

SUMMARY: This document proposes to supersede Airworthiness Directive (AD) 88-05-05, which currently requires the following on certain The New Piper Aircraft, Inc. (Piper) PA31, PA31P, and PA31T series airplanes: repetitively inspecting both the left and right main landing gear (MLG) forward sidebrace, and replacing any cracked MLG forward sidebrace. The Federal Aviation Administration's policy on aging commuter-class aircraft is to eliminate or, in certain instances, reduce the number of certain repetitive short-interval inspections when improved parts or modifications are available. The proposed action would retain the current repetitive inspections contained in AD 88-05-05, and would require incorporating both a left and right MLG forward sidebrace of improved design as terminating action for the repetitive inspection requirement. The actions specified in the proposed AD are intended to prevent the MLG from retracting because of a cracked MLG forward side brace, which, if not detected and corrected, could result in gear collapse and loss of control of the airplane during landing operations.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before February 22, 1996.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Central Region, Office of the Assistant Chief Counsel, Attention: Rules Docket No. 90-CE-62-AD, Room 1558, 601 E. 12th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64106. Comments may be inspected at this location between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, holidays excepted.

Service information that relates to the proposed AD may be obtained from The New Piper Aircraft, Inc., Customer Services, 2926 Piper Drive, Vero Beach, Florida 32960. This information also may be examined at the Rules Docket at the address above.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christina Marsh, Aerospace Engineer, FAA, Atlanta Aircraft Certification Office, Campus Building, 1701 Columbia Avenue, suite 2-160, College Park, Georgia 30337-2748; telephone (404) 305-7362; facsimile (404) 305-7348.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Comments Invited

Interested persons are invited to participate in the making of the proposed rule by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire. Communications should identify the Rules Docket number and be submitted in triplicate to the address specified above. All

communications received on or before the closing date for comments, specified above, will be considered before taking action on the proposed rule. The proposals contained in this notice may be changed in light of the comments received.

Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, economic, environmental, and energy aspects of the proposed rule. All comments submitted will be available, both before and after the closing date for comments, in the Rules Docket for examination by interested persons. A report that summarizes each FAA-public contact concerned with the substance of this proposal will be filed in the Rules Docket.

Commenters wishing the FAA to acknowledge receipt of their comments submitted in response to this notice must submit a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following statement is made: "Comments to Docket No. 90-CE-62-AD." The postcard will be date stamped and returned to the commenter.

Availability of NPRMs

Any person may obtain a copy of this NPRM by submitting a request to the FAA, Central Region, Office of the Assistant Chief Counsel, Attention: Rules Docket No. 90-CE-62-AD, Room 1558, 601 E. 12th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64106.

Discussion

The FAA has determined that reliance on critical repetitive inspections on aging commuter-class airplanes carries an unnecessary safety risk when a design change exists that could eliminate or, in certain instances, reduce the number of those critical inspections. In determining what inspections are critical, the FAA considers (1) the safety consequences if the known problem is not detected during the inspection; (2) the probability of the problem not being detected during the inspection; (3) whether the inspection area is difficult to access; and (4) the possibility of damage to an adjacent structure as a result of the problem.

These factors have led the FAA to establish an aging commuter-class aircraft policy that requires incorporating a known design change when it could replace a critical repetitive inspection. With this policy in mind, the FAA conducted a review of existing AD's that apply to Piper Models PA31-350 and PA31T3 airplanes. Assisting the FAA in this review were (1) The New Piper Aircraft, Inc.; (2) the Regional Airlines

Association (RAA); and (3) several operators of the affected airplanes.

From this review, the FAA has identified AD 88-05-05, Amendment 39-5861, as one that should be superseded with a new AD that would require a modification that would eliminate the need for short-interval and critical repetitive inspections. AD 88-05-05 currently requires the following on certain Piper PA31, PA31P, and PA31T series airplanes:

- Repetitively inspecting both the left and right main landing gear (MLG) forward sidebrace for cracks, and replacing any cracked MLG forward sidebrace stud. Accomplishment of the inspections required by AD 88-05-05 is in accordance with Piper Service Bulletin (SB) No. 845A, dated October 9, 1987; and
- Allowing for the provision of replacing both the left and right MLG forward sidebrace with a part of improved design, part number (P/N) 85165-02 (left) and 85165-03 (right) or P/N 85166-02 (left) and 85166-03 (right), as applicable. This installation is accomplished in accordance with the applicable maintenance manual.

Based on its aging commuter-class aircraft policy and after reviewing all available information related to this subject including the referenced service information, the FAA has determined that AD action should be taken to eliminate the repetitive short-interval inspections required by AD 88-05-05, and to prevent the MLG from retracting because of a cracked MLG forward side brace, which, if not detected and corrected, could result in gear collapse and loss of control of the airplane during landing operations.

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop in other Piper PA31, PA31P, and PA31T series airplanes of the same type design, the proposed AD would supersede AD 88-05-05 with a new AD that would (1) retain the requirement of repetitively inspecting both the left and right MLG forward sidebrace for cracks, and replacing any cracked MLG forward sidebrace; and (2) require replacing both the left and right MLG forward sidebrace with a part of improved design, part number (P/N) 85165-02 (left) and 85165-03 (right) or P/N 85166-02 (left) and 85166-03 (right), as applicable, as terminating action for the repetitive inspections. Accomplishment of the proposed inspections would be in accordance with Piper SB No. 845A, dated October 9, 1987. The improved MLG forward sidebrace installations would be accomplished in accordance