE:** The Garmin G3000 installation in the M600 is a tight but clean fit. Two GTC 570 touch controllers provide access to all flight deck functions, including FMS input, checklists (on their way), systems monitoring and control, and, of course, navigation and communications.

**LEFT:** When it comes to the M600, the wing is truly the thing. In this view from below, it's easy to see the shape of the new airfoil, with a slightly tapered (swept?) leading edge and 10-inch radar pod integrated into the leading edge, which Piper believes adds a few knots over the previous underwing design.

The full-fuel payload is 580 pounds (with 260 gallons of Jet-A), which is equivalent to 3 occupants and 70 pounds of bags, and better than 1,000 nm NBAA range at 275 knots. Those are dream figures for Meridian drivers.

Pull the power back, and you can go more than 200 nm farther with the same load or leave off a little fuel and add payload to cover that same 1,000 nm. For trips even marginally shorter, the M600 is close to a fill-the-seats airplane, depending, of course, on how big your passengers are and how much baggage they're bringing with them.

The new wing is the key to the whole thing. With the bigger, beefier wing, the M600 gets more fuel capacity, higher weight-carrying capability and slicker aerodynamics, all of which equate, when coupled to an extra 100 shp out of the Pratt & Whitney PT6 turboprop that powers it, to a lot of additional utility, something Meridian owners have been asking for since it came to market.

So, with the M600, you get more power, more payload, more fuel, more range and, oh, yeah, a couple more huge upgrades.

### G3000 AVIONICS

For those of us who have been lucky enough to fly the G3000, the latest-generation avionics suite from Garmin, we know just how much of an upgrade it is from the G1000

flight deck, which still graces the panels of numerous new-production aircraft, including Piper's own M500.

In a number of ways, G3000 is as much a revelation as G1000 was when it was launched a decade ago—how time flies. There are probably a few different ways of thinking about this next-gen glass, but one way or the other, it all comes down to the user experience. With G3000, you get touch control (which is different from “touch screens”) and a newly conceived user interface that uses much shallower menus along with “Back” and “Home” buttons and big icons to make navigating the system a breeze. Garmin's latest portable navigators, including the Aera 660, use a similar interface design and symbology, so you can get the feel of G3000 by checking out those products.

In the M600, the new avionics suite does lots of good things, but it has required a redesign of the cockpit that takes a little getting used to. The three-screen (two PFDs and a centrally mounted MFD) layout puts the 12.1-inch (diagonal) screens right up against each other, so there's no room for the controller buttons between the screens, as is done in many aircraft. Hence, the baro button, for instance, gets located just below the displays, on the subpanel, a place I've never seen a baro button before. Likewise, the two touch-screen controllers (GTC 570)

are situated directly below the MFD, which requires the power quadrant to be moved down below the touch controllers, which puts your throttle hand lower than you might be used to, but with no ill effects. It might be a more natural placement for the power lever, in fact.

The flight control (autopilot) panel is directly above the PFD, right where it should be. Unlike on other models, the M600 is capable of fully coupled go-arounds, something that automates a critical phase of flight, though the pilot still needs to get the power, the flaps, the gear and the flaps.

On the far left-hand side of the panel is the standby instrument, a special-purpose Aspen Evolution display with built-in backup power that provides attitude, altitude, air-speed, rate of climb and a big bright directional gyro (all solid-state, of course) display in one easy-to-read instrument.

When I flew the M500 last year, I was taken by how clean the panel was, but the panel of the M600 is even cleaner, with more functions being controlled by the G3000 system than ever before.

Like the M500, the M600 features Garmin's innovative ESP envelope protection, which provides overbanking, under-speed, overspeed and, another first for Piper, emergency descent protection, all great safety advances.

While I'm speaking of the emergency descent mode, this function is possible because the M600 features a digitally controlled pressurization system now, too, yet another first on a Piper.

The cabin, while still clearly a PA-46 by design, is the nicest PA-46 space, to date. Piper redid the seats, including the newly styled, lower-profile and more comfortable retractable armrests, giving more room to move. They also reworked the interior panels, sidewall storage units and tables with carbon fiber, LED lights, high-end materials and cool and/or tasteful color palettes.

### FEEL THE SPEED

I've been talking about the wing being the secret behind the M600, but the truth is, the engine is the other part of the equation. This part of it, thankfully for Piper's checkbook, was a much easier development program. The engine is the identical PT6A-42A model in the M500 just tuned to turn out an additional 100 shp, which, as you might know, is hardly breaking a sweat for the PT6.

