



STARTING THE YEAR OFF RIGHT

By Gene Hammond

The Soaring Safety Foundation introduced, the "First Flight" program in 2006 and again remind you to take the first flight of 2007 with an instructor.

As we frequently see during a sports event, the coach appears and stresses the need to return to fundamentals rather than "looking pretty." Since many pilots do not have a "coach" (unless you consider the grouchy instructor at your site as a coach), the Soaring Safety Foundation wants to reinforce the need to review the fundamentals learned in the past and use that knowledge to build an even more solid base for flying safely.

Each flight starts some time prior to arriving at the gliderport. Weather reports are available on television as well as several great internet sites listed as links on the SSF site (soaringsafety.ORG) to determine if flying is possible and whether it'll be a sled ride or a soaring flight. It is more than remotely possible that the weather at your house is not the weather at the gliderport, or even what you can expect for the remainder of the day.

Preflight planning includes not only weather, but what type of flight to attempt, the equipment necessary to perform that flight, charts, batteries, drinking water, and a review of the parameters of the glider to be used, including weight and balance data and collecting any necessary ballast to ensure the glider is within limits. Review the SSA recommended signals, especially the towing signal that "there's something wrong with your glider," a fanning of the tow plane rudder. Reports from CFIG's at the SSF FIRC's indicate that too many pilots interpret that signal as a signal to release rather than an indication from the tow plane pilot to check for extended spoilers or other unusual glider problems.

The walk-around inspection should disclose any mechanical problems with the sailplane – no dents or damaged fabric or fiberglass, tire(s) inflated, instrument probe installed, etc – don't forget to perform a positive control check!

Performing the pre-takeoff checklist requires the pilot not to just mouth the items, but to check that each item has been correctly performed. Recent history notes several cases of a glider becoming airborne with the spoilers unlocked and opening during the climb. The checklist is a good time to establish what course of action should be taken when the rope breaks or the tow plane has an engine problem? Be prepared to take immediate action!

With the glider in position and ready for takeoff, recheck the tail wheel dolly has been removed, the passenger has been briefed, and the canopy(s) closed and locked. The wing runner can assist by checking these items and advising you when the pattern is clear. Then, and only then, signal the tow pilot "ready for takeoff." Though this may be done by radio, back up the call by using the SSA recommended signal, moving the rudder smoothly from stop to stop.

While on tow, and especially just before and after releasing, watching for other traffic is paramount. Check the area below and left of the towing path as well as the area into which the glider will be turning. Make it a rule to **Clear EVERY turn!**

This discussion is aimed at the first flight of the year, but applies to all flights. After not flying for several months, individual skill level may be a bit “rusty.” You may notice coordination is a little off – not to worry, with practice it’ll come back quickly. Be quite conservative with all maneuvers - clear every turn - and the landing pattern - (check base and final for other traffic). Get the approach/landing checklist completed early to allow a 45 degree entry into the landing pattern, leaving more time to scan for traffic and to ensure the gear is down (one more time.) Plan to fly a complete pattern to a specific touchdown spot and rollout area. Though doing so is a reasonable expectation, should altitude or traffic not allow a full pattern, remember that the goal is to safely land on the airport, regardless.

As is frequently stated, trim for the selected airspeed and maintain by proper use of the elevator with changes in rate of descent accomplished by varying deployment of spoilers or other drag devices. Wind shear and wind gradient must be considered on every approach and swift action taken to offset the effect of either.

Crosswind landings using a slip were discussed previously (April-2007 SOARING). Once on the ground, remember to steer with your feet and keep the wings level (or nearly so) with aileron until the glider comes to a stop.

Move off the runway as quickly as possible to ensure a clear field for the next landing traffic.

As emphasized in the December issue of SOARING, make the first flight with an instructor. Make the flight and ground discussion with an open mind and stay alert throughout – after all, you’re the pilot in command – aren’t you?

The Soaring Safety Foundation has received several comments regarding the “First Flight” program and add this proviso: If your enthusiasm and instructor availability mean you fly alone on your real first flight, don’t let that deter you from getting with an instructor asap. Also, let SSF know you’ve participated in the first flight program by emailing the SSF (webmaster@soaringsafety.org) listing pilot and instructor names, date and location of the flight, and a picture, all of which will be posted on the website

I don't know how they are supposed to let SSF know???????????

Have a great and safe year in 2007!

