

Chapter Three

upon them from preflight through shutdown as they approach their normally anticipated life expectancy.

REQUIRED MAINTENANCE

The first thing to understand about the airworthiness of an aircraft is that you are responsible for it. It doesn't matter if you rented the aircraft from an FBO or borrowed it from a friend; not owning it yourself isn't the point. FAR 91.7 Civil Aircraft Airworthiness is very clear. It states: "(a) No person may operate a civil aircraft unless it is in an airworthy condition." and "(b) The pilot in command of a civil aircraft is responsible for determining whether that aircraft is in condition for safe flight."

This is further emphasized in FAR 91 Subpart E—Maintenance, Preventive Maintenance, and Alterations—where under FAR 91.403 General, it says: "(a) The owner or operator of an aircraft is primarily responsible for maintaining that aircraft in an airworthy condition..."

What that exactly means to the pilot is not quite so clear, but you can rest assured that negligence regarding the airworthiness of any aircraft you fly can result in strong action by the FAA. On the other hand, most FAA airworthiness inspectors today have the attitude that they are looking for a good-faith, honest effort at compliance, and if something does turn up on an aircraft for which you're responsible, that effort carries a lot of weight with them.

So does that mean that every airplane you fly you have to check all the maintenance logs and track airworthiness directive compliance? Few pilots actually do that, although it certainly would be the prudent thing to do. Instead, most pilots opt to find an aircraft available to them through someone they trust. In the final analysis, though, you're the one on the hook.

The regulations have requirements for the scheduled maintenance and/or inspection of numerous items such as altimeters, pitot-static systems, etc. The two major types of inspections, however, are the annual inspection and the 100-hour inspection.

Annual Inspection

With any aircraft you fly, always be aware of its compliance with its annual inspection requirement. The regulation, FAR 91.409 Inspections, is very specific. It tells us "(a) ... no person may operate an aircraft unless, within the preceding 12 calendar months, it has had - (1) An annual inspection in accordance with Part 43 of this chapter and has been approved for return to service by a(n authorized) person..." Outlined in FAR Part 43 Appendix D—Scope and Detail of Items to Be Included in Annual and 100-Hour Inspections—is a very long list of required maintenance items that must be conducted regardless of whether or not the aircraft has even flown since the previous inspection.

100-Hour Inspection

The 100-hour inspection requirement, also specified in FAR 91.409 Inspections, says: "... no person may operate an aircraft carrying any person (other than a crew member) for hire, and no person may give flight instruction for hire in an aircraft which that person provides unless within the preceding 100-hours of time in service the aircraft has received an annual or 100-hour inspection and been approved for return to service..."