



STEVE KROG

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR



What's All the Talk About Proficiency?

Establishing and maintaining it

BY STEVE KROG

PROFICIENCY. WE ALL TALK about it when gathering in informal pilot groups, but what do you do about it when on your own? I've often asked individuals who come to me for flight reviews to describe their proficiency level. The response is usually something along the lines of, "Well, I'm current." Well, I have news for this person: Currency is a long way from proficiency. Unfortunately, this is often proven by the facts coming out of aircraft incidents.

A recent incident report shared with me showed five incidents for the previous month. All five could easily be attributed to lack of proficiency. Forgetting to fly the airplane after making a crosswind landing, forgetting control inputs for a crosswind takeoff, and landing with a hard bounce and then losing control after the bounce were the contributing factors in these incidents.

Ask yourself, "What do I do to gain and maintain a level of proficiency so as to fly safely?" Or better yet, "What can I do?"

Proficiency in this day and age is measured not only in physically going out and flying, but also involves gaining and maintaining aviation knowledge. Have any of the Federal Aviation Regulations changed that might influence how and where one flies? How about

knowing when a temporary flight restriction might pop up in the area where you fly? And what about radio frequency changes?

One of our nearby airports recently changed radio frequencies. The change had been published for nearly a year before becoming reality, and the new frequency was printed on all sectional charts. Yet, more than six months later, pilots were still trying to communicate on the expired frequency. If you are not using any one of several electronic device aviation programs alerting you to these changes, then invest in a current sectional chart or look in the FAA Chart Supplement for current airport information.

Nothing can compete with actually flying to establish and maintain proficiency. However, that cannot always be done. Seasonal weather, maintenance downtime, airport closure schedules, and even physical maladies can keep one out of the airplane. Whatever the reason, it can be quite frustrating. That doesn't mean you need to avoid dealing with anything aviation related.

Local flight safety meetings can be a good source for maintaining mental proficiency. Many EAA chapters host monthly EAA IMC and VMC Clubs and discussion sessions. Each month the chapter is provided with a flight situation that leads to a good discussion on

what is the right or wrong way to proceed in the situation presented. I've had the opportunity to participate in several of these sessions and have found them to be true learning experiences.

Here in Wisconsin, we have the benefit of an active FAA safety inspector and FAA Safety Team director. He can be found traveling throughout the state and conducting evening safety seminars two or three times a week. During the day, he often conducts safety training sessions with flight school instructors.

About two years ago this individual launched a program taking advantage of an online meeting application. The first Wednesday of each month, he emceed an hourlong information session for flight instructors. The subject matter varies, but it is always helpful to flight instructors. It started out small with 40-50 instructors tuning in every month. But it has really grown, and there are now more than 1,000 instructors from all over the United States logging in and participating each month. It is a great way for those of us who work with students all day to keep informed of information we need to know to safely teach and fly.

This program has become quite successful, so it was only natural to take it one step further. Every second Wednesday evening of the month there is now an online open forum for pilots discussing all things related to flight and flight safety.

As a GA pilot, we're all required to obtain a flight review every 24 months. While many scoff at this requirement, it can be quite worthwhile if one takes it seriously. The FAA offers a WINGS Pilot Proficiency Program. Many have heard of it, but few actually use it. One method I've found to be effective is to use the WINGS program to complete the required minimum one hour of ground instruction. There are many different subjects offered, running from a few minutes to upwards of 30 minutes to read and complete. Doing so meets the ground instruction requirement, and it's free. Then finish doing the flight portion with a CFI, and you're good for another 24 months.

Several years ago, EAA built an addition onto the headquarters building in Oshkosh. It's called the Pilot Proficiency Center and is available to all EAA members. The facility consists of meeting rooms, study areas, and, most important, Redbird flight simulators.

Beginning in the fall of 2024, area CFIs were brought in and trained on the use of the simulators. Then invitations went out to EAA chapters inviting members to sign up for a Saturday flight experience. Each Saturday event involves 20 CFIs and 30-40 area pilots. Half of the pilots attend a ground school session while the other half spend time in the simulators.

Participating pilots were challenged with "surprise" engine-out emergencies. A total of three emergencies happened during

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the 90-minute session. The results were truly eye-opening. Whether you were trained years ago or more recently, emergency landings were taught. Most never give it another thought, unless you have experienced one for real. There were two different Saturday sessions, one per month, covering this subject. As an observer, I can candidly state that nearly every participating pilot crashed at least once, and sometimes two or three times, during the sessions.

Proficiency skills easily erode if situations are not practiced with some regularity. Participating pilots commented on how real these emergency situations were and how unprepared they were to act quickly and correctly.

These sessions continued monthly throughout fall and winter.

Subject matter varied. One month the emergency engine loss scenario was practiced and the next would focus on establishing a stable approach. The program is on hiatus

for the summer, but new scenarios are being prepared and programmed in the simulators.

In my opinion, this is one of the best-kept EAA secrets available to members worldwide. EAA chapters might consider organizing a weekend trip to Oshkosh to take advantage of this terrific program. There is a nominal fee of about \$40 involved, but it is well worth it for the opportunity and experience of

spending concentrated time in the simulator. Where else can you participate in a flight for that amount? And not break or bend an airplane when challenged with potential emergency situations?

Pilots are often a strange and independent breed of person. They love the challenge of being able to fly an airplane alone, recognize their skills get rusty when away from flying for a period, but are too stubborn to ask for help or guidance to reestablish proficiency. Look in the mirror after reading this paragraph and see if this description fits.

Staying proficient is the responsibility of every pilot. We owe it to ourselves to do so. Of equal importance is that of treating family and friends to safe pleasure flights. For their comfort and safety, pilots need to establish and maintain proficiency.

From a selfish point of view, I get to fly every day and share the airspace around airports with many other pilots. I wish for the other pilots to be proficient in knowing airport procedures, radio usage, traffic patterns, landing, and exiting the runway without causing problems or safety compromises for others.

Do a little study on your own, consider participating in an EAA sim session, and get out there and fly. These things will all help in establishing and maintaining pilot proficiency. *EAA*

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Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than five 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.

