



STEVE KROG

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR

Spring Training

Proactive suggestions for a safe flying season

BY STEVE KROG

EARLY MARCH in the upper Midwest means a new season of warm pleasure flying is about to begin. Aircraft owners and pilots are getting anxious, hangar doors can be found partially open to the fresh spring breezes, and the airplanes within are getting some deserved TLC after languishing in a cold hangar all winter.

Many of us residing in this geographic climate tend to hibernate during the winter months. Little pleasure flying is done except by a few hardy souls. Frozen hangar doors, required engine preheating, shoveling snow, and cold temperatures can take most of the fun out of winter flying, not to mention the lack of cabin heat, etc. Consequently, we spend time reading aviation magazines and doing a lot of hangar flying, sipping bad coffee around a stove in someone's hangar.

With the rapid approach of spring, we're all anxious to get back in the air and enjoy some true pleasure flying. Whether it be an early breakfast flight, a pancake breakfast, a \$100 hamburger, or, here in Wisconsin, a continuation of the state DOT's Airport Passport Program flights, we all itch to get back in the air.

With your first flight of the season fast approaching, what are you going to do to regain flight proficiency? Sure, you'll do the required three takeoffs and landings to be legally current, but what then? Does that make you both safe and proficient?

A longtime friend and fellow tailwheel flight instructor and I got together and discussed this very scenario. Here are some of the suggestions or actions we would recommend to get back to, or expand upon, a safe level of flight proficiency.

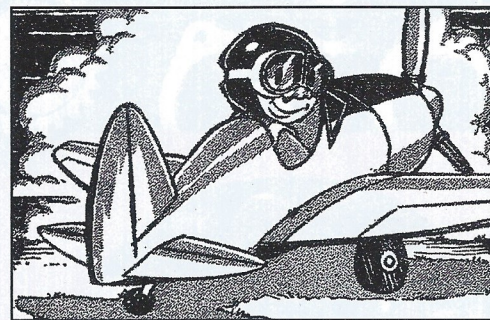
TAXIING

When taxiing a light-wing-loaded tailwheel aircraft (like a J-3, Taylorcraft, or Champ), be conscientious about aileron and elevator positioning. There is an old aviation adage that states: *When taxiing, climb into the wind and dive away from the wind.* Though many of us have lived by that adage for years, if not decades, it isn't entirely true.

Some folks I've flown with get a bit confused about wind direction and determining control position. To overcome this confusion, I use the wing leading edge as a reference point. The left wingtip is in the 9 o'clock position, and the right wingtip is in the 3 o'clock position. If the wind is from a direction between 9 and 3, it is coming toward us, requiring the elevators to be full up and the windward aileron fully deflected into the wind.

We definitely want to have the elevators in the full up position when taxiing into the wind, thus preventing a gust from lifting the tail. The ailerons should be fully deflected into the wind, again to prevent a gust from lifting the windward wing.

Where the old adage stated above is partially incorrect is in the phrase "dive away from the wind." With the elevators fully deflected downward, a blast from the prop could easily exceed the tailwind velocity thus lifting the tail. Extreme care should be taken when taxiing with a tailwind. While ailerons should be fully deflected away from the wind, I like to keep the elevators in a neutral position guarding against either a tailwind gust or prop blast.



Take your time while conducting the pre-takeoff checklist. It may prevent an embarrassing incident.

Don't be in a big hurry to get into the air after taxiing to the runway. Take your time to conduct a thorough pre-takeoff checklist. Remember, your airplane probably hasn't been out of the hangar and had the engine running for more than two or three months.

SLOW FLIGHT

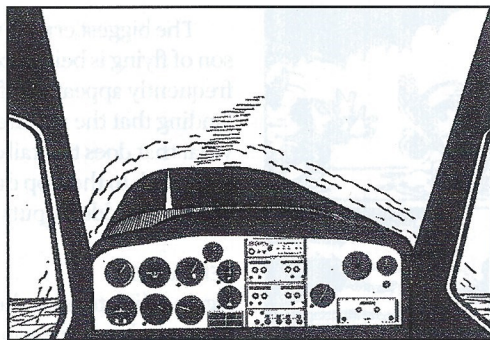
Once airborne, make your steady climb to a predetermined safe altitude, level off, trim, and adjust power for straight and level flight. Align the nose of the aircraft with either one of the cardinal headings, or here in the Midwest align it with a road. Applying aileron and rudder, use a 15-degree bank angle and complete a 360-degree turn, first in one direction and then the other. Did you hold your altitude within plus or minus 100 feet? That is the minimum requirement if you were taking a private pilot checkride today. Now do the same in the other direction. Check your coordination. Does the ball remain in the center throughout the turn? Once you've completed the 15-degree bank turns, challenge yourself with 30-degree banks, then 45-degree banks focusing on coordinated inputs and holding your altitude to plus or minus 100 feet.

