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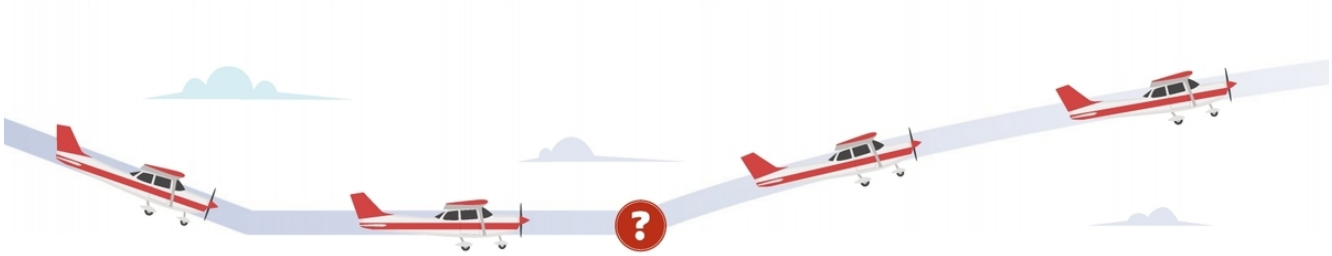

To Go Around or Not Go Around

Training makes the decision easy

BY STEVE KROG

DURING THE PAST SEVERAL months, I have had the opportunity to fly with several individuals seeking an FAA flight review. One of the exercises I often ask the pilot to demonstrate is a "surprise" go-around. At least twice, I have "rescued" the pilot from doing something that could have led to a serious incident! In both situations, we were flying a flap-equipped aircraft.

In aviation terms, a go-around is an aborted landing of an aircraft that is on final approach. A go-around can either be initiated by the pilot flying or requested by air traffic control for various reasons, such as an unstabilized approach or an obstruction on the runway.

While undergoing initial flight training, every student pilot is required to be able to demonstrate a satisfactory go-around. Usually, after several successful attempts, little time is further devoted to this maneuver. Thereafter, pilots seldom practice this maneuver and forget about the go-around procedure unless faced with a situation requiring a go-around. And that is when a potential problem arises. There is an old aviation adage that states: *When facing an emergency situation, pilots do not rise to the occasion, but rather sink to the lowest level of recent training!*

A lower-time pilot is more often going to experience a situation where a go-around should be performed. Limited experience with the aircraft being flown is the most common culprit. If a pilot is being checked out in a different make and model aircraft, nose attitude and airspeed control on final can be a challenge. A pilot becomes quite used to positioning the aircraft's nose in relation to the horizon for the desired approach airspeed when on final. Now, transition into another airplane of a different make and model, and the pilot will position the nose in relation to the horizon to duplicate the sight picture of the familiar aircraft. In doing so, the desired approach speed is exceeded or lessened by 10-15 mph, creating the need to execute a go-around unless the pilot has 10,000 feet of runway to use. Common sense dictates executing a go-around and giving the landing another try.

As a flight instructor, I get the opportunity to fly different make and model aircraft from time to time. When doing so, I always tell the owner I will be making two go-arounds before attempting a landing. This provides me the opportunity to get the feel of the aircraft control responses and establish a sight picture for the final approach. Other pilots may have their own guidelines for flight in an unfamiliar aircraft.

Another situation for creating a go-around is when making the turn from base leg to final. If pilots are distracted for whatever reason, they may overshoot the runway or neglect to consider what the wind is doing to the ground track of the plane. They initiate the turn only to realize that they have overshot the runway and now need to turn back to reestablish the desired glide path. This is the most common situation for stall/spin accidents as pilots will often try to force the turn by overusing the bottom rudder, creating an exaggerated cross-controlled skidding turn. Conscientious, safe pilots will automatically initiate a go-around when faced with this situation.

Numerous FAA designated pilot examiners (DPEs) have shared with me the most frequent weaknesses they see when conducting a checkride, and the base to final turn is a consistently glaring weakness. Frequently, students will make a skidding turn while attempting to hit the runway centerline. The DPEs have all stated that even if students salvage a perfect landing coming out of an unstable approach, they will fail that portion of the checkride.

