



**STEVE KROG**

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR



*After years of flying ultralights, Chris Schwartz (right) followed his dream and began working on a private pilot certificate. Instructor John Dorcey congratulates Chris on a fantastic flight.*

# Getting Back in the Saddle

Returning to flight

BY STEVE KROG

**AT SOME POINT** in your life, you invested either a lot of thought or a lot of time and money learning to or wanting to fly, but then you put that passion on the back burner. Family, home, and career took precedence. But now, life is good and both time and money are more readily available. That passion to fly never left you.

Where to start, you might ask yourself. It has been such a long time — maybe 10 or more years have passed since you last occupied the pilot's seat. I've encountered this situation and have had this conversation at least a half-dozen times in the past weeks following EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2018.

If you're unfamiliar with your local flight-training options, you might fire up your computer and look for EAA chapters in the area, give them a call, and then attend one of their chapter meetings.

Chapter members are a tremendous resource of information and local lore, and most will be quite open about sharing advice.

Certainly, a lot of things have changed in aviation in the past decade or two, but a lot of things never change. Lift, gravity, thrust, and drag still apply. Most of the changes that have occurred apply to the FAA rules and regulations, airspace, and advancements in cockpit electronics. One very positive change occurred about 11 years ago when the sport pilot certificate and light-sport aircraft category were introduced.

How does one re-engage with aviation after being away for so long? It's easier than you might think. If you're somewhat familiar with a local airport operation offering flight instruction, drop in, talk to the flight school manager, and get an overall feel for the operation. Then ask yourself, "Is this school truly interested in getting me back in the air? Or would it rather sell me a \$400 stack of books and manuals before discussing flight?"

One may need to visit two or three flight schools before finding "the one" that feels like it fits your needs. Don't be afraid to ask questions and shop around. Remember, flight training is meant to be not only challenging and safe, but also fun. Otherwise, why do it? Looking forward to trips to the airport for a flight is a must in my opinion.

Before meeting with a flight instructor, there are a few things you'll want to consider. What are your goals for flying? Do you intend to do an hour or two of pleasure flying a month? Or, do you want to do some cross-country traveling? The answer to these questions will help you determine what training path you'll want to employ.

Is the flight instructor truly dedicated to teaching people to fly or is he or she just building time to get a job with the airlines? Unfortunately, there are some instructors who are focused only on time building and not necessarily on teaching.

Do you have any medical issues that may make it difficult to obtain an FAA third-class medical? Some conditions may prevent you from getting a third-class medical. However, you may still be eligible to fly as a sport pilot rather than a private pilot. In this case, a medical is not required, but you will be limited to the types of airplanes you can legally fly (determined by gross weight) and you won't be able to do any night flying. In addition, if you've held a third-class medical at any point after July 14, 2006, you may be eligible to fly under BasicMed rules.

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Did you complete any previous flight training, possibly even earning a private pilot certificate? Or, did your flight training end before getting the certificate? Maybe you never had the opportunity to start flying until now. It really makes no difference if the passion still burns in your heart.

If you have completed some flight training, try to locate your logbook. All previous and officially logged flight time helps to meet the FAA's minimum time requirements to earn a certificate. After locating a suitable flight school and an instructor who is there to truly teach, it's time to schedule a flight.

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#### THE FIRST FLIGHT

Walking to the airplane in preparation for conducting a preflight inspection, the first thing to strike you will be the sense of smell. 100LL aviation fuel has a unique but pleasant aroma. If you're not around it every day, it will definitely tweak your nose.

Once inside the cockpit with the seat belt and shoulder harness in place, it's time to bring the engine to life. Checklist in hand, you nervously scan and begin locating and flipping switches, prime the engine, yell, "Clear," and turn the key to start. When the engine comes to life, rpm is checked and adjusted to less than 1,000, and oil pressure is observed. You remember what your previous instruction had taught you. If there is no oil pressure after 15 seconds, shut down the engine and determine the cause.

With the systems and gauges checked, it's time to taxi. Taxiing into position on the active runway heightens your senses. Palms begin to sweat and calf muscles tighten. As you apply full power the airplane moves forward. Your control inputs are a little stiff and slow, but finally the airplane lifts off the runway. While feeling the exhilaration, your instructor is reminding you to apply light right rudder and stabilize the nose attitude on the horizon. Don't forget to breathe, as many do at this point.

Once you've climbed to a suitable safe altitude and adjusted your power and trim for level flight, the fun can begin. Starting with shallow bank turns, you'll find that you've not forgotten what to do, but your input responses will be stiff, slow, and a bit uncoordinated. The ball in the turn coordinator will be bouncing from side to side rather than stabilizing in the center. It may take a half-dozen turns or more before the feel and coordination come back. Medium and steep turns will be practiced. The whole time you're struggling with coordination and altitude control, the grin on your face becomes near permanent.

After demonstrating slow flight and stall procedures, your instructor will have you return to the airport. It becomes a busy time in the cockpit. First, you're thinking of how to correctly enter the traffic pattern. Then you'll need to descend to traffic pattern altitude. Speaking on the radio causes a moment of stage fright. While entering the traffic pattern, the preflight checklist must be performed — fuel level checked, mixture rich, carb heat checked, trim adjusted, look for other traffic, etc. You don't recall being this busy when you last flew a decade ago.

Finally, power is reduced, trim is again adjusted, and when you're at an approximate 45-degree angle off the approach end of the runway, the base leg descending turn is established. Traffic is again checked, altitude is assessed, aircraft attitude stabilized, and the turn onto the final approach is made.

Adrenaline is pumping through your body now. You haven't landed an airplane in more than 10 years, if ever. The instructor is assisting you in stabilizing the nose attitude and glide. Power is reduced to idle, back-pressure is applied to level off at about 10 feet above the runway, and all excess energy is dissipated. As the airplane slowly settles toward the runway, the instructor keeps saying, "More back-pressure." With a solid thump, the airplane settles on the runway and you think, wow, I made it. But your instructor keeps saying fly the airplane. As long as the airplane is still moving, you need to be diligent with control inputs guiding the slowing aircraft straight down the runway.

After taxiing off the runway and arriving back in front of the hangar, you'll need to proceed with the shutdown checklist: radios off, lights/strobes off, carb heat off, etc. Once the prop has stopped, you can begin relaxing and enjoying the accomplishment of satisfactorily completing your first flight in many years. What a wonderful feeling! *EAA*

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**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.