

NON-CERTIFIED AVIONICS COMING TO CERTIFIED AIRPLANES

News / Business aviation



In what could be the start of a major shakeup in the avionics world, EAA and the FAA are collaborating to bring Dynon's low-cost EFIS-D10A to certain Cessna and Piper models.

Many aircraft owners will soon be able to install non-certified avionics in their Part 23 certified airplanes in a development that should be a boon to pilots looking to upgrade their panels on the cheap. It's being hailed as a "breakthrough" by EAA and the FAA (and it really is) but the blockbuster news also has a number of legacy avionics manufacturers scratching their heads.

Here's what's happening: EAA has partnered with the FAA to develop STCs enabling installation of non-certified avionics in certified airplanes by forgoing the costly and time-consuming TSO and PMA avionics approval processes. The first STC under the partnership will be for the Dynon EFIS-D10A under a blanket approval covering the Cessna 150, 152, 172 and Piper PA-28 and PA-38 models, with more aircraft expected to be added soon.

EAA will be the STC holder for the installation of the EFIS-D10A, which retails for \$2,200 for the

Experimental market version and is intended to replace a conventional artificial horizon with the glass display technology. EAA and the FAA say this is just the start of a new trend as a wave of non-certified avionics may soon be made available for a growing list of certified piston airplanes.

EAA president Jack Pelton said other STCs could cover fuel systems, autopilots and more. Whether “more” means lower-cost, non-certified ADS-B Out equipment to meet the FAA’s 2020 mandate was left unsaid, but it is a question many are beginning to ask and something EAA has pushed for in the past.

Legacy avionics makers we spoke with were hopefully optimistic that EAA’s push would benefit the industry, but they voiced concerns about the development as well. These established manufacturers note they have spent a considerable amount of money and time to develop TSO’d and PMA’d products for general aviation, now to face sudden competition (admittedly at the lower end of the market) from companies that won’t be subjected to the same arduous approval process.

How did EAA pull it off? To be perfectly honest, nobody outside EAA, the FAA and Dynon really knows. The association says it flight tested the Dynon EFIS product in its own Cessna 172M earlier this year with an FAA observer on board. Dynon’s product has been verified against the newly developed ASTM 3153-15 Standard Specification for Verification of Avionics Systems. The EFIS-D10A met the spec and has been given the FAA’s green light for installation in certified airplanes. The whole process took only a few months. How EAA got from point A to B is a mystery.

The EFIS product will start shipping in the coming weeks, Dynon says. Any A&P can install it. Pricing info has yet to be released but it is expected to be less than half the cost of similar certified products.

Make no mistake, this is a big deal and very good news for many thousands of airplane owners. Dynon says the EFIS-D10A is really a market test and stresses that it has much bigger plans. But the collaboration could also cause a shakeup in the avionics industry as avionics manufacturers from Garmin to Avidyne to Aspen to BendixKing and more might well seek to offer their own non-certified avionics under a similar STC approval path while their customers balk at paying more for TSO’d gear if they know cheaper, non-certified avionics choices are coming soon.

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