Next, clear your traffic area and establish the desired slow flight configuration. If you're a bit apprehensive about doing slow flight, first pick an airspeed that is a comfortable 10 mph above indicated stall speed. Adjust power, trim, and attitude to maintain a constant heading and altitude at a steady 10 mph above stall. Make very shallow (8-10 degree) turns. Take a deep breath and work on getting a feel for the somewhat mushy controls and the amount of movement required to get control response. Now transition back to cruise flight without your altitude fluctuating more than plus or minus 100 feet.

Repeat this exercise several more times but at slightly slower indicated airspeeds. Develop a feel for the airplane while building self-confidence.

STALLS

Practicing stalls immediately creates stomach knots and a case of the cold sweats in many pilots. This self-induced feeling can usually be traced back to either minimal or



Build confidence and get the "feel" of the airplane as it approaches a stall by recognizing the buffet.

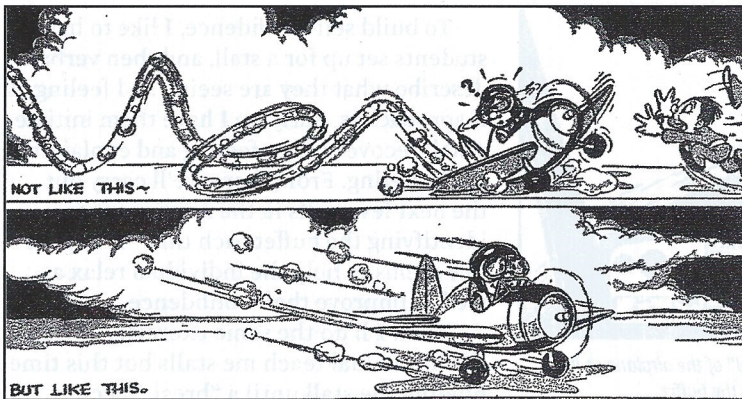
poor training. Your young instructor and his or her young instructor were apprehensive about stalls. Thus, stall training was minimal. I recently flew with an individual who had accrued about 300 hours' total time as a private pilot. When I asked him to demonstrate a power-off stall with a shallow turn to the right, he hesitated and then commented that he had never done a stall, nor had to do one, with bank.

To build self-confidence, I like to have students set up for a stall, and then verbally describe what they are seeing and feeling as it approaches. Early on I have them initiate a stall recovery after feeling and explaining the buffeting. From there we'll carry out the next few stalls in the same manner identifying the buffet each time. This practice seems to help the individual relax as well as improve their confidence.

Then I'll do the same exercise, having the individual teach me stalls but this time holding the stall until a "break" occurs. Making individuals verbalize this helps prevent brain freeze and develops a better understanding of what is occurring as well as what needs to be done to correct the situation.

It's vital that you as pilot in command are both comfortable and confident when flying your airplane. Practicing some stalls from time to time keeps your senses sharp and helps you recognize a potentially serious situation before it fully materializes.

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Practice a couple of relaxed, smooth approaches to get the feel of the airplane.

LANDING

That first landing of the new flying season can also induce stomach butterflies. Rather than committing to land on the first approach of the year, fly a normal approach, then execute a go-around. This not only helps settle the nerves, but also helps reinforce the sight picture and feeling needed to initiate a good landing.

If flying a tailwheel aircraft, I like to make the first two or three landings on turf if possible. Then move over to the hard surface runway for several more landings.

The biggest error I've observed as individuals get back to a new season of flying is being lax on the elevator inputs after touching down. It frequently appears as if the person is so happy with the first near-perfect landing that the required control inputs are forgotten, and we all know what that does to a tailwheel airplane while rolling out! Keep the control stick back to the stop during rollout and remain visually focused while applying rudder inputs as necessary to maintain a straight ground track.

VERBALIZE

Again, I like to have the individual with whom I'm flying talk me through the entire approach and landing. Pretend that I'm a first-time passenger and you're explaining every little input to me. You don't really need a passenger to practice this. Talk to yourself (or that imaginary friend you had as a little kid) as you make your approach, landing, and follow-through on the rollout. Verbalizing one or two times helps reinforce the needed inputs to fly safely — today and on future flights.

I've stated it in previous columns and will do so again. Flying is not a right but rather a privilege. We all have a responsibility to conduct flight in the safest manner possible so as to continue the privilege for all.

So, practice some of these maneuvers and fly safely! *EAA*

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than four decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight-training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.