



STEVE KROG
COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR

Be a Part of the Solution

Bringing commercial pilots back to GA training

BY STEVE KROG

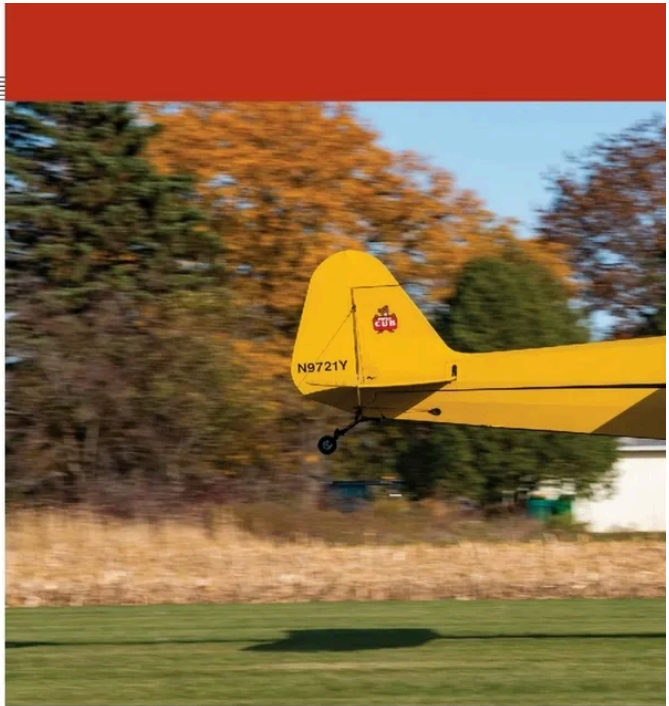
WHAT IF WE WERE ABLE TO DEVELOP an easy but safe path to bring previous flight instructors and their experience back into the GA flight training program? Thousands of today's commercial pilots came up through the time-building ranks via flight instruction. They acquired experience and knowledge devoting three or four years of their lives to the trade. Now all that's going to waste as an unshared resource.

In the past several issues I have taken the quality of flight training to task. The rapid growth of flight and the flight training industry has exposed a weak link in the system, most likely resulting from the demand for many more new pilots. The result is that new pilots and student pilots aren't receiving the quality and experience of instruction needed to turn out good, safe low-time pilots.

Today the average time a newly certificated flight instructor (CFI) spends teaching and accruing the minimum flight hours to advance is 12-18 months. That is also about how long an instructor needs to gain the experience needed to be a good teacher. And then they are gone — only to be replaced with a new CFI with no experience.

I'm not blaming these new CFIs. They just don't know yet what they don't know because their training was somewhat limited to checking the boxes.

What if we tapped into the wealth of knowledge being held by the thousands of commercial pilots? This body of knowledge could help mentor young, inexperienced instructors.



Experienced CFIs weren't available to share and demonstrate situations the new CFI might experience. Consequently, many new CFIs are apprehensive about teaching stalls, for example.

I had a frustrated student contact me some time ago. He explained that he had been taking flight lessons for more than a year, had logged well over 30 hours of flight time, and still hadn't soloed. Digging deeper, I found out he had flown with three newly certificated CFIs during that time.

He logged about 10 hours with the first instructor and was ready for his first solo flight. He showed up for his next lesson only to find out the instructor had left. Two months later, he was invited back to the flight school to continue with his training. He found out that he was to be this instructor's first student. Not knowing what to do, the CFI started from the beginning, treating the individual as a brand-new first-time student. Ten hours later, again approaching the time for the first solo flight, the instructor left. Several more months passed, and the whole thing was repeated with a third new CFI, again leaving with no notice when the student was ready to solo.

At this point, the student contacted me and asked for my help. I invited him to the airport the same day and soloed him after conducting an evaluation flight.

Situations like this happen frequently in today's world. It creates frustration for the student and adds considerable expense to the cost of training. I'm sure the aviation industry has lost many potentially good pilots as a result.

