

What You Should Know About Buying Pre-Owned Avionics

BY DALE SMITH

Let's say you want to put a new Garmin GNS 530 with WAAS in your airplane. Buying it from a reputable avionics shop would cost around \$15,000. But what if you could buy a "pre-owned" GNS 530W online for under \$9,000? You might think it's too good of a deal to pass up. Or is it?

"It's a typical 'buyer beware' situation," said Gordon Carver, director of sales for APG Eastern Avionics International of Punta Gorda, Fla. "You really need to know your source when it comes to buying used avionics."

Carver sometimes buys equipment online, and he said the first thing he asks is if the sellers are members of the Aircraft Electronics Association.

"The customer needs to have some type of yellow tag or 8130 tag — FAA-approved documentation for the traceability for where the box came from," said Rick Peavley, owner of Vero Beach Avionics in Florida. "If you don't have proper documentation, you cannot legally put the box in a certified airplane. That doesn't stop some people from doing it, but we have a (Part) 145 repair station here and we want to keep it open."

Carver said reputable shops understand quality control and they keep track of the products they sell. "That's a big issue," he said. "Nobody wants to promote stolen radios or radios that have

been involved in an incident and maybe shouldn't be returned to service."

If you did come across a "deal too good to refuse" and the seller wasn't an established dealer, all is not necessarily lost. According to Mike Adamson, vice president of member programs and education for AEA, you can take a radio, or its serial number, to an AEA member shop and it can be looked up through the stolen equipment database compiled by the Aviation Crime Prevention Institute (ACPI). It's not foolproof, but neither is buying avionics from an unknown source.

Once you're confident the radio in question is not on ACPI's list, it still is not ready to install — a licensed shop first must recertify the unit. "I had one guy come in with a bunch of equipment he bought somewhere else and I had to go get serviceability tags on everything for him," Peavley said. "That added quite a bit to his cost."

Although he doesn't deal with pre-owned avionics often, Peavley said his shop's policy is to do 100 percent testing on every unit before it is installed. "The stuff the guy bought could have easily been lemons — it could have been broken before he brought it in," he said.

Peavley's point is key to making sure you're not one of the folks P.T. Barnum was talking about. Quality should not be your only concern when buying pre-owned; you also

need to make sure what you are buying is compatible with the units already installed in your airplane.

"You have to know what types of interfaces the units need and work with, and what types you have or need in your particular aircraft," Carver said. "You can get a great price on the box, but if it doesn't interface with your current equipment, you've wasted a lot of money."

Carver shared a story about a customer who wanted to buy an RMI for his airplane. Another avionics shop quoted him a price of \$3,200 for the unit. Carver said he could match the price, but before he sold the unit he had a couple of questions for the caller. During the conversation, Carver determined the owner's aircraft did not have any of the necessary heading outputs the RMI needed to function, so by the time it was all added up and installed, the \$3,200 RMI would cost about \$18,000.

"As the buyer, you have to assume the responsibility of making sure it's not only what the seller says it is, but that it also will work the way they say it will," Carver said. "If you just pick something out and don't really understand all the interconnects and interfaces it takes to make it work, you can really make a huge mistake."

This is the kind of knowledge and expertise you pay an avionics shop for in the first place. □