

"Be Skeptical"

By: Capt Bill Trussell, CFI, IA, MEI

It's not often that there is a good reason to be skeptical. Some things are deemed too good to be true, and often that turns out to be the case. How often have you received an email advising you of your good fortune to have inherited a large sum of money from a relative overseas you never heard of? How about in aviation?

Well, let's suppose you just got the plane back from maintenance after a long period without it. Everyone, including yourself, is clambering to get back in the air to get back to being mission ready. Wait just a bit here.....

Do you treat the next flight as routine from beginning to end, or some other way? You probably want to think that everything will be ok, but should you? The FAA is asking all of us to consider the findings from the General Aviation Joint Steering Committee which indicate that, while we would like to think that all is well, there are a significant number of occasions where a closer examination of the aircraft during pre-flight might be necessary after maintenance work.

So, what should you do?

First things first, get yourself in a good place mentally, and turn yourself into a skeptic for a while. Try and find out what work was done during the maintenance down time. **We have all learned to trust the mechanics that care for the aircraft we fly, but mistakes can happen, and we should be looking out for the results of those mistakes.** Wires left disconnected, static ports blocked with foreign materials, pitot tubes blocked or left disconnected inside the wing, loose connectors, slack in the alternator belt, loose oil drain ports, or hydraulic line fittings leaking are all things that have happened, resulting in surprises on the next flights after maintenance. Imagine landing only to find your brake pressure is weak to non-existent on roll-out. Should you have paid closer attention to the spot under the landing gear?

All the items outlined in the previous paragraph above have a personal element, having all happened to this author with varying results. The pamphlet in the link below outlines the concept of conducting a "advanced preflight" and has more information on how to conduct one. The bottom line is learning to check the plane in more detail, above and beyond what is on the checklist or your usual routine. Spending additional time checking for things that are loose, missing or not connected at all, as well as being ready to identify things that are wrong during startup, taxi and runup as well as takeoff roll and initial climb out will eliminate the element of surprise later on. Having a more experienced pilot along with you would help as well.

While not always a good way to be, taking on the role of a skeptic is sometimes useful and could aid in preventing damage or injury to you or others.

Advanced Preflight After Maintenance:

<https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/2022-01/Advanced%20Preflight%20After%20Maintenance.pdf>

Capt Bill Trussell, CFI, IA, MEI
Squadron Commander, DE-019
FAA Safety Team Representative
Assistant Stan/ Eval Officer, DE Wing
CAP Instructor Pilot, Check Pilot