The additional power does lots of good things for the M600, including upping its top speed to 274 knots at 25,000 feet.

Pilots who flew the Meridian learned early on to use the 250-cubed rule, that at FL250 you'd get 250 knots true while burning 250 pounds of Jet-A per hour. The top speed was right around 260 knots. So the M600 is around 15 knots faster at top speed. But at typical power settings, it'll do around 255 knots, nearly the M500's top speed, while stretching its legs out to better than 1,200 nm.

You get another great advantage in the substantially higher Vmo on the M600, 251 knots indicated versus just 188 for the M500. In the Meridian, you need to carefully monitor your airspeed on descent to stay out of the red. On the M600, coming down is a downright uplifting experience. With 63 knots additional airspeed to work with, you can point the nose of the plane down without pushing Vmo and turn that descent into airspeed and thus get to the airport a lot faster, which is the point, right?

Before I went flying in it, I had the opportunity to witness the beauty of the M600 starting with the sunrise on an air-to-air photo mission. It can be a little hard to get an idea of the bold new look of the wing when you're standing on the ramp and looking at it straight on. From another



**TOP:** Among the most noteworthy features of the all-new wing are the new slotted, airfoil-shaped flaps, which are long in span, but narrow in chord. They're very effective, though, allowing the M600 to approach at conventional piston-single speeds.

**ABOVE:** The flap lever is a new, attractive design. Though it's located a good ways to the right of the pilot, it's easy enough to reach, and the distinctive shape and location eliminate lever confusion. The one complaint some pilots will have is that the deployment speeds are slow, 147 knots for approach flaps and just 112 knots for landing flaps.

airplane in tight formation as the M600 breaks away, I saw, as you can see here, that the difference is dramatic.

### THE BIGGER, FASTER FEELING

It was a busy day at Piper's Vero Beach headquarters. As I mentioned, I'd started the day strapped into the back of a Seneca II with the doors off taking photographs of the M600 starting in the predawn hours. It was a gorgeous morning for doing it.

By the time we were ready to go flying, it was plenty hot out on the black asphalt ramp. Despite the heat, my demo pilot for the flight, longtime company pilot and master gumbo chef Bart Jones, was patient in showing me around the new cockpit. I've got a good deal of time in PA-46s, mostly in Meridians, but this one was really different. The Meridian has been through a number of different avionics options, starting with the short-lived Meggitt Magic

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EFIS cockpit and progressing up through the latest, nicely polished G1000 suite. The G3000 in the M600 beats them all, hands down, though.

Once we got through the start and were able to finally throw on what Piper refers to as the ECS (that's turbine speak for the air conditioner), we were more than ready for it. It cooled things off very quickly, I was delighted to jot down in my notes. There even was an exclamation point.

The gear on the M600 is set a little wider than on the Meridian/M500, and it handles on the ground like it is. That is, it's a lot more stable-feeling. I appreciated that even more on the takeoff roll, when the 600 shp kicked in and we rocketed off, well, it felt like that, and the airplane wanted to keep tracking straight ahead with noticeably better lateral stability than the Meridian.

As we lifted off, gear up, and I raised the nose to climb out, flaps up, it was immediately clear to me that this was a new, more powerful PA-46. It was also a heavier-feeling airplane, and I worked hard to anticipate with trim to ease the elevator forces.

We were limited to 17,500 feet that day due to logbook limitations on the factory demonstrator we were flying, but that was fine, Bart explained, as the airplane does remarkably well in the high teens.

He was right. After climbing up to 17,500 (it was hot, ISA + 15) with a couple of very short pauses, I set max cruise power—Bart



**TOP:** As with all PA-46s, the M600 cuts a fine figure on the ramp. Though it seems like a much bigger airplane than the Meridian/M500, its wingspan is just a few inches longer, though the wing area is much greater, as is the thickness of the chord. This gives the M600 a lot more fuel capacity, one of the key elements that goes into making the new model a significantly better performer than the Meridian.

