

Check-out Time Again

By

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It is that time of year again. Time to dust off your skills set. Yes, it is that annual soaring season checkout time. Time to see if you can still fly tow, thermal, and land an engine-less aircraft. Now I fully understand that some of us fly the year round but most of us take some kind of break during the year so put what I am suggesting into action on your next Flight Review, or better yet, go get a “beginning of your soaring season” Checkout when you get back from your break.

While I am sure you will do fine and the club CFIG will wish you well for the season, my challenge to y'all is to not just do the minimum, but push the envelope. Have the club CFIG make you do things you probably haven't practiced or thought about since you last worked on a rating. Instead of making the checkout an annual ordeal to get through, re-brand it into an opportunity to improve your flying skills.

Start off with something basic. Something to get the old juices flowing.

When was the last time you did a wing-down take-off? Not so hard in the 2-33, but try it in the Grob or the ASK and see how you do. The first step you need to do is determine if your runway is suitable for a wing-down departure. Is it wide enough? Are there obstructions on the side of the runway you may encounter if things go awry? If your runway is suitable, and even if your operation ALWAYS has a wing-runner, practice it anyway every now and then. You will be ready for the one time the wing-runner is unavailable. By the way, I would NOT try this in a sailplane with a CG hook, because directional control could be marginal under many conditions.

On tow, practice slack line recovery. I don't mean small bits of slack, but those big “Oh My Gosh!” loops that look like they are going under the wing. Learn how slack can get in the line. Have your instructor put the OMG loop in the line and have at it. Learn to not be afraid of the slack. Great confidence builder, and a necessary skill for that trip to fly in the wave.

Ever boxed the wake in a turn? Try it. Not as hard as it sounds and it is another great confidence builder for your towing skill set. It is also applicable to towing in the rotor.

How about steep turns on tow? Have the tow pilot fly some 30 to 45 degree angle of bank turns.

ALL of these tow maneuvers demand a thorough briefing with you, your CFIG, and your tow pilot.

Remember too that all of these and the following maneuvers should be accomplished at or above 1500 ft AGL.

Once you release, practice the usual sets of stalls, slow flight and turns. These are great things to do. Simulate stalling in the thermal, or on the turn to final. Spoilers out stall practice. Flaps up, and flaps down stalls. Cross controlled stalls.

But once that is done, go spinning. Many pilots are very wary of spins. You should absolutely honor

any placarded limitation prohibiting spinning. But in an aircraft that can be spun, Intentional Spinning should be encouraged. Learn why an aircraft spins. Understand the aerodynamics. (“Aerodynamics for Naval Aviators” is one of the best books around for understanding this complicated subject.) Know your aircraft specific recovery procedures. Knowledge is power.

While parachutes are not specifically required in accordance with FAR 91.307(d)(2), it may be desirable for the two of you to wear them as a matter of course when conducting spin training.

A friend was out in his new sailplane. He was thermalling on a rough day near the field. His wife was watching as he went over-the-top into a spin at 1200 ft. He said the next thing he knew he was looking straight down at the ground. But he remained calm and remembered the spin recovery procedures we had covered in his aircraft checkout. He carefully executed the procedures and he came out of it at 600 ft. He was scared, and his wife was terrified. But he was able to remain calm because he had the training. If he had not had the training? Well....

Time to enter the pattern.

Cover up the altimeter and fly the flight and landing. You will be amazed how little you actually need this instrument if you practice without it. Release when it feels about right. Enter the pattern at about the right height. Set the angle for the approach and fly it. This skill is imperative for an out-landing. You can guess the elevation of the field you are going into, but you do not know exactly. The angle for a normal approach goes with you to any field or airport in the world. You are probably already better at it than you realize. Cut the altimeter apron strings and go for it. And, oh by the way, this is one of the requirements you had to do for your Bronze Badge.

Next landing, cover up the airspeed indicator and fly. It is a great confidence builder because you have all the cues you need to get the airspeed in the ballpark. Wind noise, nose attitude, and control feel are just some of the clues you have. I bet you could name others.

Flying with the instruments covered up. Dangerous, you say. Who says both sets of instruments have to be covered up? Kind of like IFR practice. The one practicing has the vision limiting device on, but the safety pilot does not. But we are in a 2-33, and it only has one set of instruments. C'mon man, if things start to go south, pull the cover off and try it again the next flight.

The “No Spoiler” approach and landing is challenging. Fly it ALL the way around to an actual landing and roll-out. Don't cheat. Even in a 2-33, at 300 ft on final, you can glide almost a mile. Learn how to make drag and control your altitude while maintaining target airspeed using forward and side slips when you need to. (2500 flights and I have had to do one actual, no-kidding no-spoiler approach and landing.) They actually can happen. The only way to be truly ready is to have practiced it.

All of this training requires a CFIG who is proficient in these maneuvers and wants to teach it. And most importantly, a candidate who wants the knowledge and the skill. Whether the candidate wants the knowledge and skill for the greater good or because the CFIG is making them do it, it forces them into areas they do not normally go. Like the old axiom says, change is good and more change is even better.



All of this sounds challenging. Well, if you do it correctly, soaring is very challenging and very rewarding. Otherwise why do it? All of us who soar look for challenges that most others do not. Embrace the challenges and push yourself. You never know when you may need to draw on these skills.

Do the reading, ask the questions, and make your CFGF earn his \$5 for the checkout. I DARE YOU!!

