



STEVE KROG

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR



Surprises!

Aviation can be full of them

BY STEVE KROG

IT'S WINTER HERE in the upper Midwest. Very cold temperatures, snow (but not yet enough to put skis on the Cubs), and wind have curtailed much of our pleasure flying. Activities at the flight school have all but ceased for Cub flying, but the trusty Cessna 150 is getting a good workout performing night flight training, exposing students to unusual attitudes on instruments, and building dual and solo flight time in tower environments.

For a lot of pleasure-flying pilots, the winter months are spent gathered around a coffeepot in a hangar discussing all forms of flight and flight experiences — real or imagined. On one recent Saturday, a group assembled for the day's discussion. During the afternoon, each aviation enthusiast shared flight experiences that had surprised them and how they handled the

situations. The shared stories were varied and quite interesting. One person's earth-shattering experience can be rather ho-hum when compared to another's, depending on the hours of flight experience each has accrued.

While driving home that evening, I began reflecting on some of the surprise situations I've found myself in during decades of flight instruction. Some recollections bring a smile and a note of satisfaction to my face while others still raise my blood pressure if I allow myself to dwell on them.

CALM BEHAVIOR LEADS TO AN UNEVENTFUL CONCLUSION

Several years ago, Amy, one of my recent students, experienced a situation that would have caused ulcers for many inexperienced or low-time pilots. She was attending college at a school in the eastern U.S. and planned to fly her airplane back to Wisconsin for a long weekend. As is often the case, her planned 11 a.m. departure time came and went and liftoff was still several hours away. Finally, at approximately 4 p.m., she was airborne and comfortably headed west for the four-hour flight. A thin line of thunderstorms had developed along her route of flight requiring a precautionary landing to await passage. Finally, after a nearly two-hour delay, she was again en route.

Navigation lights were on, strobes were flashing, and all instrument lights were functioning. Then — *poof!* Everything went black.

It was now dark, but that was not a problem as she had recently accumulated about 10 hours of night flight. Navigation lights were on, strobes were flashing, and all instrument lights were functioning. Then — *poof!* Everything went black.

If this had happened to you as a private pilot with less than 100 hours of pilot-in-command time, what action would you have taken?

Amy did a wonderful job of following what she had been taught. First, she continued to fly the airplane while turning off every electrical switch and knob. There was no smoke or electrical odor in the cockpit, so she assessed that the problem was not an electrical short. Next, she located her penlight and checked her instruments. All except the turn coordinator and electric gas gauges were functioning. So far, good common sense coupled with previous practical training prevailed.

After rechecking the radio and confirming it was dead (we would all do that even knowing the electrical system was malfunctioning), she tried her cellphone

and was able to call her father. After ensuring she was okay, they discussed options, one of them being to call me, her flight instructor. We discussed landing at the next available airport, but she estimated she was less than 30 minutes from Hartford, the airport where she learned to fly. Rather than attempting to land at an unfamiliar airport, she opted to land at Hartford. As she stated, “I’m familiar with landing at Hartford because you made me do it a number of times without benefit of landing lights.”

Soon we could hear the approach of her airplane, but the overcast sky kept us from seeing anything. She passed overhead and, judging by the sound, turned downwind for a landing on Runway 11. Still unable to see the air-

plane, we watched and waited. Power was reduced, and we could tell she was on final approach. But then full power was added and away she flew. By sound only, we followed her around the traffic pattern. This time power came back to idle, and her airplane touched down in a smooth landing.

Her father and I jumped in my car and headed for the end of the runway. I pulled in behind her, allowing my headlights to provide visible direction so that she could taxi to the ramp and hangar. After shutting down and exiting, she sat on the wing as she explained what had transpired. When asked about the go-around, she commented that she forgot the flaps were electric and thus was approaching too fast to land.

Concerned, but never losing control of her thoughts and actions, Amy performed flawlessly under some rather trying circumstances, especially for a low-time pilot. Her actions made me quite proud!

Would you have handled this same situation with an equal amount of calmness and action?



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STEVE KROG

COMMON SENSE OVERCOMES SURPRISES

First solo flights are a common event for seasoned flight instructors but are always a momentous event for a student. However, the student's first solo can sometimes be momentous for the instructor as well.

It was early evening, about 45 minutes before sunset, the south wind was at less than 5 knots. My student was doing a great job landing the J-3 Cub, having done five consecutive landings without so much as a slight bounce, so I decided it was time he tried a few landings on his own. After completing a sixth beautiful three-point landing, I asked him to taxi to the edge of the 200-foot-wide runway. It was time for me to get out and let him try a few on his own.

After exiting the airplane and having the usual last-minute discussion, I told him to back-taxi and do three good landings, and then taxi back to the hangar. The takeoff was uneventful, as was the traffic pattern flight. Turning final, everything looked good. Then the surprises began!

The touchdown resulted in an enormous bounce, and the student opted for a go-around. One of my final comments before exiting the airplane was reminding the student I have no problem with making go-arounds if the approach or landing does not feel right.

The next attempt looked good, but the landing was a bit worse than the first attempt and again a go-around was initiated. A third landing was attempted, and it was no better than the second. Now I'm beginning to feel a pit in my stomach. What did I do wrong? Did I miss something indicating the student was not ready for a solo flight? Every flight instructor, young or old, experiences this feeling from time to time.

While the student was flying the traffic pattern, I glanced at the windsock. The wind velocity was increasing, and the direction was changing by approximately 90 degrees, adding to the situation.

The student attempted a fourth landing, not only bouncing, but the crosswind caused a problem and another go-around was executed. At this point, I contacted the student via radio and, as calmly as I could, asked how he was doing. He replied he was unhappy with his landings, and the wind was now causing problems.

Still trying to remain calm, I mentioned that the lake effect wind change had kicked in and the wind was now out of the east,

hoping this would be a learning experience. He replied that he might look at landing on Runway 11 rather than 18 due to the wind change, a good decision on his part.

Changing the traffic pattern took an extra minute or two, but finally he was established on the final approach to Runway 11, a much narrower runway than 18. The first approach resulted in a quick go-around as he was much too high, as was the second attempt. Now the pit in my stomach was beginning to grow. What did I do wrong as his instructor?

The third attempt to land resulted in another huge bounce followed by a go-around. At least the student was still using good decision-making and executing go-arounds versus trying to salvage a bad landing.

What I had anticipated taking no more than 15 minutes was now approaching 45 minutes. The sun was setting, and I knew that the fuel was becoming an issue. Now, with my fingers crossed, I watched as the student turned onto the final approach. Power was reduced and all looked good. Crossing the threshold, he began leveling off, flaring, and finally touching down without a hint of a bounce. Instantly, the pit in my stomach dissolved!

As the student began taxiing to the ramp area, the gathering crowd prepared to meet the airplane. Once the prop stopped, the congratulations began. As things settled, I finally had an opportunity to speak with the student without an audience and asked what had happened. He replied, "I was behind the airplane on the first couple of attempts and then the wind changed, so I just did what you told me, make a go-around if it doesn't feel right. I was way too high on the first couple of approaches to 11, but then everything fell into place. The last landing felt good." I asked if he had any concerns, and he replied, "I knew my fuel was getting low and the sun was setting, but it wasn't a big deal. Can I finish the other two landings tomorrow?"

After everyone had left for the day, I sat at the picnic table to unwind. My concern for the student's ability to remain calm was unnecessary. He performed just as he had been trained. Another first solo and a shirttail to hang on the wall! *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.