**ABOVE:** Another view of the radar pod mounted on the leading edge of the wing. Anti-icing on the M600 is via boots, and the engine inlets have been designed to do without inlet heating. The new, beefier wing increases the weight of the M600 to 6,000 pounds max takeoff weight.

gave me the figures from the book—and was rewarded with a high cruise speed at a setting just south of the max torque setting of 1,575 pounds of 261 knots true on 345 pounds (50 gallons) of Jet-A per hour. At a more realistic power setting for

intermediate cruise at 1,200 pounds of torque, we were seeing 242 knots on just 280 pounds (40 gph). At 25,000 feet, we'd have seen, Bart told me, at least a couple of knots better than the advertised 274 knots at max cruise and in the 260s at



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intermediate cruise with even lower fuel flows. With the M600, Piper seems to have hit a sweet spot in performance.

Finding a nice patch of sky between MOAs and cloud decks, we did some basic air work, though Bart explained that the most remarkable thing about the M600 is that there's nothing particularly remarkable about its handling, which is a very good thing. The new wing, indeed, seems to fly well fast and slow. The forces are, as I said, heavier than on the Meridian, but at some point that's a question of pilot technique as much as anything. On 360 steep banked turns, I tried out the ESP overbanking protection, and, sure enough, it pushed me back from the brink as I tried to go beyond 45 degrees of bank. It might never happen, but if you were ever to really need it, it could save your life. Isn't that the purpose of such safety features?

When it was time to head back, pattern altitude 1,000 feet, from our lofty perch at 17,500 feet, Bart suggested I take advantage of the new higher Vmo and push the nose over and see the M600 go fast. On our way back to busy KVRB—the airport is home to FlightSafety International's popular academy and hundreds of Piper's planes—I saw the light. Now, I *knew* the higher Vmo

was a big enhancement, but I wasn't really prepared for it. Instead of pulling back on the power and coasting downhill, as you need to do in the Meridian, you just keep the power up, push the nose over and watch the airspeed build, but with so much headroom, it seems as though you'd never get to the max speed warning.

But if you're patient and have pushed over hard enough, you do start to see the red no-go zone on the airspeed tape. And, when you do, the Garmin ESP will kick in and nudge the nose back up for you. Sweet.

In the pattern, the M600 behaves like a PA-46—stable, predictable and easy to handle. The flaps speeds, two notches, are approach flaps at 147 knots and landing flaps at just 112 knots, which seems pretty slow for an airplane of this class. In fact, in many cases, the gear, with an extension speed of 170 knots, will be the first drag item thrown out to slow down. In all fairness, it was easy to slow down, and with a turboprop, you always have that giant air brake out front to help matters. Flight idle's flattening out of that big four-blade Hartzell prop makes it easy to lose knots in a hurry.

As I mentioned, the elevator is heavy, and on my first two touch-and-go landings, I landed pretty flat, despite applying good

pressure (though clearly not good enough) and trimming nose up in the process. Bart suggested nicely that it might be good to flare a little. It was a good point. By my third circuit, I had the feel of it, got the nose up and held off the airplane, which settled into a very satisfying touchdown. Back to beta on the prop—reverse isn't really necessary except in the coziest of circumstances—and we were down and done.

After getting a chance to really get to know the M600, my conclusion was that I couldn't have been more wrong in my initial assessment of the airplane. Far from being a model with too little introduced too late, the M600 seems a brilliant business move and a flat-out great airplane. Occupying a price point just south of \$3 million typically equipped, it surely will attract buyers who want the extra range and speed the M600 has to offer, but for around a million dollars less than the comparably equipped 330-knot Daher TBM 930.

Which, in my mind, underscores the wisdom of the M600 strategy. With this new aircraft, Piper has a model that longtime customers will feel comfortable transitioning into, but with performance and utility strengths that will doubtless make them happy that they did. **PP**

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[aviation.slu.edu](http://aviation.slu.edu)



### University of North Dakota



At the University of North Dakota, the educational and career opportunities are larger than our fleet! UND operates the largest civilian flight training fleet in the world, including helicopters and UAS platforms. The fleet serves as our "lab" equipment for two degree programs with seven undergraduate aviation options. The Bachelor of Business Administration degree includes Aviation and Airport Management majors, while the Bachelor of Science degree has majors in Commercial Aviation, Flight Education, Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operations, Air Traffic Management, and Aviation Technology Management. These degrees include a liberal arts core giving students a broad educational foundation to begin their career. UND also offers graduate degrees with a M.S. in Aviation and a Ph.D. in Aerospace Sciences. To be the best, you need to prepare with the best!

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