

FLYING LESSONS for July 8, 2012

suggested by this week's aircraft mishap reports

FLYING LESSONS uses the past week's mishap reports to consider what *might* have contributed to accidents, so you can make better decisions if you face similar circumstances. In almost all cases design characteristics of a specific make and model airplane have little direct bearing on the possible causes of aircraft accidents, so apply these *FLYING LESSONS* to any airplane you fly. Verify all technical information before applying it to your aircraft or operation, with manufacturers' data and recommendations taking precedence. You are pilot in command, and are ultimately responsible for the decisions you make.

If you wish to receive the free, expanded *FLYING LESSONS* report each week, email "subscribe" to mastery.flight.training@cox.net.

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This week's lessons:

It had been 10 years since I last flew as sole manipulator of the controls (SMOC) in a tailwheel airplane. So I was excited but also a little trepidatious, climbing into the front seat of a 1946 Aeronca 7AC Champ. And...heel brakes? That was a first for me. But I was in great hands, under the skilled tutelage of long-time CFI, friend and [Twin&Turbine Magazine](http://www.twinandturbine.com) editor LeRoy Cook for my reintroduction to tailwheel airplanes.

See www.twinandturbine.com

The preflight inspection was thorough, with LeRoy's wisdom evident: Paraphrasing a comment attributed to many, he reminded me "It's a simple airplane. It can *just barely* kill you."

"Focus on the things that can get you," he said. "Fuel, oil, the engine, the landing gear, and the controls." So as he led me around the white-fabriced Airknocker our inspection honed in on these "gotcha" items.



Simple flying fun, however, was our objective. Satisfied the Aeronca was airworthy, I buckled in and LeRoy gave me the simple checkout: throttle, magneto switch, fuel shutoff, trim, carburetor heat, brakes. A mostly-original, 65-horsepower 7AC without electrical system or starter, we briefed and then performed the "propping" procedure: a couple squirts of fuel through the primer, switch OFF, and LeRoy pulled the propeller through a couple of rotations.

Throttle full idle, stick back, hard on the heel brakes (how awkward that felt!), then CONTACT: magnetos both ON, LeRoy flat-palmed the laminated wooden propeller and threw it downward as he simultaneously spun himself away from the aircraft. No joy.

The prop had stopped horizontally, in the "prop"er position, so repeating CONTACT he again flung the varnished propeller and the engine caught. I was hard on the brakes, the throttle was idle, and the little Continental was four-banging away as oil pressure came up. LeRoy came the long way around, walking well clear of the nose to the right wingtip, then toward the cabin. "Always come at a running airplane from behind the wing," he sagely commented as he climbed into the Aeronca's back seat.

My tailwheel instincts came right back (I'd owned a 1946 Cessna 120 early in my flying career), and I decided the awkward geometry of applying heel brakes ("point your toes on the rudder bars," LeRoy advised) made it easy to follow the dictum to taxi, take off and climb as if you have no brakes at all (a bit challenging in airplanes with no steerable nose- or tailwheel). What I used to call the "dancing on the rudder pedals" came right back—stomp to get the airplane turning in the right direction, then stomp opposite rudder *before* pointing in the direction you want to go to stop the turn on your desired heading.

The standard run-up and engine instruments check ("keep the stick back, and the brakes

barely hold at run-up power”), then CIGARTIP:

- Controls FREE AND CORRECT
- Instruments CHECKED
- Gas ON
- Altimeter SET TO FIELD ELEVATION
- Run-up COMPLETE
- Trim SET
- Interior SEAT BELTS AND DOOR SECURE
- Pattern CLEAR OF OTHER AIRCRAFT

...and we were off.

Takeoff, climb, some sightseeing and three full-stop trips around the pattern and my time was up, other commitments awaiting us both. “Don’t stop flying until the airplane is in the hangar,” LeRoy told me as I worked the rudder back and forth to maintain alignment, helped with adverse yaw steering from the ailerons through the stick. LeRoy was “always at the ready,” he told me, but never felt he had to add to my control inputs. It really did come back to me.

FLYING LESSONS takes a weekly look at aircraft accident reports, reminding readers (and me!) about the hazards that exist when flying an airplane, and things to remember that will hopefully help us avoid the unfortunate experiences of others. It’s easy in the weekly morass of unofficial, Federal, NTSB and international accidents reports to forget that we may often fly for business or long-range transportation, but almost all of our flying is done in part because it’s something we enjoy—flying is *fun*.

My brief reintroduction to tailwheel flying is also a reminder—that there is great enjoyment in aviation, and when done correctly is exceedingly safe. Winds were light. The airplane passed inspection. Fuel and oil were sufficient for our flight. We briefed before we did, then we checked to be sure we hadn’t missed anything...even in a “simple” airplane like the Aeronca Champ. Potentially deadly tasks like hand-starting an engine, and approaching and boarding an airplane with the engine running, were safe because we followed standard procedures that were developed from decades of learning **FLYING LESSONS** from the unfortunate experiences of others.

So when you read future FLYING LESSONS, do so in the spirit in which they are intended—not to generate fear of what can go wrong in an airplane, but to increase your level of safety and enjoyment by reinforcing the risk management skills we may have learned but in our haste forget, or worse yet, never learned at all. Expanding slightly on an old “tag line” from **FLYING LESSONS Weekly**, if you fly safely, you’ll have more fun.

Questions? Comments? Let us know, at mastery.flight.training@cox.net



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The [July/August 2012 issue of FAA Safety Briefing](#) also explores the fun side of personal flying. Articles focus on many of the interesting activities and opportunities pilots have to keep the spirit

of fun and adventure in aviation alive and well, including:

- For the Sport of It
- Beyond the \$100 Hamburger
- Flying Just Because

Take a look at the summer issue of *FAA Safety Briefing*.

See http://www.faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2012/media/JulAug2012.pdf

Readers, what do you think? Mastery.flight.training@cox.net.

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Personal Aviation: Freedom. Choices. Responsibility.

Thomas P. Turner, M.S. Aviation Safety, MCFI
2010 National FAA Safety Team Representative of the Year
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