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## Aviation Gear of the Year 2009: Super SportCub

### Wanna spy on the ADS-B data stream and have access to all sorts of info on commercial flights?

When Thomas Paine was writing about times that try men's souls, he was actually referring to the American Revolution, but that's nothing compared to GA sales figures for the first quarter. No one's jumping out of buildings yet. But then again, hangars don't have second stories.



Okay, so 2009 hasn't been so hot thus far, but like everyone involved in aviation, we're optimists and we sense a turnaround in the wind. In any case, pilots and owners are still buying things so it's time for our annual review of the best products and services we've seen during the past calendar year.

When we reviewed our reviews for the past 12 months, we were surprised to find more new stuff than we've typically seen in a year. Here's our roundup of the most recommended things we tried this year.

#### PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

##### SUPER SPORTCUB

We're normally cautious about effusing too much about products with no market history, but we're making an exception for this one. CubCrafter's Super SportCub merits this treatment because in the LSA world, it's truly innovative. It has a true ASTM engine—at 180 HP, a big one—and the concept of an uncompromised, hotrod LSA hasn't been offered by anyone else.

The trouble with the LSA segment is that one white plastic airplane with high wings looks like any other white plastic airplane with high wings and we see a new one of them every week. The Super SportCub is thus in a league unto itself and deserves notice for that. For more, see [www.cubcrafters.com](http://www.cubcrafters.com)

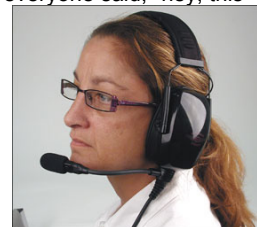


#### BEST BUDGET HEADSET

##### GULF COAST GCA 4T

When we test headsets by passing them around the cockpit focus group, most of them perform similarly. But when we passed around the budget noggin squeezers, everyone said, "hey, this one is really good."

"This one" turned out to be the \$99 GCA 4T from Gulf Coast Avionics, a house branded headset. Although its clamping pressure was a tad high, it was exceptionally quiet for a passive headset and the receive audio was crisp and readable. Further, the gooseneck mic boom also worked quite well. Second choice here, and nearly equal since both headsets are made by LightSPEED, is the LightSPEED QFR at \$175. For more, see [www.gulfcoastavionics.com](http://www.gulfcoastavionics.com) and [www.lightspeedaviation.com](http://www.lightspeedaviation.com).



#### BEST GPS EVER

##### GARMIN GPSMAP 696

Yes, we know it's pricey, but the GPSmap 696 has so many top-drawer features that it represents a good value in portable navigation. The screen is bright and clear and the operating

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logic borrows key elements from Garmin's other portable and panel mounts, which is another way of saying anyone can use this thing without even reading the manual.

If you want a does-it-all navigator that's easy to use and one that has room to grow, the 696 is certainly worth considering. For more, see [www.garmin.com](http://www.garmin.com).

## BEST EFIS EVER

### AVIDYNE RELEASE 9

We've never been shy in complaining about less-than-ideal human factors issues in the avionics we test. It's not that any of them are really bad, it's just that they often aren't really good. This can be a frustration for those of us who don't use these systems daily.

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That's why Avidyne deserves a tip of the hat for its Release 9 revision of the first-generation Entegra EFIS. The interface and button logic is simply first rate and the features this system has shows that Avidyne gets it and has learned from its years in the display business. Although Garmin may dominate the OEM glass panel market, we think manufacturers should take a close look at this system. It really is cutting edge. ([www.avidyne.com](http://www.avidyne.com))



## BEST LIGHTING UPGRADE

### HID LANDING LIGHTS

While we're fully aware that the world is being overrun with low-power LED lamps, [IMGCAP(6)] some for use as landing lights, our tests reveal that the high-intensity discharge systems still deliver the best bang for the buck. They're bright and durable and, as upgrades go, not too expensive.

Our top picks are those offered by Knots2U and Precise Flight. (See [www.Preciseflight.com](http://www.Preciseflight.com) and [www.knots2U.com](http://www.knots2U.com).) These two systems offer what we think is the best combination of price and performance in the HID field. We reserve the right to reverse ourselves in the coming year as we test more LEDs.



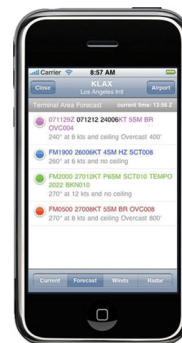
## BEST CELLPHONE WEATHER

### FORELIGHT AND MY-CAST

Snagging a weather briefing on your cellphone on the way to the airport—pull over please, not while driving—seems like a good idea. The reality is a little less so. Attempts at making this idea work have ranged from disappointing to unacceptable.

