



Pilot Jim Newman was able to fly just three days after having revolutionary new lenses implanted in his eyes – a process that cured his cataracts and allowed him to junk his spectacles after 25 years.

Jim, who flies a Warrior from Southend, is full of praise for both the surgeon and the process, which involved inserting special artificial lenses into both his eyes. Surgery took about 15 minutes per eye and was done under local anaesthetic. There were no residual effects, and Jim's eyesight is now better than it ever was with natural lenses.

Jim says: "I was apprehensive about the surgery but in fact it was far from traumatic and completely painless. In fact I would rather undergo this process again than visit the dentist."

The results, he says, are "nothing short of amazing". His ability to differentiate between shades of grey, something that was particularly badly compromised by the cataracts, has been transformed, and he has thrown away his varifocals. He is able to work at his computer and read the smallest print, and now has what his AME calls "one grade above 20/20 vision".

Jim, who is 60, had been developing cataracts for some time, and although his AME said he could continue flying at his last medical in December 2005, he referred him to consultant ophthalmologist Sam Kasaby at Southend's Phoenix Hospital.

Mr Kasaby, a pilot who keeps a Mooney at Southend, recommended the insertion of a multifocal lens implant, a new form of lens not only to cure his cataracts, but to restore his ability to focus on objects near and far and reduce his dependency on spectacles.

For the technically-minded, the lens is called AcrySof® ReSTOR® and was developed by the American eye products company Alcon Laboratories. Unlike other lenses, the ReSTOR allows patients to see both distance and close-up and in most cases – certainly in Jim's case – they will no longer need glasses. The natural human lens focuses on near objects by changing its shape. As we get older the lens becomes stiff and loses its ability to do so, and we have to resort to reading glasses. But unlike the lenses we are born with, the ReSTOR employs optical trickery to get the eye to focus on what you want to see – so Jim's eyesight will remain sharp for the rest of his life.

Jim had the first eye operated on in late

December and the second one a week later. Mr Kasaby says: "A micro-incision is made at the edge of the cornea and a tiny probe is inserted into the eye. The old lens is gently broken down by ultrasound and removed. The ReSTOR lens is then folded and inserted through the incision. Once in place the lens unfolds into the correct position. As the incision is so small, stitches are rarely required. Patients can return home the same day and look forward to a rapid and pain-free recovery.

"This is in effect standard procedure for operating on cataracts – what's new is the multifocal nature of the lens that has been inserted and the fact that the procedure can be used for patients who have no cataracts but who wish to reduce their dependence on glasses. As with a cataract operation, a letter from the eye surgeon or an AME report stating that you meet the eyesight requirements of your medical will satisfy the CAA and you can continue to fly afterwards.

"We have been doing cataract operations on pilots, private and professional, for donkeys' years, and this procedure is no different."

The chap on the other end of the knife confirms it was a simple operation. "I was awake throughout – the anaesthetic was just some drops in the eye – but I couldn't see much," says Jim. "There was a hood to keep my eyelids apart, and while the old lens was

being taken out I could just see a bright white light. When the new lens went in I saw a kaleidoscope of colours unfolding, and then it was all over."

At the end of the second operation Jim asked Mr Kasaby when he could fly again. "Whenever you feel like it," the surgeon said. Jim had been due to fly three days later, and went ahead with his plan. "There was a slightly gritty, sore feeling for the first couple of days, but nothing that would stop you going to work," he says. "They gave me some drops that I had to take for a month, and at the end of that I was completely normal.

"But oh, what a difference! It was like a new world – I could see all the colours and shades in sharp focus, and I didn't have to squint to read small print. I could look from the instruments to the horizon and see everything clearly, and I could throw away the blasted varifocals. After 25 years of having to wear glasses it's marvellous not to need them anymore.

"For the first day or so I was slightly owl-eyed, as though I was looking through two pipes, but after that I found my peripheral vision had improved dramatically."

Jim, who has about 700 hours after eight years of flying, plans to return to his other hobby, diving, this year – he had been unable to read the computer on his arm. His health insurance paid for most of the treatment, although he had to chip in about £1,000 extra for the new lenses.

Mr Kasaby, a PPL with an FAA IR who has flown his Mooney as far afield as Norway and Sardinia, actually wears glasses himself but his prescription is minor and he only uses them for distance vision. "I'm not yet at the stage where I would consider this procedure for myself, but if my eyesight deteriorates I wouldn't hesitate," he says.

"Obviously your eyes do a lot of work in aviation, focusing on charts and instruments, then on the horizon, and varifocal spectacles tend to distort images at the edges, giving you poor peripheral vision. And of course you must move your head to see, which isn't always desirable when you're flying."

For more information you can contact Sam Kasaby on 01702 421020. There's also a freephone number for information on the network of consultant ophthalmologists offering the ReSTOR lens – 0800 092 4567. ■



Right: Jim Newman, his Warrior and no spectacles