

AEROBATICS & AIRSICKNESS

Tips for a smooth flight

Jim Zazas

Editor's Note: It's getting to be that time of year when, in the case of open-cockpit fliers in cold parts of the country, covers come off the front holes and first-ride promises are redeemed. Every aerobatic pilot I know has some degree of uneasiness about causing queasiness from g's or nerves in new passengers. Vicki Cruse ran across an article authored by Jim Zazas for the IAC 19 newsletter that addressed the topic well, including the benefits of getting to know the experience of your passenger and making him or her a part of the flight crew. Jim was nice enough to allow us to share his piece in Sport Aerobatics as a public service aimed at making aerobatic ambassador flights as pleasant as possible for everyone involved. Thanks, Jim.—SW

Discussions of aerobatics and airsickness bring back a lot of memories from the days when I taught aerobatics and other formal flight instruction. Almost invariably, a new student who possessed some level of fear about flying and, perhaps, was prone to air sickness would come to me. I found the following teaching techniques invaluable in helping him assuage his fears and, hopefully, alleviate his airsickness.

I used these techniques then and apply many of the same techniques today whether my student is coming to me for a biennial flight review, a tailwheel checkout, or even a T-6/SNJ checkout. Most currently, I use the same techniques for all EAA Young Eagles flights, but in a modified and, unfortunately, shortened format.

First, I want the flight training to be a fun, positive experience for both of us. I want the student to enjoy the learning experience and have fun while we fly together. Moreover, I want to enjoy teaching the student. I want the student to share her fun and positive flying experience with others, as this type of positive feedback reaps its own rewards much later.

Second, I seek to assess the flying background of my students. I am not too keen as to the number of flying hours they possess. Instead, I am more interested in the type of airplanes they had flown previously, the type of instruction they had received, and perhaps most importantly, the training relationship they had with their instructors. Was it professional? Was it thorough, and did it follow a syllabus? Or, was the training formatted around a pattern ride here and a quickie flight there, just enough to barely meet the practical test standards and then a quick signoff for the checkride?

Third, I want to know my students' previous flight devices training, including simulator training or simulator gaming experience. Had they flown a flight simulator, such as the ELITE, FLYIT, Frasca, Advanced Simulation Systems, etc., or used a home-based computer operating one or more of the popular and FAA-approved simulator programs? What type of simulator program or game program was used? Much to my never-ending surprise and joy, I have discovered many EAA Young Eagles possess great home-based flight simulator and similar gaming skills, and they are able to readily apply this knowledge to actual flying activities.

If my student seeks aerobatic instruction, I want to know the student's background in aerobatics, if any. It could be previous formal instruction, an aerobatic flight or flights in a friend's aerobatic airplane, or even an aerobatic "gift flight" paid by a family member or the student himself. I want to know what sparked his desire to learn aerobatics or flying in general. Was it a movie? A television or radio commercial or magazine article? It could be nothing more than flight in a friend's personal airplane or a few simple wingovers in a J-3 Cub or RV-6 that launched

his desire to learn how to fly or reinforced a desire to learn how to fly aerobatics.

If the student has had any aerobatic training, I want to know if this training started with simple, basic, introductory maneuvers designed to build up student confidence and maneuver complexity over time, thus creating a solid aerobatic training foundation. Or, was the training conducted on the other extreme, a fast-paced program that in reality allowed the instructor the opportunity to build more aerobatic time at the student's expense?

Lastly, I want to know if the student had any formal unusual attitude training or experience. I ask her if she had any formal spin training, and what she liked or disliked during this training. Along similar lines, I ask if she had any fair or carnival ride experience, roller-coaster experience, etc., how she reacted to these rides, and what she liked or disliked about these rides.

In summary, I want to know my student's total flying background. With this information in hand and possessing a better understanding and appreciation of my student's experience, I can better meet his instructional needs and expectations, and create a training program and syllabus that fulfills these needs. I endeavor to build a professional relationship with my student. Concurrently, I strive to alleviate any fears or uneasy feelings he may possess. Above all, I want the student to know I am there for him and that he is my No. 1 priority during all ground and flight training.

With respect to airsickness or discomfort, I have found a person's airsickness comes from a lack of understanding the process of the flight to be taken. I endeavor to take time with any student, any EAA Young Eagle, and any aerobatic student to explain the processes involved in the flight we are about to undertake based upon her

"I try to assuage their fears by making them a participant in my preflight duties."

background and experience level. I explain how the controls move, what corresponding control surfaces move, and what control inputs are required to achieve a certain result or results. I describe what we, together, can expect during the flight and what we, together, can do to make the flight more enjoyable and rewarding. I endeavor to relate certain flight conditions based upon any earth-based experiences.

For example, I explain air turbulence as related to the movement of water, e.g., waves or currents and how they affect a boat. With this knowledge in hand, we expand it to the "sea of air" above us and compare how the movement of air affects an airplane. Often, the result is "turbulence." I want my student to feel comfortable. I want him to enjoy the flight and return for another flight or lesson.

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Clay Smith

Explaining how the restraint system and parachute work helps to relieve nerves.

And, above all, I want him involved and an active participant in making his flight happen. For example, the EAA Young Eagles ground school program taught before any EAA Young Eagle takes a flight is a great start. When my young charge comes to my airplane for the actual flight, I try to go a step further and spend the time reinforcing these brief introductory lessons, all the while building a solid learning foundation. I employ this same format with more advanced ground and flight training students.

Expanding upon this last point a bit further, I get a lot of first-time fliers aboard the big Boeing I fly for an airline. With one or more flight attendants leading the way, passengers come to the flight deck well before departure to share their fears or uneasiness. I try to assuage their fears by making them a participant in my preflight duties. I give them a brief overview of "my office on the 40th floor" and show them what I do, why I move a certain switch or lever, what it does, and when I do it, but I measure and pace what I say. Too much information and the passengers' eyes glaze over, resulting in a less-than-positive experience and doing nothing that alleviates any of their flying uneasiness.

Moreover, I try to get them involved. I hand them a copy of the paper flight plan and show them what information contained on that flight plan is input into the

flight management system, and then I show them how it is done. I let them retrieve the weather for their destination airport through the ACARS (aircraft communications addressing and reporting system) and then explain to them how we "read" (decode) the information presented.

Finally, I demonstrate and explain to them how the other pilot and I, along with our flight attendants, and all the folks on the ground and throughout the airline, are a team that makes this big airplane fly. We all work together to make their flight happen, and any one of us will be most happy and willing to answer any of their questions. In other words, I strive to mollify any fears my passengers may possess and replace these fears with knowledge. I do the same for any new flying student, any new aerobatic student, any EAA Young Eagle or individual making their first flight, and any individual that may hint she is prone to airsickness. I do not profess to know all the answers, teaching techniques, or training standards. There are countless other flight instructors and pilots out there with vastly more teaching experience than this kid, but as a part-time flight instructor, I try to share my flying and teaching experiences with others to build a better, safer flying community. 🛩️