

I don't agree that the mechanic's actions "bordered on criminal." They were not even unusual. In my experience, many A&Ps would do exactly what this one did, especially given that Mark was a perfect stranger and his airplane was a transient visitor.

It was a good thing that this shop was in business. If it hadn't been, how would Mark have gotten the relief valve cleaned and his oil pressure restored? The local A&P was clearly a competent wrench swinger (if not a world-class diagnostician), and it was sure lucky for Mark he was on the field and even willing to work on Saturday! Maintenance shops are few and far between in remote areas like this, and we sure don't need any fewer of them.

Most A&P mechanics are scared to death of being sued. And in the incredibly

litigious environment that followed the passage of the General Aviation Revitalization Act in 1994, they should be scared. There has been an explosion of lawsuits against shops and mechanics. Even a lawsuit with no merit can be punishingly expensive for a shop or mechanic to defend. These are typically not high net worth individuals, and many of them have marginal or no insurance.

Let's face it: There aren't many A&Ps who would be willing to go out on a limb the way I did for this Cessna 185 owner that I didn't know from Adam. Think about the consequences for me if Mark were to crash on the flight home. His widow's attorney would be all over me like white on rice. Very, very few A&Ps would be willing to take the kind of risk that I did, and frankly I don't blame them one bit. (And yes, I did breathe a big sigh of relief when I heard that Mark and his beautiful airplane were safely home.)

My purpose in relating Mark's story is not to condemn the local mechanic (who is probably a very good mechanic, albeit understandably risk-averse). It is to teach a lesson about the nature of the maintenance infrastructure for these airplanes that every aircraft owner has to deal with.

If an owner is not sure what maintenance should or should not be performed,

he should always seek an expert second opinion from someone he trusts. This is especially important when the owner has a problem away from home and is dealing with strangers whose skills, judgment, and attitude are unknown.

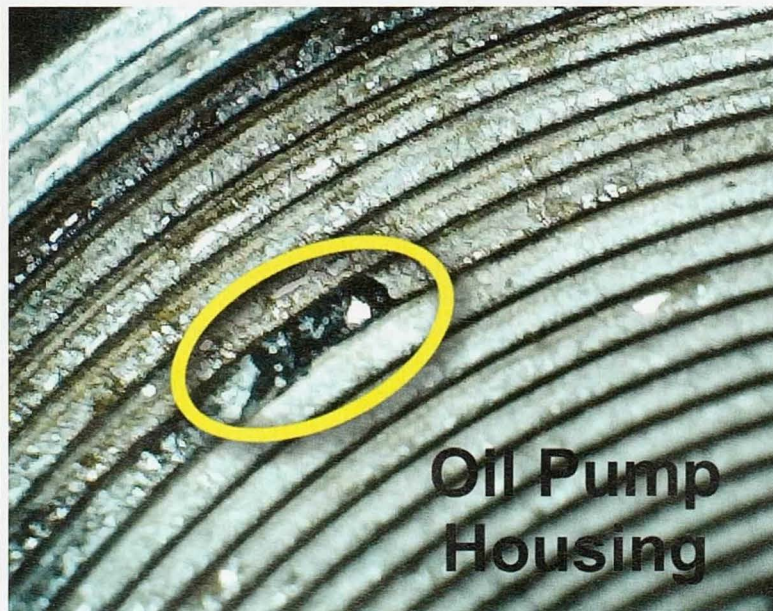
EPILOGUE

Not long after Mark got his airplane home, I recommended that he take it to a very good Cessna service center in Northern California for its annual ordeal. In the course of the annual inspection, the shop found exactly where that little chunk of aluminum in the oil pressure relief valve had come from. It turned out that the oil filter adapter's jam nut had worked loose, and the adapter was vibrating and chewing up the threads in the aluminum oil pump housing. (This problem is so commonplace that there's a recurring AD against the oil filter adapter.) The shop installed a new pump housing and oil filter adapter. Mystery solved! *EAA*

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On the ground at Carson City. The oil pressure was rock-solid all the way at 50 psi.



Source of the aluminum chunk found in the pressure relief valve: torn-up threads in the oil pump caused by a loose oil filter adapter. Mystery solved!