

Baby Loves To Fly

By Brian Olson, Newsletter Editor

Editor's Note: *"Baby" is our 1950 Cessna 170a, and she loves to fly. In July, the author added an instrument rating to his pilot certificate, and in September a Garmin GPS and Garmin G5 were added to the seventy-year-old panel.*

Good news: Baby is back from the shop and safely in her hangar. At the end of the day we performed a top-overhaul on her lovely engine and are in the process of flying her hard to break in some spankin' new cylinders. We have some lost time to make up since we haven't been able to keep up with our normal cadence of weekend travel adventures, but that will come. We don't want to rush the "process". It's been a little easier to stomach with the foul weather that has seemed to plague the Atlanta area for the past couple of months.

I belong to an association of other Baby-owners, an incredible group that has been around for some fifty-one years. Some really great people and an amazing wealth of information at your fingertips. Our Chapter president, Dan Wood, has been a frequent contributor to the tribal knowledge that I have devoured over the past couple of years. The web site and forum are a regular stop at 5am each day when I sit down at my desk and dive into my cup of coffee.

So, one morning not too long ago an interesting post showed up. First-time poster, and it read like this:

'I'm the author of a series of clean romances set in Alaska with the pen name [name removed by Brian]. I have a situation in a book and I'm trying to figure it out. (For background on me: I grew up in Alaska and have flown Cessna 150/152, 172, and my family owned a 177-RG. But it's been a long time since I've flown.)

"I have a character flying his 170 and he loses communications and the engine stops. He makes an emergency landing on a remote strip - of which are many in Alaska - and the plane is able to be repaired within a couple of hours by a mechanic who flies in later. Is it realistic for a 170 to have this type of failure, what would cause that, and would it be something that could be fixed that quickly?

"Thank you for your help. I tried going through three Cessna places on the phone today and they wouldn't help me. It seems they don't want to talk about why planes fail, which is understandable."

There were some really good, thoughtful responses by many respected members of the association and I am hoping she got some tidbits upon which to start building out a credible story/situation. Of course, in typical Brian-fashion I had to respond, too.

And my response went something like this :)

Not to get too far-fetched here, but some other items which may or may not tie into other areas of the story in which you are building. Environmental conditions could play a part: low clouds and moisture causing ice build-ups, forcing a landing. A slow fuel leak causing fuel starvation (caused by any number of things: a loose fuel cap/gasket, a hose that has a leak. Vacuum pump failure causing a loss of vac pressure and making the vac-controlled gauges (artificial horizon, etc.) slowly become inoperable. Accidentally striking a log on a sandbar during the precautionary landing, damaging part of the landing gear (flat main tire perhaps? Sheared off a bolt on a brake caliper?). A 170 generally only has "one" of everything: minimal instrumentation, a single comm, single nav, single generator (or alternator), single this and that ... so on one hand it's not an overly complex aircraft, but taking one or more out of service has a pretty measurable impact depending on how far you want to take it. I've heard stories - never experienced myself - of cylinder replacements in the field which could be done in a relatively short amount of time by an experienced mechanic, signs/symptoms of which could be gradual or catastrophic depending on how you want to portray them. Not sure how to tie a comm problem into a mechanical problem