Wind and weather can also create the need for executing a go-around. There have been times I have been forced to do two or three go-arounds before being able to make a safe landing when flying cross-country and encountering weather. Trying to time a landing, especially a crosswind landing, with a lull between stiff gusts can be nerve-wracking. But remaining patient and calm will generally win out, and a safe landing will result.

Conflicting traffic should also lead to a go-around. When flying with a student and encountering a possible traffic pattern conflict, I always teach that you should assume the other pilot never sees you. Take whatever safety maneuvers you feel necessary to avoid the conflict.

I recently turned a student loose to do stop-and-go landings at a nearby towered airport. The student was naturally nervous, as we all are our first time flying solo under tower supervision. The student was cleared to land number two behind another aircraft. He set up for the landing, reduced power, and extended full flaps. On short final, the controller told him to go around. The other aircraft had come to a stop on the runway and was not moving, nor was it acknowledging radio contact with the tower. The go-around was uneventful, and the student completed six more landings before completing the flight. During the post-flight discussion, the student commented that he had to make a go-around, and it was uneventful. He added that he now understood why we trained for them from time to time.

If I plan to fly into an unimproved landing strip, public or private, I always make a low pass to inspect the strip, and then go around before ever attempting to land. You never know what might be on the runway, so a low, slow visual inspection is a must. A low pass to inspect the runway may save having to explain an incident.

WHAT DOES THE FAA STATE IN THE AIRMAN CERTIFICATION STANDARDS FOR PRIVATE PILOTS REGARDING THE GO-AROUND?

A student applicant must exhibit satisfactory knowledge, risk management, and skills associated with the go-around with emphasis on factors that contribute to the landing conditions that may require a go-around.

But what does that mean?

Breaking it down a bit further, the examiner is looking for:

1. A coordinated stable approach.
2. Awareness of the wind and weather conditions.
3. Recognition of the need to make a go-around.
4. Demonstrating the proper steps for executing the go-around.

If a go-around is the proper action to take, immediately announce your intentions on the radio so other aircraft know where to look for you and understand what you are doing.

A go-around is the proper action when the approach is neither coordinated nor stable or when there is a conflict with other aircraft in the air or on the runway.

Upon recognition of the pending situation:

1. Stabilize the aircraft by bringing the wings to level flight.
2. Apply takeoff power immediately.
3. Transition to a climb pitch attitude for either V_X or V_Y.

Use caution when making the power application. Slamming the throttle to full power can cause engine hesitation, especially in carburetor-equipped engines. Rather, use a steady but smooth application.

Once stabilized in the climb pitch attitude:

1. Complete any checklist items normally found for takeoff. This might include pushing the carburetor heat to OFF if it has been applied for the landing.
2. Activate the electric fuel pump if your aircraft requires it for takeoff.
3. Adjust the trim to prevent the nose from pitching upward when full power is applied.
4. Begin removing the flaps no more than 10 degrees at a time.
5. Maneuver the aircraft to the right side of the runway to avoid conflicting traffic. This is especially important if the go-around was caused by someone taking off in front of you. You will not be able to maintain visual contact with that aircraft if it remains under you, nor do you have any idea what the pilot's intentions might be. Moving to the right side allows you to visually monitor what that pilot is doing.
6. If flying a complex aircraft, now is the time to retract the gear.

There is an old aviation adage that states: *When facing an emergency situation, pilots do not rise to the occasion, but rather sink to the lowest level of recent training!*

Continue the climb to pattern altitude, fly a normal traffic pattern, and execute a normal, coordinated, stable approach and safe landing.

The pilots in the two incidents I mentioned in the first paragraph did not follow this procedure. Rather, both decided to retract all of the flaps before adding power when I "surprised" them with a go-around. That made for an exciting two or three seconds before regaining control of the situation and properly doing a go-around.

The go-around is a simple maneuver, but if it's not practiced from time to time, you can forget the proper procedure, creating a situation that may end up bending some tin. Be a safe pilot and try one the next time you take your airplane for a pleasure flight. EAA

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