

# GOOD AS NEW SKYHAWK 172 SWEEPSTAKES



## *A 172 makeover. Step one.*

BY THOMAS B. HAINES

I could feel Peter Kingsley's eyes watching my every move as I preflighted the lemon yellow and white 1974 Cessna 172M. I'm sure he wanted to offer some advice about the airplane he knew so well, but he stood quietly, biting his tongue. A few minutes later, as the Skyhawk lifted off of Beverly Municipal Airport, just northeast of Boston, and into the frigid February air, I could see Peter and his wife, Janet, shivering arm-in-arm, watching me fly away in their airplane. ■ I spent the 3.5 flight hours enroute home to Frederick, Maryland, shaking down N13057, scribbling notes on a pad: *Likes to*





turn right, a little out of rig; some crazing in the windshield; DME inop; suction too high—regulator or gauge? pilot's seat torn; carpet and paint looks its 19 years; oil down a quart at fuel stop; engine strong—just now at TBO; heater lousy; toes cold.

My discoveries were but a few of those the maintenance shop would find during the prepurchase inspection. Fortunately, none was serious, and many related to the paperwork, or lack of it. Some of the FAA Form 337s for the various pieces of extra equipment could not be found. The compression was fair for an engine at TBO and not all that important to us because we planned to overhaul it anyway. The right master brake cylinder needed adjustment; the tachometer read 100 rpm low of actual and the idle high. The muffler, an original, had some warped baffling, the elevator cable tensions were low, and the aileron rod ends were worn.

But in the end, the airplane turned out to be just what we knew it was, a mid-1970s Cessna 172 with a run-out engine, beat-up paint, worn interior, but healthy airframe—exactly what we were looking for. We bought it, and so

■

***The goal is to purchase and recondition a used airplane to “like-new” status for about the cost of a luxury automobile.***

*Former owners Janet Swaysland and Peter Kingsley pose for one last photo with N13057.*

ended my weeks of searching for an airplane. And so begin my weeks of shopping for an engine, paint, interior, and avionics.

N13057, soon to be renamed N172GN (172 Good as New), satisfies two of AOPA's goals for 1993. Those of us on the editorial staff of *AOPA Pilot* have been discussing for years the idea of buying a simple, older airplane, fixing it up, and then writing about the experience. The goal is to show how a pilot can purchase and recondition a used airplane to “like-new” status for about the cost of a luxury automobile.

AOPA's membership staff picked up on the concept and decided a Good as

New 172 would make a fine prize for the 1993 membership sweepstakes. They'd come up with the dough, we'd do the fix-up, and they'd give the airplane away. We get our stories, they get their member recruitment tool, and some lucky member gets a cream-puff airplane. Nods of agreement abound.

A Cessna 172 seemed the obvious choice because we wanted it to be a simple airplane that any A&P could work on and that any winner could fly. Also, parts and technical support are widely available. We also considered a Piper Warrior, which fit the bill. The Warriors are actually a bit undervalued right now, according to the price guides, but somehow we always returned to the Skyhawk as being *the* symbol of general aviation, an airplane everyone can identify with. So a Skyhawk it was. Our budget for the purchase was set at a maximum of \$25,000, and we'd spend at most that much again fixing it up. This was, after all, to be a showpiece. And when we were done, for half the cost of a new airplane of similar performance, we'd have a good as new 172.

Somewhere in there, though, the “we” became “me,” and I suddenly



## AOPA'S GOOD AS NEW 172 SWEEPSTAKES

When all is said and done, we expect our pristine N172GN to be worth some \$60,000, a nice plum for anyone's hangar. That "anyone" could be you in one of three ways:

1. If you're not already an AOPA member, call 800/USA-AOPA and join.

2. If you are a member, sign up a friend or family member. You'll be entered once for every new AOPA member you sign up. Use the membership applications found in each issue of *AOPA Pilot*.

3. Renew your membership in AOPA anytime between April and December 1993.

See the sweepstakes details on p. 17, then sign up for your chance to win our Good as New 172.

through 172M, preferably with a run-out engine, which would lower our cost and allow us the experience of purchasing and observing the overhaul. Worn paint and interior were fine, but I wanted a solid airframe with

no damage history.

With the help of the support staff in the Publications Division, all 1,043 postcards were labeled and sent out in an afternoon. Two days later, the telephone started ringing.

