

Quality Flight Instruction

A weak link

BY STEVE KROG



AS A NEW OR *recent flight student, are you getting the quality flight instruction that you deserve and are paying for?*

Throughout this past summer we have acquired a number of primary students who began flight instruction somewhere else, became disenchanted or lost interest in learning to fly, and then decided to give it one more try by coming to Kylie's Cub Air Flight. One student heard me talk at an EAA chapter meeting and approached me afterward. Her experience was one I've heard many times.

Her frustration began with the instructor frequently canceling the flight 15 minutes before the scheduled flight time. This caused problems for her because she was taking classes and had rearranged her schedule to be able to fly.

When she flew, she was never told what to prepare for before the flight. Many times, the instructor would just have her fly around doing little or no instruction. There was seldom a purpose for the flight. Learning to fly is not inexpensive. When you see money being spent with no return, it becomes quite aggravating proving that you are not getting focused, quality instruction.

This young lady asked to come to our flight school and talk about her situation. Before letting her give me an explanation for wanting to change flight schools, I asked to review her logbook. Page after page of flights with little or no purpose nor explanation. Just an illegible signature. It was obvious then what was happening. The instructor needed flight hours to move on but had little or no interest in being a flight instructor. Sadly, the student had been charged for more than 50 hours of flight time with little to show for it.

She is not the first student I've met in the recent past who has experienced a similar situation. One middle-aged student had acquired 55 hours of flight time and hadn't yet soloed. Not having a mentor or even someone to talk to about flying, this fellow thought this must be the norm. With the help of a mutual friend, we got acquainted and discussed his situation. I then conducted an evaluation flight, and it was apparent he was being used for personal financial gain. I was able to solo him in about two hours in a different make and model aircraft. From there, we proceeded with flight

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training, and he took and passed his checkride about four weeks later.

Other students have experienced frustration and have come to us wanting to finish their training at Cub Air. The first thing we do in these situations is conduct an evaluation flight. Then we work together to develop a plan to complete the training and earn a certificate in the most expeditious way. The flight evaluation exposes many of the weak areas in the flight training previously received.

We have both high- and low-wing aircraft in addition to the J-3 Cubs, so the evaluation flight is done in an airplane similar to what they have been flying. The first error is the startup. They set the throttle to about half and hit the starter. When the engine catches, it immediately runs at about 1500 rpm, and they never reduce the power. When asked why they do this, the reply is they have always done it this way. My personal philosophy is that the engine should never exceed more than 800-900 rpm on startup and at idle while warming up. Based on my experience, every time an engine is started with advanced power, it shortens the engine life by at least an hour, if not more.

It significantly raises my blood pressure when I learn how these students have been denied good instruction while spending a lot of money doing so and gaining nothing.

Taxiing is another tell showing the student has not been given good instruction. Why does one taxi at 1500-1700 rpm and then ride the brakes all the way to the runway? The response is, "I've always done it this way. No one has ever told me to do it differently." Where I learned to fly, the fixed base operator was adamant about not using brakes. His threat was if he saw you taxiing using brakes or saw you slamming the nose down and using brakes on landing, the student had to help replace the brake pads at the next 100-hour inspection. We were taught to respect the equipment and use common sense.



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What I've described in the previous paragraphs is quite common, and it tells me the student was never properly taught these simple procedures. Thus, their flying is probably going to lack precision as well. And that holds true nearly 100 percent of the time.

Asking a student to perform a power-off stall with a full break can be an eye-opener for me. The student will look at me, stating they have never done one like that in any previous instruction. Oftentimes they will add that their instructor was afraid of doing full stalls! Consequently, they were taught to recover when hearing the stall warning horn.

I believe the poor instruction problem is twofold. Post-COVID many young men and women opted to pursue a career in commercial aviation without understanding the sacrifices that must be made. If one can get on with an airline, the pay is quite good.

Many of these flight candidates did not understand what it takes and the sacrifices needed to be made to finally arrive in the left seat of a commercial airliner. When faced with the required training and hour building, they approached the situation as something they had to do but did not like doing.

When these individuals became flight instructors to build time economically, it was a needed chore they didn't care to do. This attitude carries over to the students they are supposed to be training. A new student looks up to the instructor, no matter young or old, male or female, and tries to emulate them. Lax teaching creates lax students and lax new pilots.

This situation is proven repeatedly every day. The national average for a private pilot candidate passing the checkride on the first try is barely 50 percent! To me that is a sad demonstration of poor instruction.

The second problem I see is that there are no longer experienced instructors available to mentor new instructors. With the growth in commercial aviation, an instructor can move up to the next career level and fly charter or freight as soon as reaching somewhere between 1,000-1,500 hours of flight time. As a new instructor, who can you talk to for direction or advice if no one is there to do so? It is discouraging not having someone to talk to about an issue with a student, for example.

A frustrated or unhappy flight instructor is an unhappy teacher who then is not giving a student the full direction and attention they deserve.

My chief flight instructor, Bob Lussow, EAA Lifetime 206907, and I have a combined flight experience of over 120 years. He is from the airline side, and I'm from the general aviation side. We've each had to deal with many flight situations and challenges in our respective careers. As a result, we spend time mentoring the six young flight instructors we have at Cub Air. It is an open-door style policy. If they have an issue with anything flight related, they will seek out one of us, and together we talk it through. A frustrated or unhappy flight instructor is an unhappy teacher who then is not giving a student the full direction and attention they deserve.

A student visited me recently wanting to talk about finishing her private pilot certificate. She had four different instructors over the course of one year. The first was a good teacher but left for an airline only weeks after the student had started her flight training. After waiting for four weeks, she was scheduled with a new instructor who played on his phone and talked to his buddies throughout each flight. She learned nothing. A month later, the instructor was gone overnight with no explanation, and a new instructor was eventually scheduled. He couldn't or wouldn't verbalize anything; instead he just looked out the side window. He told her to just fly and do whatever she thought she needed to do. This instructor disappeared after a few weeks. After waiting again, a new CFI was assigned to her. This instructor was a good teacher, but after three or four weeks, this instructor also left for the airlines.

It is experiences like this that I hear every week. It significantly raises my blood pressure when I learn how these students have been denied good instruction while spending a lot of money doing so and gaining nothing.

My advice to individuals wanting to learn to fly is to invest the time in seeking information about the flight school and their instructors. Who is the most senior instructor on staff and how many recommendations have they signed off for checkrides? What is their pass/fail record if they will share it with you?

Good instruction leads to good safe, proficient pilots. Lax instruction generates poor pilots. I would rather not share the airspace with these poorly trained, lax pilots. EAA

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than five decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched what is now Kylie's Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.

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