

# How to find a Good Mechanic for Your SLSA Aircraft

You are in control of your experience!

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*Whether you are a mechanic or a consumer you need to be aware of the importance of good customer relations. Consider the following comments:*

*“Sure, the work was done well, but the final bill for my SLSA inspection and repairs totaled over \$5,000! I was expecting it to be half that amount. Is this normal? I had no idea my mechanic’s hourly rate was \$95.00.” Pilot A*

*“Only someone with an in-depth knowledge of his subject would have known what was going on. My mechanic saved me many dollars and many hours of labor.” Pilot B*



The difference between Pilot A's and Pilot B's experience may be as simple as a signed customer work order and clear communication. Both pilots received quality repairs and a careful inspection. However, Pilot A's mechanic should have established a firm understanding about the cost, or range of cost, anticipated for the job.

Then, of course, when you're 3,000 AGL and the engine quits, the importance of a good mechanic takes on even greater meaning. Finding a good aviation mechanic should rank second in importance only to finding a good doctor.

So what's the best way to find a good mechanic? Here are some tips: First and foremost; Look before you need one.

This may be the most important advice of all. Start looking for a competent mechanic before your first condition inspection is due. New aircraft owners often call the first mechanic who can fit them in. Your chances of finding a good Light Sport Repairman with a Maintenance rating (LSRM) or Airframe and Powerplant mechanic (A & P) are slim using this approach. As soon as you purchase your new SLSA aircraft or move to a new area, begin your search for a reliable mechanic.

**How do you find a reputable one? Word of mouth is always a good resource.**

Ask local aviation clubs or your friends who have a similar model aircraft as you who they would recommend. If there's a group that knows the

importance a good mechanic, it's the members of aviation clubs. Don't jump on the first name you hear. Wait until several people recommend a single shop or mechanic. And then give that shop a call. Make sure they work on both your model of aircraft and engine and are authorized by the manufacture of your aircraft. For example, while an Airframe and Powerplant (A & Ps) may be authorized, by your aircraft manufacturer, to maintain and inspect your aircraft, they may have little or no experience with SLSA Aircraft or, say, for example, the Rotax 912.

Additionally, avoid shocks to your system and ask how labor is priced—flat fee or hourly. If an inspection is involved and the mechanic charges a flat rate, ask what is included. Often service items are price

separately. Such items might be:

- a. Cleaning spark plugs.
- b. Servicing landing gear shock struts.
- c. Changing oil.
- d. Making minor adjustments.
- e. Servicing brakes.
- f. Dressing nicked propeller blades.
- g. Lubricating where necessary.
- h. Stop-drilling small cracks and minor patching of cowling and baffles.

However, don't choose a mechanic based solely on price. The least expensive mechanic might not be the best place choice. At the same time, the most expensive mechanic may not give you the best service or quality.

### **How do I know if I've found a Good Mechanic?**

Before you take aircraft to a mechanic take a look around the shop. A dirty, oily, cluttered, poorly lit shop is never a good sign! My experience with these type of shops has been a bad one every time. Look for a neat, well-organized facility. If the mechanic is also a pilot eyeball the quality of aircraft he owns—it should be as good as your own.

The mechanic should be professional, courteous, and able to satisfactorily answer every question you have. Is he friendly, helpful, and not irritated by your questions? A good aviation mechanic typically has an enthusiasm or excitement towards educating their customers about their aircraft. If you've run into a

mechanic who doesn't want to discuss things with you, go elsewhere.

Communication is key. Your mechanic should have a customer service agreement and offer an estimate in writing. All costs should be laid out and explained prior to starting the work. (Make sure you get signed copies and that you keep all paperwork.) If an inspection is involved, remember that the flat rate does not include correction of discrepancies or unsafe items and that such maintenance will be charged separately just like services items. So you should also ask whether routine servicing is to be included in the fee as part of the inspection or if it is charged separately.

If you believe you're being overcharged, go through each service and or repair item to be performed by the shop and be sure you will be charged a fair rate. The more complicated or expensive the maintenance or repair, the more you owe it to yourself to get a second opinion.

### **Test the mechanic with simple repairs**

Your best defense is being a smart consumer. Once you've selected a potential mechanic, you're going to have to climb a confidence curve. If possible, have them start off with relatively simple and straightforward work. Bring your aircraft into the shop for small stuff like oil changes to get a feel for the place and develop a relationship. You will be able to test their

level of communication skills, policies, and competency. If you go away happy, you'll feel less anxious that fateful day when you have to bring your pride and joy in for a complete inspection.

There are some very professional mechanics out there. They come equipped to do your work and they comply with all the FAA regulations. Your job is to investigate to make sure they are professional. A good mechanic is, at heart, a good businessman. Long-term profits come from repeat business, so, if you're happy with your experience, go back to the place and start building a relationship. It's like marriage. If things aren't what you'd hoped for, talk out the problem, and give the place a chance to resolve things to your satisfaction before you walk out in a huff. If you're satisfied with the work done and the level of professionalism, keep your new mechanic on speed dial. Once you find a good mechanic who meets your needs, treat him or her like gold. You've found a treasure.

For a complete list of all LSRM mechanics listed by state visit: <http://www.rainbowaviation.com/repairman.htm>