Over the next two weeks, I received probably two dozen telephone calls from prospective sellers. Several of the airplanes fit the bill, including one at Frederick, right outside our door. But some missing logbooks and a history of use in flight training led us to keep looking. One day at lunchtime, Associate Editor Bill Gruber and I flew the 25 miles to Hagerstown, Maryland, to look at one prospect. The nose-gear strut was flat, engine run out, oil seeping, interior a mess—we were delighted, until I noticed the corrosion on the trailing edge of the flaps and ailerons. Still, the asking price was not bad—\$18,000. Surely they'd take less, and maybe the corrosion was stoppable. At 4,600 hours total time, it was about mid-time for airplanes of the vintage. I'd seen some over 6,000 hours.

Meanwhile, the telephone calls trickled off, but the "Returned to Sender" postcards kept coming in. And they still do dribble in from time

found myself X-acto-knifing tiny ads out of *Trade-A-Plane* and taping them to a tablet, probably every prospective buyer's first step. I spent a week making calls, jotting notes next to the ads, and checking area codes. TAP provided lots of leads, but many of them were for airplanes in the Midwest and West. For logistics' sake and to keep transportation costs to a minimum, I limited the search to the Mid-Atlantic region.

To better focus the probe, I decided to send query postcards to all the owners of 1968 172I through 1976 172M models in the Mid-Atlantic region. I chose those models and years because the 172I was the first to have the more desirable Lycoming O-320-E2D engine, which is capable of burning 80-octane fuel, and the 172M, which debuted the "Camber-Lift Cuff" wing, is about the latest model I could get without busting the bank.

A number of companies advertise aircraft owner list services in the aviation tabloids. Fortunately, AOPA's information systems department could gin up the address labels for me.

I printed the postcards on the office computer system. The message was simple—I was looking for a 172I





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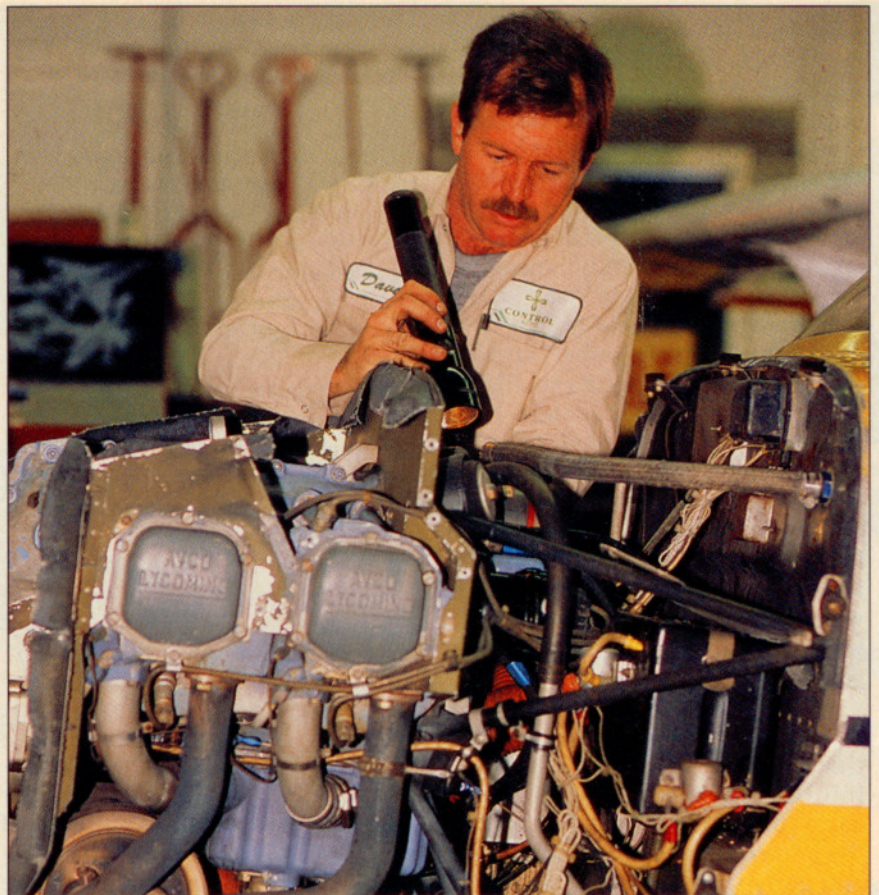
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A&P Dave Dodds of Control Aero at Frederick gives N13057 a thorough going-over as part of the prepurchase inspection, including a compression check (below).

