

The ABC of N REGISTRATION

George Irvin

To anybody considering registering an aircraft with the FAA, the basics are as follows. First, unless you are a US citizen, you will need to set up either a US registered company two-thirds of whose directors are US citizens or else set up a proxy trust through a US citizen. Most of the 'illegal' N-registrations arise from the mistaken belief that it is enough to set up a Delaware 'foreign owned' company. Such companies provide scant legal protection and, legally speaking, any N-reg aircraft 'owned' by such a company must be operated at least half the time within US airspace. Nor is it enough to have your American friend, Joe Bloggs, pretend to be the owner by signing the certificate. Unless there is a legally binding covenant between you and Joe---saying in effect that Joe bears all financial responsibility for the aircraft (with a second agreement saying you will reimburse him)---you're simply not legal.

In practice, several offshore experts are to be found in the back of Pilot Magazine who will take care of the paperwork and keep your N-reg legal with Oklahoma City, but expect to pay as much as GBP 1000/- per annum for the service. (An excellent article appeared in Pilot some years ago on this subject by Peter Leventhal, a Jersey-based lawyer who specialises in such matters.)

That's the hard part. Now that you have a proxy to 'own' the aircraft, you can de-register G-AWOE and reregister as N-XXXX where X may be any ten registrations you care to choose as long as they are not already taken (see the AvWeb FAA register for available alphanumeric values). File your papers with the FAA in London, Brussels, Frankfurt or Oke City and you will receive a registration (N-number) for which there is a small fee. Now comes the more expensive part. To be legal, your aircraft must first undergo a full annual done by an FAA-licensed engineer (or 100 hour check if you plan to fly PT ops known as 'Part 135' in FAA-speak). A number of well-know engineering firms in the UK do such work; eg, Marshall's of Cambridge.

If you want to fly IFR, the check will include testing the pitot-static system and altimeter(s), the transponder and the ELT. Once the work is done comes the final and possibly most costly bit. A designated FAA inspector will need to look at the aircraft (including its newly painted N-registration), sign off the paperwork and issue an FAA certificate which must (by law) be visible to all who enter the aircraft. The annual may cost you a couple of hundred or more, depending on the state of your aircraft. The inspector's visit may cost as much as GBP 500---less than one by the CAA but still significant money. And of course, you will need an FAA airman's certificate to fly the aircraft not forgetting an FAA-IR if you want to file IFR.

What are the advantages? First, the FAA actually has a clear statement of what boxes are approved to fly an N-reg aircraft in ECAC airspace thus greatly reducing the anxiety level of those who like to file IFR legally. Second, you will no longer require 50- and 100 hour inspections, part 75 inspection of your constant speed prop and so on. You will now need only an annual inspection and meet the prop TBO---though wise airpersons will still

want the basic oil change and preventive maintenance at 50-100 hour intervals. Third, while ADs continue to be mandatory, SBs are not. To a far greater degree than is possible under JAA regs, you the pilot will determine the maintenance level with which you feel most comfortable.

Arguably, too, the money you save on having a CAA inspector renew your CofA or inspect a major mod can be used to improve maintenance and invest in essential safety equipment such as a backup vacuum system or electrical system redundancy. And of course, should you on some rare occasion bust an altitude or wander off course, you can always apologise to ATC in your best Texan drawl hopefully avoiding what might otherwise have been a stinging CAA financial penalty.

Worth the hassle? Depending on your circumstances, it's an alternative worth looking into!