

Jewel in the Rockies

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by Bill Lavender

MONTROSE, CO - Where can an ag-operator find a piston engine shop that is willing to warrant their overhaul for five years or to TBO, whichever comes first? Western Skyways, Inc. of Montrose, Colorado offers this unheard of warranty for their Gold Seal Piston Aircraft Engine. This includes paying your mechanic to work on the engine if needed!

Western Skyways' excellent company practices carry over to their Pratt & Whitney turbine engine shop, as well. As recently as November, Western Skyways has become an FAA-certified complete overhaul facility for the PT6A engine. It opened its turbine engine shop for extensive PT6A repairs in 2003 when it bought out ASL Turbines of Rome, Georgia. This acquisition brought with it 22-year turbine engine veteran, Tom Barry.

Who are these guys, Western Skyways, Inc.? The name comes with a long back-ground in the aviation engine business. The two partners that make up today's Western Skyways are Al Head and David Leis. There was a third partner, John Robinson, who was bought out in 2004 and a fourth partner, Perry Nicholson, who passed away in 2005.

The original Western Skyways Corporation was formed in 1946 in Troutdale, Oregon. It was acquired by AAR Corporation and in its day, AAR Western Skyways earned the reputation of being one of the best engine shops in the world.

David Leis started with AAR Western Skyways in 1975 and became the company's director of marketing. Perry Nicholson started in 1977 as chief inspector. John Robinson started in 1978, becoming the shop manager. The three worked closely together until one day in 1987 AAR Western Skyways decided to close the shop, announcing it would no longer be in the aviation piston engine business.

Another company, Monarch Aviation in Grand Junction, Colorado decided to form an engine shop called West Star Engine Corporation. It hired the three friends, who packed up their families and moved from Oregon to Colorado.

The association with West Star lasted about six years. Things were changing at West Star, different from when the three first came on board. Between the three friends, there was talk of starting an engine shop. It was at this point, another friend, Al Head,

came into the picture. Al had recently sold National Aircraft Salvage; his aircraft salvage business in Long Beach, California. When he learned of the three's plans, he told them to count him in. By doing so, the financial needs for the project were met and it wasn't long (1993) before David, Perry and John left West Star, joining Al to form an all-new Western Skyways, Inc. in Montrose, Colorado.

The first shop was in the industrial part of Montrose. It was small with only 7,000 square feet of space. Within two years, the shop was building an engine every day, over 250 engines a year. Literally bursting at the seams, Western Skyways decided to build a new facility on the Montrose airport (KMTJ). The new facility would be almost four times as large, 27,500 square feet. Adjacent to it, Western Skyways leased a 1aa,aaa-square foot facility from Jet-Away Facility for its turbine engine shop, becoming a state-of-the-art fly-in shop for both turbine and piston aviation engines with over 127,500 square feet of combined workspace and with more than 80 employees.

Upon landing, a pilot can literally taxi his aircraft onto the Western Skyways' ramp. Here, the engine can be removed and brought in for service, or the engine can be shipped to Montrose.

The moment one walks into the reception area of Western Skyways it becomes obvious this is an elite engine shop. Quality should be the upper most concern for an engine, overhaul. It is evidently clear at Western Skyways quality engine rebuilds is its primary concern. Engine rebuilds are what the company does and its owners have been doing it for more than thirty years, "Engines are our only business."

The Turbine Engine Shop:

In 2003, Western Skyways opened its turbine engine shop, bringing in Tom Barry from Georgia. Tom has a 22~year history of working on turbine engines. He started with Van Dusen's turbine engine production line in Worcester, Maine. He went on to become a Pratt & Whitney production technician for 11 years. After that, he and a partner opened a turbine engine shop in Atlanta that was later bought out by Atlantic Turbines. He and a different partner opened ASL Turbines in Rome, Georgia. After a couple of years, Western Skyways stepped in and bought out ASL, moved the shop to Montrose and in the process hired Tom to run the turbine engine shop.

