

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTIONS

WHO SHOULD GET A PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTION?

Unless you personally know the owner and the history of the airplane or helicopter you are considering, the answer is – YOU.

WHY GET A PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTION?

If you think you can determine the completeness of the aircraft log books and paperwork history, understand what has been done, what to expect in the future, and how it all comes together to make a determination as to the Airworthiness and Value of the aircraft, you are sorely mistaken – and it's a potentially expensive proposition!

FINANCING YOUR PURCHASE?

Some lenders are now requiring borrowers to submit a Pre-Purchase Inspection before funding the loan. These lenders have also gone so far as to inquire about the experience level of the chosen Inspector.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTION?

Most aircraft inspections are mandated by either the FAA or the aircraft manufacturer. These would include Annual, 100 Hour, Progressive, Hard Landing, and so forth. The parameters of these inspections are specifically spelled out.

Nowhere however, will you find the parameters of a Pre-Purchase Inspection. That's because they simply don't exist! A Pre-Purchase Inspection is not mandated by any rule or regulation – only by common sense. Therefore this inspection can be anything the purchaser wants it to be. From a, 'kick the tires and light the fires' to a full Annual Inspection, or anything in between. You wouldn't buy a home without an inspection, and you certainly wouldn't buy a car without an inspection, **then why would you buy an Airplane without an inspection?**

WHO SHOULD PERFORM A PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTION?

There are a few pilot 'handymen' (some helped their Dad rebuild the 57 Chevy) who feel that they have the technical knowledge and aviation background to make this important determination. The question is – are you one of these rare individuals?

While a thorough inspection of the aircraft is extremely important, equally important is an in depth understanding of the aircraft's paper trail and how it relates to the aircraft in question. Ideally the individual performing a Pre-Purchase Inspection should be at least an IA with many years experience performing this type of work. If you are not the detective type, do NOT apply!

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

I perform over twenty Pre-Purchase Inspections in an average year on anything from a Cub to a Lear Jet and most of what lies in between. The only thing they have in common is that they can have very little in common. Except when I perform a full Annual Inspection, each Pre-Purchase Inspection is specifically tailored to the aircraft in question.

For instance, if an aircraft resides on the Gulf Coast, Florida, or the Southeast Coast, I would look hard for the effects of corrosion – whereas in the midwest or southwest I wouldn't be overly concerned about this condition. If the aircraft has been used for flight training, I would look closely at the landing gear and it's attach points to the wing as well as the wing attach points to the fuselage for potential stress damage due to repetitive hard landings.

These are but a few examples of what a seasoned Inspector will pull from the logs and from an in depth inspection of the aircraft.

Believe it or not, the more sophisticated the aircraft, the less likely it is to have major problems because these aircraft are more apt to have had ongoing professional maintenance. Unfortunately however, most general aviation aircraft are maintained by small shops and independent mechanics with varying skills and results. While some are quite good, others are not. Of even greater concern, many small aircraft owners are financially stressed in the current economy and simply cannot afford ongoing professional maintenance.

While the FARs allow an aircraft owner to perform some maintenance tasks, I have seen owners actually doing what amounts to major overhauls on their aircraft, for which you can be sure they didn't make any log book entries! At one time or another these, 'Sears & Roebuck' specials will come on the market. Would you like to put YOUR family, YOUR children in one? An experienced and seasoned Inspector given the time to look closely at the aircraft paperwork and then the aircraft itself will usually be able to identify these problem aircraft. Remember that once you write the check, it's now YOUR problem!

REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

In the best of all worlds, a complete inspection by a knowledgeable and seasoned professional will identify all issues. Unfortunately, we do not live in that world. There are places we cannot look such as the interior of the engine, the interior of the wings, the interior of a constant speed propeller, etc. There are things we cannot see or be expected to know with the tools readily available to us and the reasonable time constraints involved. While we can certainly find the 'hot spots', the reality is that some things will remain unseen. The most important point is that when I perform a Pre-Purchase Inspection on an aircraft, **I look at it as if I were buying it for myself.**

SUMMARY

I believe that the above has answered most of the usual questions pertaining to this type of inspection. Invariably the next question is, 'what will it cost me?' Unfortunately, as each inspection is unique to a different aircraft type at a different location, with varying requirements, etc. – I must therefore quote each inspection individually. Do NOT however, under any circumstances employ a local Inspector or one who has worked on the aircraft before. You MUST have your inspection performed by an independent Inspector who will be accountable to YOU and only to YOU! This is why I am frequently called upon to travel all over the country to inspect aircraft for prospective buyers.

Be cautious regarding anxious aircraft sellers and their salesmen! Too often they will either ignore, minimize, or in some cases not even know the answers to the questions you SHOULD be asking. If you are going to make an offer at all, make the offer contingent on an acceptable Pre-Purchase Inspection performed by a person having the qualifications as previously discussed. An experienced professional will charge what is appropriate for the many years of experience he brings to the project. If you want cheap you can always find it, but remember the old saying that you get what you pay for. There are many legitimate places to save a buck – is having an experienced professional on your side when buying an aircraft one of them? I have seen the results of buyers who took their chances and ended up with an un-airworthy aircraft that subsequently cost a fortune to make right, resulting in financial distress, many sleepless nights, and even one ruined marriage.

As the man said, "Do YOU feel lucky?"