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Pelton: Finally, Some Plain Speaking

By [Paul Bertorelli](#)

Twenty years into what seems like a hopeless search for an avgas replacement, the only thing that appears to have emerged—other than reams of depressing reports—is fear and paralysis. So Cessna CEO Jack Pelton's unambiguous statement last week that yes, he has seen a replacement fuel, it appears to work and looks producible was a bracing blast of breathable air.

Pelton and AOPA President Craig Fuller visited General Aviation Modification Inc.'s modest test facility in Ada, Oklahoma and saw the company's proposed G100UL run through a detonation cycle and learned more about how the stuff might be made. Pelton urged other GA leaders to get busy and have a look. To date, even seven months into GAMI's project, GA principles are only now taking notice and getting for-the-record comments that say anything substantive gives the word futility a bad name. It baffles me that so many people are afraid to state honest opinions.

I noted that Pelton sent his comments a couple of hours after seeing the test run. He didn't wait for someone to craft a carefully worded press release. Why is this such a big deal? (And is a big deal.) Because finally someone has stepped up and said: Look, let's stop implying that just because we've failed so far, we can't figure this out. I did not interpret Pelton's comments as an endorsement for G100UL so much as an illumination of the conviction that there are innovative companies out there that can solve this problem if we'll just let them. (Hundred octane and all.)

With aircraft sales still in the tank, Pelton fully realizes that uncertainty about future fuel supplies is beginning to chill the market. And the longer we go without some expression of confidence and forward movement, the colder it's going to get.

What I am anxiously awaiting is to see if Pelton's remarks and Fuller's hands-on evaluation will translate into the right kind of pressure to get the FAA to remove the unreasonable obstacles it places before anyone trying to develop a new fuel. Specifically, GAMI still awaits approval of an STC it has requested to expand its fleet testing, an option that should be open to anyone trying to develop new fuels. Fuller's direct involvement is encouraging because the alphabets have been too cautious about expressing confidence in the process of finding a new fuel.

Why is the STC so important? For several reasons, none of which the bureaucrats obsessing about the ASTM process seem to see. First, if we're about to convert the entire GA economy to a new fuel, it would be nice to have a bunch of hours of real flight time on it. It would be good to run it through a cold winter, a wet spring and a blistering summer in Tucson. It would be nice to know how it behaves at -30 degrees in the flight

levels and to find out if it chews up the seals in fuel trucks. You can't learn these things in test cells.

Further, because GAMI wants to do the STCs in a limited number of Cirrus aircraft equipped with the Tornado Alley Turbo, they've got the perfect laboratory for these tests. Those aircraft are equipped with sophisticated data logging instrumentation that will give us an unparalleled opportunity to see G100UL—or Swift or any other fuel—perform practically on an hourly basis. This will do what badly needs doing: It will give the fuel search credible visibility, reducing the erosion of confidence.

But the single best reason to approve the STC post haste is the simplest: There's no down side to doing it. None. The project is small and since the applicant does most of the work anyway, it won't tie up a lot of FAA resources. In opposing the STC, I'm sure some will argue the safety card, but that's absurd. Does anyone really think anything in aviation development is risk free?

Jack Pelton has a piston-engine aircraft factory he would like to see busy again. He has lots of people he would like to get back to work. He understands how the lack of direction in fuel development threatens that and said as much last week.

I hope the right people are listening.