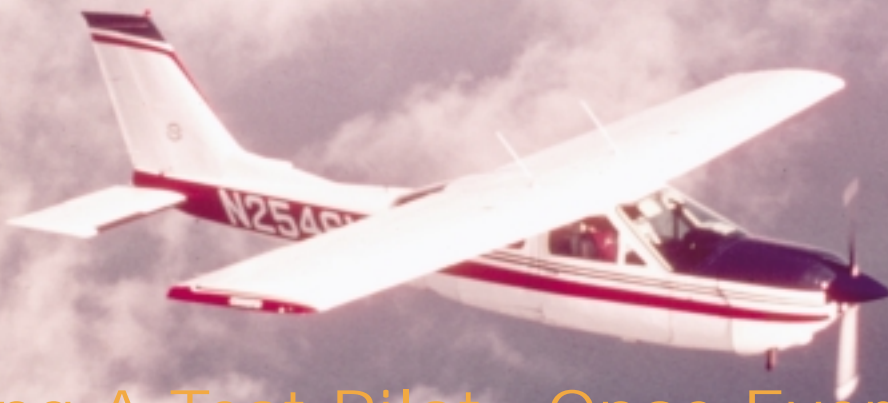


FROM THE LOGBOOK:



Becoming A Test Pilot...Once Every Year

by Jim Trusty

Is it time for an annual inspection? Ever dream of being a Test Pilot?

The first flight after the annual inspection of your airplane can either be totally uneventful or a very busy flight. I have known and trusted my mechanic for years, and he seldom misses anything. This is good because live, happy, and satisfied pilot/customers can recommend you to others and then return the next time to spend more money. Even so, you should always expect the worst and be prepared. Just think about this statement while I use my case as an example.

Four strangers to my aircraft checked, filled, turned, tightened, touched, replaced, repaired, removed, looked, pondered, and evaluated over 100 items on a factory inspection checklist and then complied with the latest Airworthiness Directives from problems encountered in the last year or so with its make and model. Two of these young men were A&P trainees with absolutely no experience as mechanics.

Some things that fellow pilots have experienced over the years as they left from the annual include, but are not limited to, the following: engine oil not refilled, rags left in gear door wells, fuses pulled, battery disconnected, spark plugs left out on one side, screws not replaced in cowling cover, brakes not bled, fuel turned off, hydraulic fluid not refilled, gear handle in the UP position while the gear is actually DOWN, and tools left on the en-

gine, in the floor under the cabin, and under the seats and carpets.

I might also add that no pilots were injured, crashed, or died because of the foregoing list of mistakes. And in testimony to the hard work that our mechanics do, I really feel that it is impossible to do what they do and combine that with what we do to the airplane during the year and not have an adventure occasionally. But we should be apprehensive...RIGHT?

If they tell you about a problem area that required parts, time, and research and that they think the problem was caught just in time, then you have been forewarned to watch that area much more closely than you normally would. Some would argue that the A&P should be required to fly the aircraft before they release it back to the owner and even others would say that makes as much sense as having the owner participate in the actual work of doing the annual inspection. NO THANKS!

As a flight instructor who does an awful lot of proficiency training, flight reviews, and transition work on complex/high performance aircraft, I have found that pilots who DO NOT fly on a regular basis are generally not as ready as they should be to react to an "unexpected happening" in the air. When I review emergency procedures (such as gear, radio, and vacuum failures and add fuel transfer mistakes), I find that most pilots are not as well versed in recovery procedures as they should be.

This is clearly the fault of the pilot. We get a little complacent and start comparing flying with driving and mistakenly think if something goes wrong that we will have plenty of time to just pull over to the side of the sky and call someone to come fix it. WRONG! I never cease to be amazed when reading accident reports from the NTSB and others just how much of a role pilots often play in what happened and how with just a normal amount of specific training the entire thing could have turned out differently.

Careful selection of a mechanic based on known skill levels for your particular aircraft will not keep something from happening, but it certainly couldn't hurt. Do not make the mistake many pilots make of mechanic selection based solely on the cost of the annual. This is certainly inviting trouble. Bring a squawk list with you and explain the items included. Work with them, especially since it is to your benefit.

The list of people hurt and/or killed in aviation accidents does not have to include your name. You really have a choice in this decision. Is it time for an annual inspection? Ever dream of being a Test Pilot? Let's be careful up there.



Jim Trusty was the FAA/Aviation Industry National Flight Instructor of the Year (1997) and still works full-time as a pilot/flight instructor at MQY in Tennessee.

