



Keep the Pedal to the Metal

by Tom Johnson SSF Trustee and SSA Instructor

As the soaring season, for some of us, winds down, it gives us an opportunity to reflect on our flying and activities.

The Soaring Safety Foundation highly recommends that we all use Scenario Based Training (SBT) to make us better pilots. SBT is the concept of using scenarios and situations to allow us to analyze what type of decisions we would make and why. It also allows us to review our flights and dissect them for decisions that could have produced better or different outcomes.

The SSF has hammered home our desire for our community to use this technique. Some may ask why we are at it again?

OSTIV, the International Scientific and Technical Soaring Organization, encourages and co-ordinates internationally the science and technology of soaring and the development and use of the sailplane operations, and the safety and training of pilots. This is achieved by encouraging dissemination of knowledge and information throughout the worldwide soaring communities.

OSTIV has three primary development panels.

The Meteorology Panel brings together leading scientists, pilots, researchers, and engineers in the field of Meteorology for Soaring to exchange information on their latest research.

The Sailplane Development Panel looks at ways to improve sailplane safety and performance and serves as an advisor for EASA certification standards.

The Safety and Training Panel (TSP) collects and discusses safety records from member countries, compares training methods and successes, and develops strategies for mitigating risks through safety and training initiatives.

The SSF has four Trustees and Advisors who are active members of the TSP.

We learned that Sweden is a great success story when it comes to operational safety. In one seven year stretch, they had one fatality. Their training curriculum, high standards, and constant repetition of safety issues have led to this remarkable record. And this record is not due to a lack of activity, they fly at the same rate as our friends in Canada.

Well, because their safety record is so impressive, the decision was made to “take their foot off the safety pedal” and back off. Almost immediately, their accident rate started to increase. It seems that human nature demands we maintain constant vigilance and focus on safety in the high threat environment like we operate in.

This brings us back to our personal end-of-year review. Every one of us has probably done something in the sailplane this year that we wished we could have done better. Think about your experiences and ask yourself why the outcome you got was not the outcome you desired.

For example, at a contest, I landed my sailplane and rolled into the holding area. The sailplane was well out of the way of interfering with anything or anyone. I was hot, tired, and the effects of my accident injuries were screaming at me to sit down. I decided the best thing to do was get my sailplane back to





the parking spot as soon as possible. So, I hooked up and started to move it back. I thought I saw an opening to motor down the runway quickly. I was wrong. I put another sailplane pilot in jeopardy because I was in a hurry. The contest director loudly and rightly admonished my ignorance and arrogance.

How could I have handled this better?

Since the sailplane was not in anyone's way, I should have gone into the clubhouse, sat down, got a glass of water, taken some Advil, and chilled until the recovery was long over.

Why did I do this?

I have never, in my 48 years of soaring, faced a situation like this where my body was telling me to stop, but my mind did not want to. I did not realize my age, physical condition, and physical conditioning did not allow me to do the things I easily could have done five years ago. I now have developed personal plans to deal with my issues should and when they arise again.

I give this example, because it is the kind of hard self-reflection that is necessary to avoid things like this in the future. It can be painful to realize that you have these shortcomings.

As a group, we are all aging rapidly. The ability of our bodies to handle the physically demanding aspects of soaring get tougher each year. This places stress on us that we may not have experienced or thought about. The ability to make good decisions when we are stressed is not easy. And as we age, it gets more and more difficult.

That is how SBT comes into play. We can use SBT to look at the situations that you experience and develop ways to mitigate the bad effects. You cannot change the past but you can use SBT to avoid problems in the future.

Because you are older and more experienced, you have more resources to draw on. Use this to analyze your actions. It can also preclude putting yourself into a situation you really do not want to be in.

Reviewing how things went is not just for pilots. The SSF needs your flight data to accurately analyze what is going on in the community. Please respond to our request for flights and flight time. We get about a 30% response rate from you'all as a whole. The more data we get the better. Even if you have not replied to us for 2022, we can still take your data and add it to what we already have.

So do what the Swede's learned and keep your foot firmly on the safety pedal.

And you know what? After I land and am out of anyone's way, I secure the sailplane and chill for a bit until things calm down and I can safely put my sailplane away. Who knew?

