



More bang for your buck

*Satisfied customer **Martin Leusby** is well pleased with the replacement engine he's had installed in his 172*

Early last year I retro-fitted my 1969 Cessna 172H with the latest Lycoming O-360-A4M. This replaced the failing old O-300D, gave me a maximum cruise of 150 mph, and actually saved me money versus zero-timing. Having received superb service and advice from the people at Air Plains Inc., I wanted to meet the people and see what they do

'Wichita - Aviation Capital of the World' proclaims the sign as you arrive at ICT, Wichita Mid-Continent Airport, Kansas. As soon as you step off the plane you certainly feel you are in their midst - the airport is decorated with the regalia of the local manufacturers - Cessna, Beech/Raytheon, Boeing, and the Citation factory is a huge site across the runway from the terminal.

Less than 30 miles south of ICT is Wellington Airport, where Mike and Carolyn Kelley own Air Plains, Inc. Founded in 1977, Air Plains is devoted to modifying single-engined Cessnas to give the best possible performance. 'Air Plains is Power' is the company creed - and you can get the cap and shirt that proclaim it. It's the sort of operation that could only thrive in the USA, where there is a sufficient stock of aeroplanes, pilots willing to improve their machines, and a lighter regulatory touch than our own CAA (or is all that changing with new EASA regulation?).

Top: Mike's own constantly-modified 172 has dual alternators, dual fuse-boxes and landing lights on each wing

Right: Mike and Carolyn Kelley with their multitude of STC certificates and letters of appreciation from customers

Their prime markets are 172 and 182 owners. The former upgrade to O-360s, replacing their old Continentals (like mine) or the troublesome H2AD, or simply their O-320s because they need more punch. Changing out an O-320 has to be the easiest, but there is more than just supplying an engine, it's the details that go with it. For example, with my change it meant everything firewall forward was changed - with new engine frame,

propeller, exhaust, all ancillaries. In fact, only the spinner and vacuum pump are my originals, and the modified cowlings. The necessary STCs are all-important, as is the myriad of paperwork that has to accompany everything.

Air Plains offer a menu of options. They will do the whole thing for you, or sell you a kit, with or without engine, but including propeller and everything else you will need. Whichever you go for, you'll get great service (and well-priced engines - and it's ideal to be able to ship everything from one source). Carolyn will help you through the process of what you need, with great knowledge of the product. If





Above: Hartzell propellers and Lycoming engines in stock. Carolyn orders engines twice a month



Below: This is a C182L about to be fitted with an IO-550 - note the V-shaped stiffener bars on the firewall
Below: The spanking new O-360 engine in Martin Leusby's Cessna 172



you (or your engineer) need some even more precise technical details, Jerry Putter, chief engineer, knows his products and Cessna's probably better than Cessna themselves!

In fact, in 1995, when AOPA-US built a 'better than new' 172, it was Air Plains that re-engined N172B. The aircraft was effectively zero-timed and really was better than anything that Cessna had produced originally. It was won in AOPA's annual sweepstake by a very lucky Marshall Stambovsky of Tennessee.

It's not just 'old' Cessnas that can benefit from Mike's company. When the 172 was re-launched, the R model was de-rated to 160HP. Amongst the numerous STC's that Mike can offer is a change to this. Jerry explained how by fitting a modified airbox and

a new propeller the engine can reach its full potential at 180HP. Not much to do to achieve a lot (but you do change the tach and ASI at the same).

If you have a 182 and are due to zero-time, or need to replace, you might consider their IO-550 conversion. This will give you full-time rating of 300HP, not just for take-off! Would 150 knots, or more, appeal?

How popular are these conversions? For 172s, Air Plains has converted (either themselves or by kit supply) over 1500 airframes. Naturally, numbers have begun to decline as there are fewer older frames out there, but they are still replacing 16-18 Continentals per year, and 40-50 O-320s. In the UK there is a target market of some 70 O-300D owners, who will have increasing problems (and cost) in refurbishing – you can't buy a new one! And O-320 owners would well appreciate the increased performance and efficiency when it's time to renew their engine. With exchange rates as they currently are, it's a worthwhile consideration.

What can Air Plains do next? Well, they have STCs to help owners of 172, 177, 180,



Top: a Piper tail intrudes on a sea of Cessnas - Air Plains also does scheduled maintenance
Above: Air Plains' experimental Skylane TC that we can't talk about...

182, 185, 206 and 210 owners, but they also have started parts manufacture for new aircraft production. The new 'Luscombe' 11E being produced by Quartz Mountain has new parts made at Wellington, and other manufacturers are in discussions.

Meanwhile, Mike has a secret project with an experimental Skylane TC. Apparently it was being demonstrated to interested parties at Sun 'n' Fun last year, but on the other side of the field away from 'the public'. He would have told me about it, but then I'd have to be killed – you know how it goes...

Check out www.airplains.com ■

My 172's performance has improved dramatically in every way and now compares well with a 182 – see table.

	Stock Cessna 182	172 Air Plains 180 hp
Cruise	155 mph	150 mph
Fuel consumption (US gallons)	13 gph	9.5-10 gph
Useful load	1100-1200 lbs	1000-1100 lbs
Engine TBO	1500 hours	2000 hours