



SAFETYGRAM

March 2016

The vernal equinox is just around the corner. I'll welcome it in a mildly sleep deprived state, after losing an hour of sleep daily in a government-inspired plot to make me more productive by making me get up an hour earlier for no discernable reason. There's also the issue of lions and lambs chasing each other in the month of March; this always seemed like a recipe for bloodshed that no one could ever explain to me. No matter your take on it though, spring is nearly here. That means the beginnings of better but more volatile weather, bird nests, and rusty pilots thrown into that mix.

As the threats of ice and snow diminish, spring is a great time for pilot tune ups. Truth is, most of us just don't fly as much during the winter. The cold weather and holidays often lead to "rust" building up on our skills. Now is a great time to go fly with a CFI and knock some of that rust off – a tune up, if you will. I like to make the most of my dollars if I'm going to go up with a CFI, so I prepare before the flight to make sure I get the most out of it.

I start by doing my homework and then thoroughly planning the flight - and then I fly that plan. My starting point is always to review the appropriate pilots operating handbook and checklist. Aerodynamics is a science (with a lot of math figured out by engineers who are way smarter than me) – the aircraft can be flown 'by the numbers' and will react predictably every time. If you set the controls according to the POH/checklist you minimize your workload and only have to make minor corrections for small deviations. The airplane knows how to fly; you just have to set the controls to get the performance you desire. (You remember Attitude + Power = Performance, right?) Flying by the numbers eliminates the guess work. For every flight maneuver (takeoff, climb, level off, straight and level cruise, turns, airspeed changes, and descent) there is a simple attitude and power setting. Set, monitor, wait, and correct - simple! Reviewing the numbers and thoroughly planning the flight before I show up to fly frees up a lot of brain cells so I can get more out of my time with a CFI.

In addition to needing a tune up on basic flying, spring flying can add the volatility of rapidly changing weather to our list of challenges. That time I mentioned with a CFI is a great time to review all the best ways to get a thorough understanding of the flight's predicted weather encounters (including an FAA approved brief, of course!). Keep in mind, even on a clear day, spring winds can be gusty, shifting, and fickle. While that presents challenges, it can also present opportunities to get some cross wind practice, or even use runways you don't normally see. You may get to view the pattern from a different angle. Of course you'll also need to be extra vigilant in case someone else forgets to check the winds and enters the pattern the wrong way because it's what they're used to doing! (I've had that happen...)

Another thing to keep in mind is that you can encounter drastically different conditions during a spring cross country, even if you only land 50 miles away. This reinforces the need to get a good weather brief. At the very least, if you show up to a cold blustery airport and you took off in just shirt sleeves, you might get pretty cold even with the quickest of pre/post flight duties. Failure to dress for these instances can be uncomfortable. At the very worst, letting unfavorable weather catch you by surprise with can really put you in a bind. If you show up someplace and the crosswinds are out of limits or fast moving storms have moved in, you could really find yourself scrambling - always have a good alternate in mind!

My final note about flying this time of year: always be on the lookout for signs of critters building stuff in and around your aircraft. It never ceases to amaze me how fast birds will start building nests this time of year. Their overwhelming desire to use aircraft engine compartments for this purpose also amazes me. I remember a time after fueling my aircraft that I had to go inside and pay. I was gone for no more than five minutes...and found a bird's nest had been started in my engine compartment by the time I got back. The moral of the story: if the cowl plugs are out and you've turned your back on the airplane for more than a minute...check the engine compartment one more time before you start it up! There are plenty of other critters that seem to like airplanes, but birds are the fastest builders of unwanted things in your airplane I've seen. Then again, some bugs probably have the same level of affinity for vents, drains, and pitot tubes. Vigilant preflight checks are always in order...but even more so this time of year.

Blue skies and fair winds!

EFB Airspace Depictions (Does the GPS screen's depiction match reality?):

<http://pilot-protection-services.aopa.org/News/2016/February/Class-D-Airspace>

CallBack – What would you do?:

http://asrs.arc.nasa.gov/publications/callback/cb_433.html

Marginal Weather Go/No-Go Decisions:

<http://www.aopa.org/AOPA-Live?watch=%7B532E843F-D747-48FE-B653-B6D25B506B97%7D#>

Encouraging Questions – How interacting with passengers can make you better:

<http://www.flyingmag.com/this-weeks-flying-tip-encourage-questions>

Tune Up your Flying Skills

http://flighttraining.aopa.org/magazine/2007/April/200704_Commentary_Presidents_Perspective.html

FLY SAFELY!



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