

THE HOMEBUILDER'S

Corner

by PAUL H. POBEREZYNY



WE HEAR A lot of words and sayings in aviation . . . many, which if you do a bit of thinking about, will make you wonder if they really mean what they are generally accepted to mean.

Being around aviation folks as much as I am, it is interesting to note some of the following and wonder just how realistic they are:

We have all heard the expression, "It flies like a Cub". It is applied to all sorts of airplanes regardless of size or shape. Does a 747 REALLY fly like a Cub?? And what about that Cub, itself? Is it really that easy to fly?? As compared to??

What about that shop worn handle "The Little Guy" in aviation? Does this refer to physical size, wealth, the type of airplane the person owns? . . . or, does it mean any person regardless of size, position in society or wealth who pays his own way?

Pilot proficiency? I am often asked, in this regard, if the "average" pilot can fly the BD-5. What, really, is an "average" pilot? One who can do quite well flying instruments? One who has instrument procedures memorized, but just can't land the airplane? One who is an expert on "training wheels" but has a long way to go in handling a tail dragger?

And then there's that almost sacred (in some quarters) term "SAFETY". How would you rate the compatibility of, on one hand, the simple courage needed to fly at all and, on the other, an alleged need to put "Safety" ahead of all other considerations in flying? Would . . . or, indeed, SHOULD . . . a person fly if he is completely consumed with a concern for "Safety"?

How much credit do we really give ourselves in aviation? Are we doing well? . . . badly? How do we judge our accomplishments? In particular, what about our safety record? In reading our civil aviation accident reports for a number of years, I don't ever recall a government or even a report from an aviation group saying we had a good year. It always has been "another bad year . . . too many accidents". Well then, what is a "good" year, realistically? We could ground all aircraft and achieve a zero accident rate, but how many of you would call that a "good" year?

For the last couple of years, the total number of civil aviation accidents has stayed fairly constant while the total hours flown have increased. This means the accident **rate** has improved . . . still, these years are called "bad" years. What do we use as a standard of measurement of "good" or "bad" years — a dream, a hopelessly unattainable goal . . . or what?

We certainly are all for encouraging safety, but sometimes we wonder if "Safety" — or a lack of it — is what is wrong with aviation. Critics charge that flying has been slow to catch on with the average man because it is unsafe. How many of you believe the element of risk involved in skiing, motorcycling, snowmobiling, auto racing, freeway driving, climbing the basement stairs and bathing in bathtubs has cut down on these activities? All of you know that these activities kill or seriously injure far more persons every year than flying. Would we not be more realistic to admit that expense and the lack of useability have hindered flying just as much or more than "Safety".

Consider useability of an airplane as it relates to "Safety". As I have so often said, if we auto drivers only spent 50 to 75 hours behind the wheel per year, during daylight hours and on dry pavement only, how good of a safety record would we have? With so little variety of experience, how would we do when encountering fog, darkness, rain, storms and blizzards? I know the results of a little light snow that melts when it touches the pavement in the great city of Washington, D. C. . . . many leave work early, there are "fender benders" and traffic jams in the streets. In Milwaukee or Minneapolis these conditions wouldn't be given a second thought — traffic would move as usual.

Though we don't want to think about it, maybe, just maybe some higher authority determines that some of us are going to have an accident. Did you ever meet a man who **knew** he was going to have an accident? I don't think so. I met a fellow once — just a few years ago at Aurora, Illinois during an air show. I know him quite well — he has flown a lot of different kinds of planes, has sat in them many thousands

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of hours over a period of many years. As I recall it, he was flying a P-64 that suddenly turned into a sled when the gear forgot to come down . . . and all the way down final approach he didn't know he was going to have an accident. When that big three blade propeller touched the runway with a crash and I found myself sitting lower than usual, I never would have believed it.

Safety comes in different packages — design safety, maintenance safety and flight safety. The first two should be a lot easier to comply with as one has the advantage of time to think and time to redo things. But flight safety is something else again. There are so many variables there in the cockpit, less time to solve the problems. Pilot skill, proficiency, ability — call it what you like — are the factors that stand between us and an accident. Just as important — maybe **most** important — is that elusive quality, judgment. Just knowing when to fly and when not to fly is as important as any decision a pilot must make. You can only land an airplane or take it off just so good. And if the altimeter doesn't move while in straight and level flight, you have achieved a particular skill . . . the maximum, if that's what you are striving for. If you pass enough wind across the wing, the plane will stay up, but knowing when to match your skills against the varied conditions of flight — and when not to is perhaps most important to the attainment of a long and successful career for a pilot. Such judgment is, at least in part, an inborn quality that is hard to put your finger on — it certainly can't be legislated — but some of what we call judgment comes from experience. And how is the average man supposed to gain this experience while flying remains so expensive and while his airplane has so little useability?

Regarding the biennial flight check — a good refresher for most of us; but we are beginning to receive reports that indicate a possible gouging situation from a few fixed base operators and flight instructors who are requiring a lot more flight instruction than might be ne-

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cessary and the selling of ground school courses that are not required. We have not received enough comment to really know if this is a national problem or if it is a personality situation. From past experience, we do know that once WE obtain our license, it is not too often that we find ourselves out obtaining further instruction. If you are having a problem in this area, however, let us know.

The household will be pretty empty in a few weeks as son Tom is taking the big step on April 27 . . . marrying a very fine neighbor girl, a nurse named Sharon Matheson.

She will have to get used to airplanes . . .

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