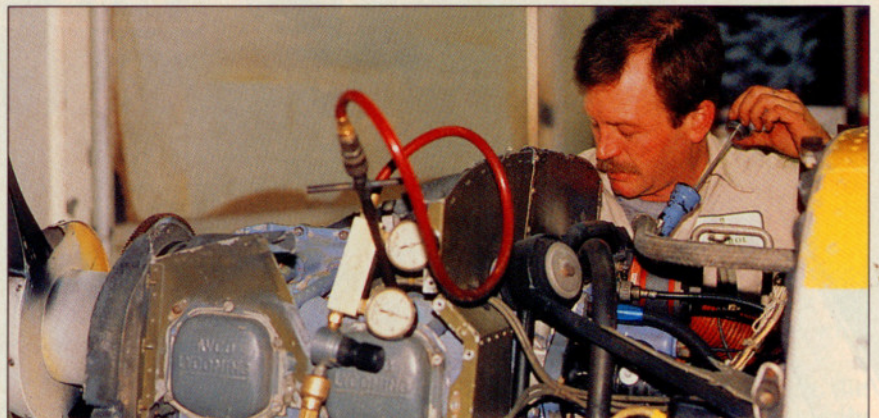
to time. At last count, 52 cards came back as undeliverable. The FAA could learn a thing or two about keeping its databases up to date from the direct-marketing folks.

While awaiting the telephone calls, I kept up the search in other ways. I carefully scrutinized AOPA's information kit on buying used aircraft. It's stuffed full of useful facts, and it contains all of the forms needed to complete the transaction. The kit is available for \$5 by calling 800/USA-AOPA. I also studied the aviation tabloids for used 172s, perused FBO bulletin

boards, and posted a message on AOPA Online.

But despite the organized search, my meeting with N13057 was happenstance. One day, there she was on the ramp, her cowlings glimmering, well, glinting in the winter sun.

Peter had flown her to AOPA for a meeting. He and Janet and another couple were discussing a business deal with AOPA. He had been telling me how he used his 172 for sightseeing flights over Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in the summer. "Interested in selling it?" I'd asked, mostly joking, because I'd asked the







*After the engine overhaul comes a new interior and avionics. New paint goes on next fall.*

same question of every Skyhawk owner I'd met in the previous few weeks. All of the replies had been negative.

"Well, maybe. I've been thinking about upgrading," came his reply. You can guess the rest.

With a spec sheet from Peter in hand, I waded through the *Aircraft Bluebook-Price Digest* to put N13057 into perspective. Total time of about 2,000 hours is relatively low for a 1974 Skyhawk, but the time puts the engine right at TBO, which means a buyer can expect to put about \$10,000 in an engine at any time. The paint and interior are original. Neither appears bad from a distance, but up close, they look two decades old. The IFR panel is about what you'd expect, a bit of a hodgepodge. Most everything works, but it will turn no heads.

Adjusting for engine time and avionics, average retail came out to \$21,904. High and low wholesale were \$4,000 to \$6,000 lower. We offered \$20,000. He wanted \$25,000. We compromised at \$22,000.

After we had agreed in principle to the deal, I called AOPA's Oklahoma City office and put the title search personnel into action. A title search by an experienced firm and a prepurchase inspection by a knowledgeable mechanic are two of the most important things a buyer can do to better ensure a long and happy ownership. Details of AOPA's title and escrow services can be had by calling the staff at 800/654-4700.

The title search staff discovered

that a long-since repaid loan had not been cleared by the bank. And then a simple typo on the previous bill of sale forced them to track down one of N13057's earlier owners. At one place on the previous bill of sale, the seller's middle initial was "D."; at another point, it was (incorrectly) "J.," causing a "discrepancy in the chain of ownership," which must be a bad thing because it took more than a week to straighten it out. Remind me to buy stock in Federal Express.

Once it became apparent that the title would clear, we took advantage of another program AOPA offers to buyers—the escrow service. Peter sent the signed bill of sale to AOPA's escrow office, and AOPA wired the purchase funds to the escrow account at an Oklahoma City bank. Once the title cleared, the bank wired the money to Peter. AOPA's Oklahoma City personnel then completed the transaction, filed the aircraft registration documents with the FAA, and sent us our copy of the temporary registration. After sending in the application for an aircraft radio station license, we were legal and in business.

The next step is the engine overhaul and a thorough going-over of the airframe. We'll report the progress of the project throughout the year, probably about every other issue.

Come January, some member will get to take home our Good as New 172. If it's you, be careful with that first preflight. I'll be watching, ready with advice. □