

FRANKLIN: STILL KICKING

Prior to World War II, there were three major light aircraft engine makers, not just two, and Franklin was one of them. Franklin engines had—and still have—a reputation for unusual smoothness and they were used in a number of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, including the Bell 47 and the H-13 military variant. The company, although under a different name, Aircooled Motors, survived into the 1970s before being sold to a Brazilian company, then later to the PZL Group in Poland. It still exists under the Franklin name, although it appears to have little market activity.

Nonetheless, Franklin engines are still apparently well supported by Susan Prall's Franklin Engine Co. in Jewett, Texas and by an overhaul shop, Southern Aero in Thomasville, North Carolina. Prall told us that thanks to military contracts, Franklin manufactured significant surpluses of parts and because part interchangeability is high between engine models, there's little problem in supplying any part for a Franklin engine, including cylinders.

"Normally, we overhaul cylinders, but we are working on a line of new cylinders," she told us. She's also building such parts as pistons, bearings and cylinder sleeves. Prall estimates 3000 to 6000 Franklin engines are still in service, with Stinson and Bellanca representing a major part of the market. (Those engines were built by Aircooled Motors.)

Some parts are periodically unavailable, but Prall says she's working on PMA sources for those. She says the Polish-owned Franklin owns the type certificates, but has been unresponsive to requests for parts and new engines.

At Southern Aero, Robert Still says the company is still support-

ing all of the engines, even the beyond-rare Tucker car engine, which Aircooled also manufactured. "Right now, we haven't had to turn anybody down as far as having to support them and we've been actively seeking manufacturers of parts, even crankshafts and camshafts. The only hurdle we're dealing with is the FAA giving the parts approval," Still told us.

Still thinks the Franklin population might be as large as 8000 airframes, not counting STC'd airplanes of various kinds that have Franklin engines. "They're out there and they seem to keep coming out of the woodwork," Stills says.

Overhaul prices for the four-cylinder 4AC found in the J-3 hover around \$10,000, while six-cylinder Franklins vary between \$13,000 and \$18,000, depending on the model. That makes the four-cylinder Franklins comparable in overhaul price to the Continental A-65, but the six-cylinder models may be cheaper than equivalent Lycoming and Continental sixes. Southern Aero has also partnered with a company called Franklin Aerospace, which bought up the parts stock when PZL moved the factory to Poland.

In our view, support for Franklin engines appears strong enough not to worry about buying an airplane equipped with one. For more, contact Susan Prall at www.franklinparts.com or 903-626-5120. Southern Aero is at www.southern-aero.com and 336-476-9094.

