



The worst mistakes that Pilots make / Jim Trusty

Posted on Friday, 01 July 2005 @ 01:05:00 CDT by compilots

FROM THE LOGBOOK: THE WORST MISTAKES THAT PILOTS MAKE . . . MY EXPERIENCE WITH HIGH TIME CABIN-CLASS PILOTS

You may want to ask: How can anyone at this level of aviation possibly make mistakes? Let me count the ways. To begin with, pilots make mistakes just like any other professional we deal with on a daily basis simply because they are human. They forget. They start believing their own press releases (and sometimes write them, too).

They get comfortable with their past performance. They get complacent about the task at hand. They exceed their personal minimums. They rely far too much on newfangled ideas and technology. They let uncontrollable outside influences get them behind the power curve. Finally, and the most dangerous of all, are those that think of themselves as the "Hot Shot" or "Ace of the Base."

Pilots make mistakes by simply forgetting. *What was the procedure they last used to avoid the problem they find happening once again? And right now! As they are progressing forward at over 200 knots, they have to put the brakes on their mind so they can simply think. In other words, at this very moment they are totally unprepared for this particular problem to rear its ugly head.*

Whatever happened to them in that other long ago flight did not scare them enough to make an indelible impression on them that would speed up their thought processor and allow them to have a positive reaction to this present malady. They forgot!

They start believing their own press. *They listen too closely when someone rides with them and tells them what a great flight it was, and they certainly listen when someone says they might consider a career with the "biggies" if their present career choice should suddenly go down the drain. They arrive at their destination on time and certainly ahead of all those non-pilots that had to take commercial flights to the important meeting. In their own minds, they become bulletproof.*

They get too comfortable with their past performance. *This usually turns out to be a major problem at any level of aviation, especially when something really stupid happens. It is usually the problem when we are told that some type of "pilot error" causes over 90% of all aviation accidents. They are usually very comfortable with their level of training, airmanship, aircraft knowledge, and certainly their expertise in getting from point "A" to point "B" and landing safely. These pilots use the words "routine" a lot.*

They get complacent. *This is the easiest of all faults to fall into and the hardest to recognize and repair. You must first be the one who recognizes it and devise a plan of action that will not only cure it but possibly keep it from recurring. Some symptoms to look out for? The same route or flight on too regular a basis, with the same crew and the same airplane and the same old predictable weather. Starting to hit a nerve now? Same teacher or flight instructor at the same interval of time. Same destination and runway and cargo. It is predictable to the highest degree. It is also an erosion of all your skills and training if you let this happen to you. Just one tiny little surprise can get you in so much trouble that you might not be able to work your way out.*

They exceed their personal minimums. *Personal minimums are something that we as pilots in command set for ourselves. It is generally based on some scale or formula that we devise to rank or rate our previous performances. If any one thing changes in this flight that is one iota different from that personal minimum flight of sometime back, then very quickly we find ourselves behind the power curve.*

Personal minimums should be improved on or at least added to on each and every flight. Don't mistakenly set your personal minimums too low in order to minimize the importance of the task on your shoulders. Write down what you feel are acceptable minimums that you have set for yourself and then discuss them with another pilot you trust or your personal flight trainer.

Get a second opinion. It just may be that you are capable of doing a lot more than you have been doing. Even worse, you may have overrated yourself to a level that you are unable to achieve on a regular basis. That can be very dangerous, and it is most easily spotted by you. No one knows you better than you.

They rely too much on new technology or ideas that can prove deadly without a backup. That dreaded Global Positioning System, or GPS if you will, has made a lot of pilots go bad, but we have lived through a lot of avionics changes over the years and survived. What we need to remember and use is the proven systems that have taken care of us for a lot of years, VORs, NDBs, Loran, time and distance, speed, wind correction, and certainly, "Prior planning prevents ---- poor performance."

The cockpit is no place to start planning your flight. After the engines fire up, you need to be on your way and on the instruments, not head down in the low altitude charts or the approach plates. Fly the airplane!

They let uncontrollable outside influences get them behind the power curve. Love life or lack of one, problems at home with spouse or kids, sickness, personal health problems, money, job, death, age—you simply cannot allow yourself to be anywhere but in that seat with all your thoughts on the job at hand or you are about to get into some serious trouble. "Can't chew gum and fly an airplane," is really a true statement.

I personally think that flying an airplane requires every bit of attention that you have to offer. Others may notice before you do that the power curve has not only caught up to you but is slowly passing you on the wrong side of the flight. If you are not mentally ready to devote your entire mind to taking this flight, don't go.

They think of themselves as the "Ace of the Base." In some instances they may really be the best pilot in the fleet, know an awful lot about aviation and airplanes, and along the way received the best aviation education. In reality, this can be the ticking bomb of the entire operation and if they go down they could take you with them. If something serious ever did happen to "Hot Shot," many times they crumble under pressure.

They take unnecessary chances, stress the other team members and the equipment, and in the end cost the company much more than they could ever have been worth. They also make it hard on all the other players as they try to do their jobs. You'll be able to recognize this person very quickly. They can fly anything better than anyone else, have been everywhere and done everything, and deep down know that this show-off attitude can someday hurt them or someone else. Be very wary of "Hot Shot." The smiles they see when walking by a group of pilots may not be happiness at their arrival but joy that they are leaving.

Sometimes the very worst mistake pilots make is simply never learning that the airplane is really flying them. All they are doing is simply setting the knobs and going for a ride in a beautiful cabin-class aircraft. It is the most beautiful experience anyone can ever undergo (if aviation is your life and love). Prepare well for this experience and there will be many more trips for you. Do it wrong and you might get stuck with the tab.

So most of the mistakes listed above occur when pilots display the following five distinctive attitudes identified by the Federal Aviation Administration: (1) invulnerability; (2) anti-authority; (3) impulsivity; (4) Mr. Macho; and (5) resignation. Don't let yourself fall into these traps by simply being aware of them. Know your enemy! And remember—"If all else fails, fly the airplane!"

There are certainly a lot of great flight instructors out there to help you stay at maximum performance. Try to find that certain one that exceeds your needs and is not afraid to tell you what has to be done. Learning and re-learning how to fly is a constant battle; at least it's supposed to be. How is your flying? Are you completely satisfied with it? Remember, I said completely. If you can afford to fly that aircraft you are in, you can also afford good training. In fact, you have to. If you are unable to find that certain someone who will work with you on a regular basis, call me. I might know someone in your area.

I'll see you at the airport. Come up and say "hi."

-----+-----

Jim Trusty was the FAA/Aviation Industry National Flight Instructor of the Year (1997) and the first-ever Southern Region Aviation Safety Counselor of the Year (1995). He still works full-time as a Corporate Pilot/ Flight & Ground Instructor/ FAA Aviation Safety Counselor/ National Aviation Magazine Writer at MQY in Tennessee. You have been reading his work since 1973 in over 120 publications worldwide. He appreciates your comments.

Do you have a comment or question for Jim? Click here: <http://www.compilots.com/forum16.html>