At Western Skyways' turbine engine shop, there is a different philosophy about engine repairs, "one engine / one man". When a customer's engine comes to the shop it is assigned an A&P authorized mechanic, that stays with that engine from the beginning to the end of its service work. The engine has its own engine cart. where all of the parts are kept together throughout the process. Almost daily, the customer is contacted

by his assigned mechanic via email or a phone call, updating the progress of the engine. The customer is consulted before any decisions are made about whether to replace or exchange with a new or serviceable part.

The method of one engine / one man allows the Western Skyways mechanic to develop a working relationship with both the engine and the customer. The philosophy is based on thirty years-of experience and has been found for turbine engine service to be superior to an assembly-line method of repair:

With Western Skyways, the customer can expect a 24-hour turn time for a hot section inspection, based on the repairs needed, parts availability and the customer's requirements. The list of repairs that Western Skyways can make to the turbine engine is quite long; power section inspection and repair, wire strike, lightning strike, oil contamination, sudden stoppage, accessories gearbox repairs and gear changes, engine removal, rigging and dynamic prop balancing. And, now since November 2006, Western Skyways is FAA-certified for the complete overhaul of the PT6A engine.

If a customer has an ailing turbine engine and not quite sure what is wrong with it, he can fly to Western Skyway's facility for expert troubleshooting. Can't fly to them, they'll come to you, bringing their fully compliant PT6A tooling. Back at the shop, Western Skyways' Micro View computerized testing for cracks is state of the art. For machining, a Vertrac computerized lathe is used. Rotables are computerized balanced, both vertically and horizontally, with a Schenck balancer. Fuel nozzles can be cleaned or exchanged via Western Skyways exceptional complete fuel nozzle exchange kit program (\$200), including gaskets and o-rings. The company also maintains an extensive in-house OEM turbine engine parts inventory.

Call Tom Barry or David Leis at 800.575.9929 and find out all the great things Western Skyways can do for you and your turbine engine.

The Piston Engine Shop:

Overhauling a "revenue engine" brings with it lots of responsibility. A "revenue engine" is one that is used to make money, like an ag-operator's. Down time costs big bucks and Western Skyways knows this. That's why they overhaul engines that will go to TBO without problems, over 502 of them in 2005! Western Skyways' Gold Seal Engine comes with over two decades of smooth performance and endurance history.

Western Skyways' piston engines are precision built. All reciprocating components are matched sets and balanced, both statically, and dynamically. Plus, where corrosion is a fact of life in the ag business, all external hardware is cadmium-plated to help prevent corrosion. The balancing of a piston engine is one of the most important

aspects of an engine overhaul. At Western Skyways, the connecting rods are balanced to within one gram. The crankshaft is balanced to within .5 inch-ounces. And to be sure everything works the way it should, every engine receives a factory specs flight test run with a flight prop and governor installed.

An overhaul facility's warranty speaks worlds about its engine. Western Skyways' warranty is the best in the business. Its standard warranty is six months with unlimited hours and 100% coverage of parts and labor. Thereafter, prorated at 40 hours per month to TBO, including parts and labor.

How many times has an operator experienced an engine problem, but the facility was too far away for service? Not a problem with Western Skyways. With prior approval from Western Skyways, warranty work can be conducted at another facility by another shop.

For just a little more money, about \$2,500, the Western Skyways Gold Seal Engine comes with a five-year warranty or to TBO, whichever occurs first. This is also a 100% warranty for parts and labor. The cylinders used for this warranty are new Superior Millennium, or the ECI Titan cylinders.

If this all sounds too good to be true; when you call Western Skyways to discuss your next engine overhaul, ask for Trent Tubbs or Eric Barker: They can answer any questions you have about the Western Skyways piston engine overhaul program.

There are other things going on at Western Skyways in Montrose, Colorado. Things like a turbo-normalized 10-520 and 10-550 engine developed by Al Head, and the Mess Master, a unique shop tool used while working on an engine. You can visit the Western Skyways web site, www.westernskyways.com to learn even more about a great engine shop, that can claim over 30 years of experience in piston aviation engine overhauls and more than 22 years experience working on the P16A turboprop engine. Or; just call Trent Tubbs and Eric Barker for piston engines, or Tom Barry and David Leis for turbine engines at 800.575.9929.