

Challenges for New CFIs

Instructing in unfamiliar aircraft

BY STEVE KROG



A MONTH OR TWO ago I published an article about new certificated flight instructors (CFIs). New low-time CFIs are sometimes faced with awkward, safety-compromised positions. I've been there so I know of what I speak.

Times and circumstances have changed since I first began building time by instructing seven days a week. Insurance coverage and liability were of little concern 50 years ago. If the airplane flew and had one engine, I could fly it or at least give instruction in it. I did pilot checkouts or provided dual instruction in Mooneys, Piper Cherokee Sixes, Comanches, Beech Bonanzas, Debonairs, and others back then. And I had never flown nor received a checkout in most of them.

I recall doing a checkout in a V35 Bonanza with a young man who had just earned his private pilot certificate in a Piper Cherokee. I had never flown a Bonanza of any kind, nor had I even ridden in one at the time.

I was able to get my hands on the pilot's operating handbook (POH) the night before and spent quite a bit of time reviewing numbers and procedures. I also had the opportunity to talk with a Bonanza pilot the next morning before the flight. His recommendation was to start our descent into the pattern 10-15 miles out. Otherwise, we would overfly the airport by 10 or more miles.

Sure enough, that is exactly what happened on our first flight. When I think back on those days, my palms sweat and blood pressure rises. I would never consider doing things of this nature today as a new low-time CFI. Unfortunately, today's new and low-time CFIs are sometimes put in similar situations.

For example, a new CFI finds a time-building part-time job at a small airport. They are the only instructor on the field, and the FBO is not an instructor. The FBO begins talking up the fact there is now a CFI on the field, and the inexperienced CFI is quickly recruited to do some flight instruction, but the CFI has never flown anything other than Cessna 150s and 172s. The first person asking them to fly is a middle-aged person owning a Piper PA-28 Warrior. That can't be

much different than a 172, so why not go for it? The flight and many that followed in similar aircraft were uneventful.

Experience and confidence gained, the CFI was open to new challenges if asked. Several days later, an individual came to the CFI needing a flight review. The aircraft was a Cessna Cardinal RG. If you were a new CFI, would you fly in this aircraft? This is a question low-time CFIs often encounter.

What if the situation was the same, but the aircraft was a Cirrus SR22? You've looked at the sleek-looking Cirrus aircraft and thought it would be interesting and fun to fly. As a low-time CFI, would you conduct a flight review in this aircraft?

Before considering either of the mentioned flights, I would want to do some background work. I would like to know how much flight time the owner had in the aircraft, frequency of flight, and how and where the owner had obtained their respective checkouts in these aircraft. Then I would want to know what type of flying they often do. Are they Sunday pleasure flyers? Or do they use the aircraft for medium to long cross-country flights?

Sadly, reviewing the recent FAA published incident/accident reports, there is an alarming number of incidents involving low-time, inexperienced instructors and it is easy to speculate on how these situations happened.

From my interpretation of these reports, it appears the low-time CFI was put in a position that they were not qualified to safely and confidently handle. In one situation, the CFI provided dual instruction in a Cirrus and had little or no time in that make and model of aircraft. Cirrus pilots know that one must be careful when establishing the flare when landing. Too little and the nose touches down first. Too much and the tail drags on the runway, causing potential structural damage. An inexperienced pilot, CFI or otherwise, can do great harm and expense in a situation of this nature.

Based on the daily accident/incident reports I receive, there were at least three situations that probably would never have occurred had a more-experienced CFI been sitting in the right seat.

A young, inexperienced CFI was conducting a flight review with a pilot who owned a complex airplane. The pilot had about 35 hours of recorded flight time in the aircraft in the past 12 months, and the CFI had about two hours in a similar aircraft. The air work was uneventful, but when it came time to return to the airport for a landing or two, the fun began.

If you lack experience in the airplane to be flown, do whatever you can to gain some knowledge of the aircraft. Read the POH, talk to other pilots, and quiz the pilot to see if they really know their aircraft.





According to the CFI, it felt like the pilot was a step behind the airplane as they entered the pattern. Airspeed was too fast, and the altitude was not stable. After an extended downwind leg, they turned onto the base leg. From there, it became a growing problem. Flaps were extended while turning onto the final approach. Wanting to see how the pilot would handle the situation, the CFI allowed the pilot to demonstrate his ability (or lack of) to recognize the situation and then take corrective action. The long final approach was unstable both for altitude and airspeed. Power was added, and then reduced.

Crossing the runway threshold, the altitude was amazingly about right, but the airspeed was 12 knots too fast, a real concern given the 3,000-foot runway. As the airspeed dissipated and the runway continued to disappear, the CFI called for a go-around. The pilot began retracting the flaps before adding power.

Before the young CFI could react, the right wing stalled and dropped, contacting the ground. When the aircraft came to a stop, both individuals stepped from the aircraft physically unharmed, but the airplane was damaged beyond what the insurance coverage would pay.

Another recent accident occurred when the inexperienced CFI was giving dual instruction in a complex airplane. Not being familiar with the flight characteristics, the pilot and instructor were performing steep turns, slow flight, and stalls. Rather than adding 2,000 or 3,000 feet of altitude for safety, the maneuvers were practiced approximately 2,000 feet above ground level (AGL). A power-off turning stall was being performed when a breaking full stall with a dropping wing occurred. By the time the pilot and CFI took corrective action, it was too late. The complex aircraft did not respond to the control inputs like a Cessna 172.

Don't try to be the ace of the base, nor should you feel like a lost soul with no support nor direction. There are many of us "geezers" who would be glad to share experiences and advice. Don't be afraid to ask for it.

A couple of expensive lessons were learned in these accidents. From the CFI's perspective, if you find yourself in these predicaments:

1. Spend more time with the pilot learning more about flying habits and experience.
2. Thoroughly review on the ground the maneuvers you want the pilot to demonstrate. If you include a go-around, then be sure to discuss the procedure for performing the maneuver.
3. If you lack experience in the airplane to be flown, do whatever you can to gain some knowledge of the aircraft. Read the POH, talk to other pilots, and quiz the pilot to see if they really know their aircraft. Can they tell you the best rate and best angle of climb? Do they know stall speeds with and without flap extension? Research the flight characteristics of the aircraft. Whatever you can gather may save your life one day.
4. Don't be afraid to tell the pilot you have little or no experience in that make and model aircraft. It is better to admit this on the ground than it is in the air while wishing you hadn't agreed to this flight!

At Cub Air Flight, we hire two or three new CFIs nearly every year, and they have done most, if not all, their flight training with us. All began in tailwheel airplanes and are proficient instructing in them.

Our situation is a bit unusual compared to many flight schools. There are three of us, Bob, John, and me, who in total have accrued approximately 170 years of flight experience. We all still love to fly and love to share that love of flight as well as our experience with students and new CFIs.

The newly hired CFIs are limited in what aircraft and weather conditions they are allowed to fly. As goals are met and experience gained, the limitations are expanded. It has been a successful formula for Cub Air Flight. We logged nearly 2,000 hours of dual given and recommended 40 for checkrides in 2025. Thirty-six passed on the first attempt. The checkrides covered sport, private, commercial, instrument, certificated flight instructor, and certificated flight instructor instrument rides. The national pass/fail rate is approximately 50 percent, so I think we're doing something right.

If I could offer new low-time CFIs one piece of advice it would be this. Don't try to be the ace of the base, nor should you feel like a lost soul with no support nor direction. There are many of us "geezers" who would be glad to share experiences and advice. Don't be afraid to ask for it. It is not a sign of weakness. Rather it shows your concern for teaching and sharing safe flying. EAA

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