THE SOLUTION

What if we tapped into the wealth of knowledge being held by the thousands of commercial pilots? This body of knowledge could help mentor young, inexperienced instructors.



I can't take credit for this idea. An airline pilot friend contacted me and suggested it. He keeps his flight instructor certificate current and does some limited instructing on his days off. He mentioned this idea to commercial pilots with whom he flies. All thought it was a good idea. However, several of the pilots had let their CFI currency lapse and were leery about having to take another FAA checkride to get it renewed.

I mentioned this concern with our area FAA safety inspector. He said the reinstatement was considerably simpler than the initial CFI checkride and nothing to be feared. Here's the path he suggested to a pilot wishing to reinstate their CFI certificate.

Since many commercial pilots have been away from operating aircraft in an FAA Part 61 and 91 environment, these regulations must be reviewed to make sure you are sharing correct information if mentoring a CFI or even a student pilot.

Next, visit the FAA.gov website and download the Airman Certification Standards requirements for the private and commercial certificates. These new documents replace the old Practical Test Standards from years ago. These documents outline — in detail — the requirements for a student pilot to pass the checkride. You may chuckle to yourself, thinking, "I haven't done any of these maneuvers in years!" But it could be both fun and a new challenge renewing your skills since you have been flying heavy iron for a few years.

There is another great resource for acquiring information, and that is to visit the FAA Safety.gov website. Here you'll find an entire library of information to expedite your reeducation of GA flying. Once on this page, click on Courses found in the top left area of the screen. In addition, there are several courses and activities found under the WINGS program. The website is somewhat confusing, but the information is good.

Another good way of getting up to speed again is to assist in teaching a ground school. Taken seriously, you'll be doing a lot of reading and self-study to stay ahead of the students. I chose this path years ago when I got back into instructing full



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time after a career in marketing. It was amazing to me how much I had forgotten but also how quickly it came back. To stay proficient, I teach a ground school about once each year. It helps me remember what I may have forgotten.

You may or may not be familiar with the FAA Safety Team (FAAST). Over the past decade, the FAA has recruited flight instructors and knowledgeable aviation enthusiasts to help promote aviation safety with an emphasis on general aviation. These recruits provide raw input and help edit programs. In turn, they are provided with these materials and visuals in support of the safety seminars FAAST representatives conduct in their geographic area.

We have conducted several of the seminars at my flight school, and all have been fun and well attended. I suggest that you investigate this program if you're interested in becoming a mentor to young instructors and students.

Many "seasoned" pilots came up through the ranks by first earning all the necessary ratings, then living on mac and cheese for a year or two while building time as a flight instructor and making next to nothing. I remember those days quite well. But there were always older, more experienced instructors and charter pilots I could turn to for help. They provided me with a wealth of knowledge gained through their own experience. I didn't realize at the time how valuable it was to have associates like that guide me. (Thanks, Jim Christopherson!)

Today, there are no mentors in most flight training operations, whether it be Part 61 or Part 141. Where do these new young flight instructors go for advice? During this year's EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, I visited some of

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the university flight school displays. My purpose was to informally find out what kind of experience their team of CFIs might have. It made little difference from one school to another. The oldest, most experienced flight instructor on their respective staffs was 23 years old.

I'm not chastising the school programs here. They are all good, successful programs in their own right. What I am trying to do is bring attention to a serious weak link in our system for training new young pilots. There are no "go-to" people the young instructors can turn to for help and suggestions.

We need to somehow improve our system for flight training to make knowledge and experience more readily available to the young, low-time instructors. One possible way of doing so is to get professional pilots back into GA and share your judgment, experience, and knowledge.

Like the old saying goes:

"Good judgment comes from experience. And experience? Well, that comes from poor judgment!"

Let's do our part to pay it forward and eliminate poor judgment by sharing knowledge and help make aviation fun and safe. **EAA**

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than four 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.

