

Judgment©

Spend a few days thinking over the teaching of judgment and then consulted with my bitter-half. Her contention is that you either have common sense or you don't. I always wondered why I always bet on the "don't" when playing craps. Nevertheless, I do have some strong opinions on the teaching of flying judgment. Other opinions to the contrary, I feel that a student pilot cannot learn the desired judgment with out exposure to the actual situation.

Many aspects of flying require exposure to the mistakes of flying. It is just as important to be exposed to the mistakes of landings as it is to the correct procedures. Stalls are taught as flying mistakes to be avoided. The correct performance is taught as a recognition skill rather than as a performance skill. So do I teach VFR weather flying. A student pilot who has only been told about SVFR and flying in minimum conditions will never appreciate the complexity of knowledge and decisions that need to be made.

Just how much weather I give a student depends upon how he seems to expect to utilize flying. The student who expect to use flying as an efficiency tool in his work needs a different approach than the student who expects to be mainly recreational. I never cease to be amazed by the number of pilots that I give flight reviews to, who have never done a SVFR flight or flown in MVFR. More than a few have been unexpectedly trapped in these conditions with which they had no prior training. A student needs to know where the IFR approach routes and altitudes are then he must know to stay away from that area in marginal visibility.

I have always advocated a student learn to fly in the Fall and Winter so that you get your rating being exposed to adverse conditions and learn to make fly/no fly decisions under guidance. The S.F. Bay Area where I fly has many adjacent valleys where mesoscale weather varies greatly. A pilot needs to learn to read Bay Area weather if an airplane is going to be an effective working tool. A student who learns in the Spring and Summer is totally unprepared for Fall and Winter weather. He simply stops flying, only to find that the hiatus now requires the additional cost of dual to regain proficiency. A very high proportion of new pilots never fly again. Often those, who challenge the weather without training, appear in the evening news.

In teaching to fly the weather I have several specific parameters. First, I always fly toward improving weather. That implies that I fly away from deteriorating weather. Second, I always leave myself an out and usually more than one. I know where I am. I have more than adequate fuel reserves. Last, I am never reluctant to get help. The overly proud pilot who feels that his training has taught him all that needs knowing, who is unwilling to admit being misplaced or lost, is just flying toward future trouble.

I was able to deliver four plane loads of clothing to Watsonville flying VFR after the '87 earthquake while IFR flights were lucky to make one. The weather was MVFR but good enough for an area familiar pilot. On TV the next day I saw the clothes we brought getting wet from the rain. No one thought to fly in tarps.

I teach weather flying by adjusting to the conditions as they exist. I do not fly in 600' ceilings, 2 mile visibility, turbulence, or SVFR for fun. I will and do fly with students in these conditions to teach them how to deal with the situation. I teach that the VOR is very limited at

low altitudes. The ADF less so. The GPS and LORAN are now the future. There is little reason for a pilot to become lost now. Radar coverage is being extended every year to more and more airports. The AWOS weather program will soon be widely available. Things are getting better. However, these improvements will cause more and more pilots to push their experience envelope. Many will be relying on technology when the only aid available will be the Mark-I eyeball. I teach the eyeball system. The eye is always looking for options.

Made a dual night flight with a student where there was a dew point /temperature spread that was relatively close. This meant that fog could form if it became closer. As we went in and out of other nearby airports we made an ATIS check of our home field just to make sure that we would be able to get back in. Was this teaching judgment? I would think so. The ultimate weather option is to land and arrange other transportation. I have done this more than once because of ice, winds, turbulence, and aircraft performance.

The relative safety of a situation depends upon pilot experience and evaluation of the alternatives. Doing a dumb thing successfully skews your judgment. You think you can get away with it again. What ever induced a pilot to perform in such a manner? Success? The 'risk management' process is often so flawed by presumptions of success that failure is inevitable. The pilot is the leading cause of preventable accidents. Prevention is a blend of capability, preparation and attitude. Learning your limits in flight training is what it's all about.

All activities involve some degree of risk. Flying, due to its multi-dimensional complexity, has more than its share. Risk can be managed if the pilot has properly prepared for the flight and is proficient and current in the required skills. Preparation is mental, physical and mechanical. Proficiency requires recent flying in aircraft type and weather conditions. 72% of pilot accidents have occurred where pilots are not trained or current in the conditions surrounding the accident. You can be trained for flying in minimum conditions. Such training deliberately selected are more productive in developing judgment than those which occur as surprises.

Since poor judgment is involved in so many accidents we should know that an unfamiliar situation is a breeding ground for poor decisions. An airplane can be flown into an abnormal situation faster than your decisions can get you out. The critical decision is one of determining what is most important? Risks are often best minimized by landing. Good judgment can be taught and learned. When in doubt, make the safe decision.