

Re-Currency (an article from Jim Trusty)

Who needs re-currency training? Just the pilots who plan on flying proficiently the next time they go up. And I hate to admit it, but this certainly includes you and me. There is nothing worse than a pilot on the ground telling stories about when they used to fly and how good they were when in reality they are just too lazy or too proud to fly with someone in order to become current again.

The awful truth about flying is that by the time you have completed your Private Pilot training, you are really close to being as good as you are going to get unless you get it in your mind that you can be better, want to be better, and throw some money at an instructor of your choice, to help you get better. Some of our pilot evaluations end with the statement that the person we are flying with has reached their potential. That's not all that bad. It simply means they are through learning and that they have demonstrated this to us by the way they are reacting to the training program.

If you are something less than a "professional pilot," someone who flies for a living, then it is really doubtful that you stay current. And why don't you? Because it is not required. But if airline pilots and cargo pilots and corporate pilots need re-currency training every six months and are required to take regular check-rides from the FAA and their own company check pilots, are you willing to do less and fly? Unfortunately, most are.

I have never met a naturally bad pilot! Quickly, let me qualify that statement. I have met some who could use more training, some who over the years of flying by themselves have developed some awful habits, some who are just plain lazy, some who think the rules are made to be bent, and, believe it or not, some who still fly and don't really want to.

Re-currency in itself need not be a chore, and it is something that you can do a lot of by yourself. The maneuvers required to get your particular certificates and ratings are the ones that you are supposed to remain proficient in forever, with an occasional update. Actually, the maneuvers over the years have gotten more graceful as the examiners and the equipment have gotten older. Spins are seldom done except for instructor candidates, Eights Around and Steep Spirals are all gone, and stalls are done with no loss of altitude. Now that's a drastic change from my training days.

Re-currency simply means flying at very top of your skill level every single time you fly an airplane. Practice, practice, practice. It may require a little reading on your part and an occasional purchase of a new textbook. Rod Machado has a great one out called Private Pilot Handbook that we use for everything from Private through Instructor, and of course, for those of you that missed "Stick & Rudder" when it came out in 1943, it is still available and still the best book ever written explaining what makes an airplane fly. Converse with the instructors at your airport, attend some safety seminars, visit an air show, then go up and try it all out. Feeling rusty? Get a buddy to go with you to a fly-in breakfast or some other aviation event. Change pilots on each leg and critique each other; be hard on each other.

When you think you are close to the top of your game, pick an instructor you think you might be able to put up with for an hour in the air and go flying. Don't waste good money just sitting there. Ask questions. Make him demonstrate. Ask more questions. Pick an instructor who never seems to be completely satisfied with what you are doing. Training and learning have to be continuous.

Getting current is just the first step. Now figure out what you are going to have to do on a regular basis to stay that way . . . and do it. People who don't fly have no advantage over those who can't fly! Don't just sit there and mildew and waste all those hours you put in and all that money you spent learning to fly. It was great fun then and it can be again. Flying has always been a buddy business, a group gathering sort of thing, so get back together with some group and start doing all those fun things again.

Re-currency . . . don't let all this stuff slip up on you either. Every time we catch you gone from the airport for over a week or two, we change the rules or add or delete something that you are going to have to learn or forget. To be on the safe side, you need to stop by at least three or four times a week. Going to be out of town for over a week? Better leave a number where we can reach you. I really don't know how a pilot can consider himself as safety conscious and not feel that they are putting their passengers and themselves at risk on every flight if they are not absolutely and strictly current.

I fly with a lot of people who have simply let their skills deteriorate from disuse. Don't let this happen to you. I also fly with a lot of people who have to take FAA check-rides every six months or so for Corporate 135 or Passenger Part 91, and they tell me that they never do the required maneuvers between check-rides because the maneuvers are not a part of their everyday ritual. They take the easiest, smoothest, quickest route and then take a chance on losing their certification because they can't fly specific required maneuvers for the check-ride. This absolutely does not make sense to me. But we can learn from them, that's for sure. Right?

If you know in advance what is required of you and you have six months to get ready for it, whose fault is it if you do it badly? Worse yet is having to fly with a total stranger, an instructor who in reality probably does not fly as well as you have demonstrated you can fly. Don't do that!

Re-currency is something that has to be done on a regular basis, and the only person who can keep up with your schedule is you. Are you current? Would you like to be? Start with your next flight and let's get some smoothness and anticipation back into your flying. Identify those bad habits that you have let magnify over the years and let's make a mental list of them. Slowly, make an effort to get rid of them. The time needed for correction of a bad habit is the same amount of time it took to perfect it. It's a worthwhile project and those who fly with you will notice it.

I'll see you at the airport! Always remember: Pilots that don't fly have no advantage over people that can't fly. What's your excuse?