



**STEVE KROG**  
COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR



## Common Sense

Where has it gone?

BY STEVE KROG

**WHILE I WAS SITTING** at the picnic table visiting with my hangar neighbor and dear friend, Tom Hegy, EAA 6849, recently, an airplane landed and taxied to the self-service fuel island.

After shutting down and exiting the aircraft, the pilot added fuel. So far, no problem. But then the pilot left the aircraft in front of the fuel pumps, blocking access. He walked away, leaving his airplane unattended. By this time, another aircraft had landed and needed fuel, but the pilot of the first aircraft couldn't be found. Tom looked at the situation and said the first pilot had neither consideration nor common sense.

We chatted about other situations that demonstrate a pilot's lack of common sense. For instance, I see many of our student pilots push a Cub out of the hangar just beyond the door. Then, after pre-flight, they fire it up and blast the hangar full of dust and debris. After seeing this, I like to meet the student at the flight's conclusion

and hand them a broom. You blew the hangar full of dirt; you get to sweep it out now. These students never again start the airplane without first turning it 45-90 degrees away from the door.

When parking an airplane after landing at a fly-in, we frequently see pilots taxi just beyond the last parked aircraft in the line. Then, they hit the brake and run the engine up to about 2200 rpm in an attempt to turn the airplane 90 degrees. While doing this, the poor airplane they are parking next to is getting blasted with every piece of dirt, grit, and grass being kicked up by the prop blast. No common sense demonstrated here.

This whole situation could have been avoided in two ways. If the airplane is heavy, like a Cessna 182, taxi about 50-60 feet beyond the last airplane in the parking line, make a 180-degree turn, taxi back toward the last airplane, and then turn 90 degrees to align your airplane with the others in the row. No prop blast hitting other

airplanes, and the person parked next to you will be your friend. All that is required is a bit of common sense.

If you're flying a lighter aircraft, such as a J-3 Cub or something similar, taxi about 25-30 feet beyond the last aircraft in the row and shut your engine down. At this point, it is quite easy to turn the aircraft 90 degrees and push it backward into place. This action is nothing more than using common sense, but many must have skipped the day common sense was taught in school and gone to the airport.

After parking their aircraft, one of the next demonstrations showing lack of common sense is positioning the propeller. The airplane looks best if the propeller is positioned at the 10 o'clock and 4 o'clock position. Here again common sense goes out the window. The pilot, while standing in front of the airplane, will grab the prop and swing it counterclockwise in the same direction as if the engine was running. This is a potentially dangerous move as the engine could easily fire. What if the magneto switch was left on? Or

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a magneto had a broken P-lead? Or there's a loose wire in the magneto switch? All these situations make for a "hot" engine that could fire with minimal movement on the prop.

Ask me how I know this, and I'll tell you I've experienced a hot prop twice in my career. One time it was due to a faulty magneto switch, and the other occurred due to a broken P-lead. Thankfully I still have all my appendages. When positioning the prop, always rotate it clockwise (or counterclockwise if it's British or Russian and turns the "other" way). Learn and practice common sense. It may save a limb or even your life.

The other day I was giving dual instruction to a student who is nearing readiness for the private pilot checkride. They were wearing goggles and flying on instruments. While maintaining level flight, I asked the student to tune in a nearby VOR station and show me how to track to it. All was going well. I then requested they tune in the VOR to track outbound on the 030-degree radial after station passage and time the outbound leg for two minutes and descend to

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2,500 feet while doing so. At station passage, the VOR was reset for the outbound leg. Then I noticed the student fumbling with the panel clock, but it was obvious they had no idea how it worked. I asked if there was a problem, and the reply made me burst into laughter. The student had no idea how to read a standard face clock and had always relied on a cellphone digital clock. Common sense was nowhere to be found.

I'm not sure just when common sense ended and a lack of it began. I recall always having a hammer or a wrench in my hands while growing up. We acquired common sense through trial and error. Using large nails for axles on a go-kart and then rolling down a steep hill ended by losing a fair amount of right-side skin when a wheel fell off. Common sense taught us to not use nails for axles for future kart builds. Most young people today have never had that kind of experience.

When I was about 16, I wanted to buy a car. My father made it clear that before I could have a car of my own, I had to be able to take one apart, put it back together, and make it run. I was not happy with the demand but purchased an old Ford and proceeded to disassemble the engine. I learned a lot, and when I ran into a roadblock, I could always go to my dad's friend, an auto mechanic, for advice. I learned a lot through trial and error, gaining experience and common sense.

In today's world, most student pilots under the age of 30 have little or no concept of engines, systems, or the tools needed to work on them. I was quizzing a new 18-year-old student several weeks ago and asked how many cylinders and spark plugs the Cub engine had. Remember, the cylinders and spark plugs are exposed on a Cub. The student gave me a puzzled look and said they had no idea. This was after completing three flight lessons.

Another situation I've mentioned previously was when a certificated private pilot had parked his airplane directly in front of the self-service fuel island. One of the CFIs at Cub Air was also needing fuel. She observed the pilot for a few minutes and could see he was quite perplexed. When she offered to assist, he quickly accepted, and while she helped refuel his airplane, he mentioned that he had never done this before. It had always been done for him at his home base airport.

An area designated pilot examiner (DPE) dropped by recently, and our discussion quickly led to the subject of common sense and the lack of same. He shared some of his recent experiences. While conducting a private pilot checkride, he had the student deviate to a nearby airport. The student, after some uncertainty, was able to figure out how to enter the pattern and land uneventfully.

When it was time to depart, he and the student taxied to Runway 27, the active runway being used by others at the time. While sitting behind the "do not cross" yellow lines, the student began trying to tune the radio. Several minutes passed before the DPE questioned the actions. The student commented he was trying to find the automated weather observing system (AWOS) frequency for said airport

as he was in search of the surface wind direction to determine direction for the takeoff. The DPE suggested looking at the map and the airport information.

It was then the student realized there was no AWOS and was at a loss for selecting a departure runway. Finally, the DPE asked if there might be some other way available to find the wind direction. After a moment of confusion, the student remembered there was a windsock on the field, looked at it, and determined Runway 27 was the best option.

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Once the takeoff direction had been determined, the student began trying to adjust the altimeter. Again, the DPE stepped in and questioned his actions, to which the student commented he was trying to figure out the barometric pressure. If there is no means for obtaining this information via an AWOS, the DPE asked what the best method for adjusting the altimeter before takeoff might be. A minute or two passed and then the light bulb went off — set the altimeter to field elevation!

After reading these examples, I do believe we have a twofold problem on our hands when it comes to common sense, especially with younger students. First, many of these individuals have spent the early years of their lives tinkering with computers and such rather than being in the garage tinkering with mechanical things. Outdoor activities have also been limited.

There was never a need to learn about wind direction and velocity. Common sense comes from doing things and learning from them. This part of maturing was, sadly, never experienced.

The second problem is much more important when it involves aviation. Knowing these students lack experience and common sense, I think it is the responsibility for instructors to help them develop those traits. Sadly, many of today's instructors grew up in similar environments and have never developed common sense of their own when it comes to flying an airplane. So, how can it be taught if both student and instructor lack it?

Today many flight training facilities train students to check the box and perform according to arbitrary numbers. They don't discuss what to do when a "what if" situation develops. Should an engine problem occur and we need to maintain true slow flight to get the airplane safely on the ground, how do we know what true slow flight is if we were trained to perform it 10 knots above true slow flight airspeed?

Lack of common sense when dealing with flight will get someone hurt, or worse. Let's all try to think through situations and make flying safer. *EAA*

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**Steve Krog**, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than five decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.