Two product offerings that do work are Garmin's My-Cast and ForeFlight which works well with what's arguably the best cellphone out there, Apple's iPhone. You can even buy it through iTunes. When we tried the system last fall it worked well and has been upgraded since.

Garmin's My-Cast has a stronger featureset than ForeFlight—the graphics blew us away—but its ability to connect isn't quite as reliable. It's still in the top tier, however. For more, see [www.foreflight.com](http://www.foreflight.com) and [www.digitalcyclone.com](http://www.digitalcyclone.com).



## BEST VALUE USED CRUISER

### CIRRUS SR22

In the current economy, the last thing we want to do is take advantage of the other guy's hard times. Nonetheless, the used market is flush with inventory and very best deals are to be had on late-model aircraft—late model being older than five years.

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For our money, the best deals are on pre-glass Cirrus SR20s, of which there are quite a few on the market because Cirrus owners so frequently step up to SR22s. This is definitely a buyer's market. Our



advice is to find an SR20 whose MFD has been upgraded to the Avidyne EX5000. Unless the price is exceptionally sweet, avoid the original ARNAV ICDS 2000, which is dated.

### BEST LOGBOOK

#### AIRCRAFT LOGS.COM

Let's see, you've got your pilot logs and you've got your aircraft logs. You've also got a bunch of paper and every time you fly or fix something on the airplane, a tree dies.

Realizing that the best way to get this paper trail organized and under control is to place the data online. Aircraftlogs.com does just that. The product's strongest feature is the aircraft logging, which allows secure storage of aircraft log entries accessible from anywhere in the world, thus eliminating the iffy practice of carrying logbooks in the baggage compartment. That always strike us as a disaster looking for a grid reference. For more, see [www.aircraftlogs.com](http://www.aircraftlogs.com).



### BEST OIL ADDITIVE

#### CAMGUARD

The oil companies hate when we test CamGuard and find that it beats the pants off their premium oils for corrosion protection and anti-wear properties. But it does. So for the second year in a row, we're calling this product out for exceptional performance.

Why? Because we continue to hear from owners frantic about corrosion problems in engines. Part of this is because of reduced flight activity.

CamGuard isn't a slam duck solution to this problem, but it's the best solution we've seen because it provides marginally—and measurably—better corrosion resistance. For more, see [www.aslcamguard.com](http://www.aslcamguard.com).

### TOP CUSTOMER SUPPORT

#### ASPEN AVIONICS

When Aspen rolled out its Evolution aftermarket EFIS last year, we were impressed but also held our breath. Would the company be able to keep up with demand? (It did.) Would systems rushed into production suffer infant mortality? (Some problems, yes, but not many.)

But our leading concern was about continuing customer service, especially for shops doing the installs of what is ultimately a complex system. An extensive customer survey we conducted last spring revealed that Aspen has excelled at field support, for which we think they deserve kudos. Users also report few complaints on the service side of the business. For more, see [www.aspenavionics.com](http://www.aspenavionics.com).

### TOP FLIGHT BAG

#### BRIGHTLINE BAGS

We'll admit that reviewing flightbags is like evaluating neckties. Maybe you like stripes or maybe you prefer solids—it's all so... personal. Still, Brightline proved us wrong with its cleverly designed flightbag that uniquely swallows a headset while still having room for the other must-have geegaws you always have in your flightbag.

The bag has a bunch of zippered pockets whose size and shape is well thought out so you can carry a range of stuff, such as flashlights, PDAs, cellphones and so forth. The price is on the expensive size, but good stuff usually is. For more, see [www.brightlinebags.com](http://www.brightlinebags.com).



### BEST NEW AIRCRAFT MOD

#### TN CARDINAL

When Tornado Alley Turbo acquired turbo

mod rights from Flightcraft, it pledged to improve the turbonormalizer system that had been developed for the Cardinal RG by the previous company. In early 2009, it delivered in the form of the new TN Cardinal. In our view, the new system is an engineering masterpiece, with improved intercooling, baffling and a new oil cooler to solve the RG's chronic high oil temperature problems. It also gets new mags for better high-altitude performance.

Speaking of which, how fast is it? How about 177 knots in the high teens on a little over 10 gallons per hour. That turns the Cardinal into a real contender with any turbocharged airplanes and without the compromises of older systems. For details, see <http://www.tatturbo.com/>.



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