



Brian Meyette of Cornish works on the engine of his Vans RV-7A home-built aircraft. He started the project in his garage, then moved it to a hangar he built at the Hartness State Airport in North Springfield, Vt.

*Brian Meyette has been building his own airplane from a kit since 2003. The project hit a snag when the engine proved more difficult to install than he anticipated. The following is an edited interview.*

There was this one kit from a company in Florida. It's ironic, but one of the selling points was that you take it out of the crate, bolt it up, then go. I didn't want to spend a lot of time screwing around. I just wanted to fly this thing.

But it was a disaster from the beginning. An absolute nightmare. It sounded like a good idea at the time, but I've been working on this engine for at least four years. I think originally I thought it was going to be cheaper to build a plane, but I could have bought a pretty darn nice used plane for just what I've put into this engine alone.

A typical aircraft engine, in terms of technology, is like a 1930s tractor. They're mechanically simple, and they've been reliable for all these years. But you've got magnetos (an electric generator that produces a magnetic field), mixture controls and things like that.

I got sold on the idea of electronic ignition, closed-loop fuel injection and all that stuff. No fooling around. I looked around online, and I read a couple people's Web sites, and it sounded so much better. There was one engine out of the Subaru STi 300-horsepower sportscar, and I thought, "That sounds pretty good to me."

It came in pieces. A lot of the parts weren't there. The guy who sold it didn't really test any of it, he just threw it out there. The design hadn't been thought out at all, and by the time he shipped it, he'd just given up on it. We were left to figure it out on our own.

I plan on taking the test phase very seriously. A few people buzz around in circles or blow it off or exaggerate their logbooks, but I'm going to have a real test program. Flight No. 1: make sure it takes off and circle a little bit. Flight No. 2: take it a bit further, test it for stall, and land. And so on.

On that first flight, I'll definitely stay over the airport. Even if the engine goes out, you'll just coast in for a landing. Just don't panic and you should land fine.

Right now, I'm tuning the engine, playing around with the timing a bit, and looking into getting the prop on. The prop is still in the box. It came in from the factory four years ago.

I've never opened it, so I hope all the parts are there.

Copyright © Valley News - All Rights Reserved