



Flight Reviews

Good or not?

BY STEVE KROG



ARE FLIGHT REVIEWS EFFECTIVE? Do they prevent incidents from occurring? If you monitor the published incident and accident reports, the general aviation community is destroying a half-dozen airplanes a day it seems.

Over time, the number of incidents and accidents involving general aviation pilots has raised widespread concern. As a result, the FAA implemented measures several decades ago aimed at addressing the factors that contribute to unsafe flying conditions.

The aviation community has identified multiple factors that have led to an increase in incidents and accidents. One noted challenge is the growing complexity of aircraft, which can make it difficult for

pilots to remain proficient. In addition, the development of faster airplanes requires pilots to exercise greater skill and heightened attention during flight. Advances in onboard electronics, while beneficial, have also introduced new operational challenges that pilots must manage effectively.

Access to up-to-date weather information has been another critical factor impacting flight safety decisions. The lack of reliable weather data can impair a pilot's ability to make sound judgments before and during flight.

Furthermore, there has been concern regarding pilots' commitment to maintaining and practicing their flying skills. While many pilots fulfill the legal requirements to fly, true proficiency, going beyond basic legality, has been recognized as indispensable for safe flight operations.

After extensive discussions within the aviation community, the FAA introduced the requirement that every pilot complete a flight review every two years. This initiative was intended to ensure that pilots maintained a minimum level of proficiency and safety awareness. Although the concept of biennial flight reviews was sound in theory, its practical implementation has not always achieved the intended results. In some cases, flight reviews have been treated as mere formalities, similar to superficial annual inspections, and have

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The maneuvers I like to use involve medium 360-degree turns left and right followed by steep 360-degree turns left and right. Without ever looking at the instruments, it is quite easy to feel if the turns are coordinated and if the altitude is constant by observing the top cowling relative to the horizon. More often than not, the pilot will share their dissatisfaction with the maneuver if it is done in a sloppy manner.

From this point I ask for a demonstration of slow flight, first without flaps and then with flaps if the aircraft is equipped with flaps. Silently observing how the pilot establishes slow flight will tell me a lot. If it takes the pilot more than a minute or so to establish, it becomes apparent this maneuver hasn't been done since the last flight review two years ago.

Then it is time for stall performance. Sitting side by side with the pilot brings a hidden smile when I see the pilot reach for the carb

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heat and then the throttle. Their hand is shaking, and the look on their face is one of concern. I think, this is going to be interesting.

With the power to near idle, the nose begins to rise above the horizon, and the pilot's eyes get bigger and bigger. At the first sign of a burble, the nose is pushed over to a near vertical attitude, and power is added as we come screaming out of the near stall configuration.

If the stall was performed in this manner, I will call for a time out and replace my evaluator hat with my instructor hat. When I ask the last time the pilot performed a stall, a sheepish grin appears, and the pilot admits to not having done a stall since their last flight review two years ago.

For the next 10 minutes or so, we do some stalls together, allowing the aircraft to break and pitch downward each time before initiating the recovery. After about three or four stalls, the comfort level rises and the pilot relaxes, realizing the aircraft isn't going to fall out of the sky or enter a spin. Confidence is regained, and I can put my evaluator hat back on.

I like to have an emergency landing demonstrated before returning to the airport. While distracting the pilot with something out of the window, I pull the throttle to idle and state, "Engine quit." Most individuals handle this smoothly, easily picking a field and then setting up to land in the selected field.

Upon returning to the airport, I observe radio usage, pattern entry, and alertness for other traffic. A stabilized approach is mandatory. If the pilot usually makes an approach and lands with two notches of flaps, I call for a full-flap soft-field landing.

General aviation (GA) pilots rarely fly more than 25-35 hours per year. That's about once every two weeks, not nearly enough to remain proficient. I would really like to see GA pilots fly once a week, even if they are only doing a half-dozen landings.

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Think about it from this perspective. If a charter pilot who flies several times a week still needs to undergo annual flight training, then do you think a flight review every two years truly maintains your proficiency — and safety?

I encourage all GA pilots to try flying a bit more often and don't be afraid to ask a local flight instructor to ride along. Unfortunately, there is a stigma when trying to do this. Most GA pilots are middle-aged, but the instructors are in their early 20s. The GA pilot thinks, what can that wet-nosed, green-behind-the-ears kid teach me? After all, I've been flying longer than he or she is old.

This can certainly be a problem. But I'd like to share an experience I had with a middle-aged man who came to us to get current

and then do a flight review. His wife shared with me that while en route to the airport, this man swore he would not fly with someone younger than his own kids and certainly not with a young female. I assigned a 20-year-old female instructor to fly with him.

At first the man was hesitant but finally gave in, and off they went. About an hour and a half later they landed, and the fellow made a point to find me and comment, "I was totally wrong in my assessment. Damn, can that little girl not only fly but teach! I really learned a lot from her." I cannot vouch for every young instructor out in the real world, but I can for the young instructors we have at Cub Air.

As we kick off the new year, let's each make a commitment to fly more, do it safely, and be willing to ask for advice or assistance if feeling uneasy about any aspect of our flying skills. Your airplane, and possibly your life, may depend on it. *EM*

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