

A Pre-Buy Failure, Or Just Normal Wear and Tear?



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By Mike Jones

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This trip started with a call from a college roommate of fifty years ago, retired Air Force Lt. Col. Bruce Denner who was looking for a new ride. In the end, he found the bird for him. N4691K is a 1975 Cessna 182P, with a fresh engine, good logbooks, adequate avionics, a shabby interior, but handsome paint.

“This lady had a tortured past,” Denner confided to me. While her first three decades had seen family service, more recently she had been owned by a flight school. A nose-wheel landing that resulted in a prop strike ended her flight school days but explained the new engine. (Prop strikes are not unusual on Skylanes, a notoriously nose-heavy aircraft, so much so that newer Skylanes have substantially more robust firewall configurations.)

“The sellers were very up-front and transparent about the plane and its history,” Denner said. “Sure, I had some trepidations, but they gave me confidence that I had an even chance of getting a decent airplane.”

“That’s also why I spent extra on the pre-buy,” he explained. “I wanted them specifically to look for any damage to the firewall and to ensure the repairs were done properly.” Important safety tip: the pre-buy was performed by a company which had never worked on the plane before.

They say you only get one chance to make a great first impression, and '91K did very well. Squeezed into a busy hangar, she stood shiny and proud amidst a gaggle of turboprops and the Museum's dusty DC-3. Denner reviewed the pre-buy with the A&P from Haven Aviation. Together they confirmed her tires were round, her windows clear, and the paint as handsome as had been promised. For Denner, it was love at first sight.

Denner's new Skylane is a handsome and reliable bird. I guarantee it will

N4691K Squawks

1. An electrical grounding problem? In precipitation, GPS loses satellite signal
2. Transponder intermittent
3. Powering on the landing light and/or taxi tight blows the circuit breaker
4. Pilot-side strobe inoperative
5. Engine primer very difficult to pull, to push, and to un-lock/lock
6. Old-style Strikefinder unreliable, hard to read, very slow refresh rates
7. Baggage door leaks in heavy precipitation
8. Aircraft door locks unreliable. [Note: It turns out there is an NTSB warning on this. If the door lock isn't working properly, check the ignition. This could kill you.]



A summary of the squawks Denner found on his new bird once he got it to Nashua.

provide him with years of flying satisfaction. He also did an excellent job researching the plane; the logbooks were clean; the pre-buy meticulous. So far, so good.

To some degree, Denner was surprised that even after

such strenuous efforts the plane wasn't perfect. In fact, it had a couple serious deficiencies which we did not discover until well into our long flight to New Hampshire. But he was sanguine about his new acquisition.

"Old planes are sold as is, and all are likely to enjoy imperfections. They're like little diamonds," he wrote to me in an email. "The important thing is to

avoid the big gotchas, like hidden corrosion, years of bad maintenance, or non-compliance with ADs.” Denner is wise beyond his years.

Fortunately, Denner successfully dodged those bullets because (a) he was dealing with honest folks, (b) he had reviewed the logbooks thoroughly, and (c) had an effective pre-buy from Haven Aviation. His “squawk list” is provided here; item 1 was a real eye-popper when it first happened while we were in hard IMC. In my experience these squawks were modest, reasonable, and expected. They also soon will be remedied with a massive avionics upgrade.

It's important to manage our expectations. I recommend treating a newly-arriving bird like a first date —cute, interesting, amusing and potentially even exciting; with lots of tolerance for those dents and scars that come from a long and busy life.

About the Author

Dr. Mike Jones is a commercial pilot, a writer, and an entrepreneur with 4,000 hours and 800 Young Eagle missions in his logbook. His “day job” is consulting with general aviation airports, using his aviation expertise, business acumen and academic research to help them improve their governance and operations. He’s always accessible at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.

