

Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

There is a rumour that my favourite phrase is, 'Fly the plane, fly the Plane, fly the Plane!' and it may be the most uttered phrase in my week.

It is one of those little-known facts of life, that those smooth landings only come when pilots do not actually land their airplanes. The secret is to fly the plane. The art of landing is *not* to land! Does all of this sound confusing? Well, if you consider the fact that what I call 'landing' is *the controlled flight of an aircraft within the ground effect, with gradual, controlled deceleration and associated loss of lift until the full undercarriage has kissed the ground and the machine slowed to a safe taxi speed;* then you might have a better grasp of the concept.

You see I have NEVER told a student to 'land the plane'. In fact, more than ever, you need to *fly* the plane, especially once the main wheels have touched down and you are slowing down, waiting for the nose to nod softly, and allow the wheel beneath to make contact before gently applying brakes, if necessary, as you roll out on the runway. In essence, landing is something that the plane does or, put more simply, the pilot does the flying and the plane will land itself. Simple really, BUT this fact is all too often elusive to those learning to fly.

Ask any pilot about their preparation for their first solo; that is, the first flight without an Instructor aboard. They will tell you that they were made to fly circuit after circuit, touchdown and immediate take-off, hundreds of times until the penny dropped into the right mental compartment, and they too realised that they need to FLY THE PLANE!

I have one particular gentleman who is learning to fly, who makes me laugh every time we go into the air together. He is achieving a lifelong goal of learning to fly, and I am learning a lot from his determined and patient attitude. This intelligent chap, a leader of industry, has easily mastered all of the basic arts of flight: smooth take-offs, superb climbs, gentle descents, coordinated turns, notable navigations, and has passed his written exams and his Aviation Medical as if ticking boxes in a questionnaire. But there has been a bit of a challenge – one that is nearly over. In fact, I believe that, by the time this hits the news stands, he probably will have overcome this last hurdle in this phase of learning to fly

He can set up the approach perfectly. The numbers of the runway start small, and grow in the middle of the windshield, just like they should. If the numbers appear to rise in the windshield and more of the planet's surface fills the screen, the power is increased, exactly as prescribed. When the numbers appear to be disappearing under the nose of the aircraft, a suitable decrease in power setting is applied. All of this time, the approach speed is nailed to the relevant speed setting on the Air Speed Indicator. As the plane gets within the last fifty feet or so, the nose is raised a little and flight within one half of a wingspan commences. This is called flying in the ground effect – an aerodynamic phenomenon that provides additional lift and the ability to fly slower, close to the ground. Up to this point, all is well. Then for our friend, like so many students I have taught, am teaching and will teach, the mistake comes into the mind of the student. He starts trying to put the wheels on the ground! Oh no, not again! All that happens is the plane bounces and we are quickly out of the ground effect and adding power, ready to try again on the next circuit!

Well, so that you know, in case you enter the cockpit with me at any point in the future, as the 'round out' occurs to enter the ground effect, I start to say (in

earnest, pleadingly, and in every way I can to encourage you to succeed), 'Fly the Plane, fly the plane, fly the plane!'

It *is* the *only* way to do it. You must remain on the controls, adjusting your stick and rudder, working your remaining power back slowly, flying close to the ground, and waiting patiently for the main wheels to kiss the ground; and then you must continue to use flight controls and inputs until all of the wheels are in contact, and you are going slow enough to taxi. Sounds simple, eh? Then try it!

It takes an almost unnatural patience to fly the plane until it lands. You cannot rush it; you must stay on top of it. It is a skill that is hard to learn but, once learnt, you cannot understand how anybody could not learn it easily.

Is this not like so many things in our lives? We master so much, but find impatience spoils our completion of a task. We get so near to our desired achievements, but seem unable to break that last little bit. We need to keep on working and trying, concentrating and focusing as much in the final phase of a project as we did at the beginning, or during the exciting phases leading up to the 'landing' of our undertakings?

Imagine that you are learning to play the piano; you quickly master the first few bars of a piece of magnificent music written by Strauss. You make progress through the next few bars, and can amuse your friends with your ability to play the opening of the piece. But the last bit – the twiddly bit at the end – the one where your fingers seem to be racing up and down the keyboard, skipping here, dancing there and pretending that they are like ten boy-scouts tying a new and incredibly complicated knot with the ivory and ebony keys beneath them. It seems to evade you, and you try harder and it is not coming; so you feel like giving up.

One day, you sit down to play and, without thinking, you find that you have played it all – perfect, a sound that sparks your inner being and awakens a part of you that has never before opened its eyes. It feels as if you have been born anew and have to shout about it. You slap yourself metaphorically in the face and say 'why couldn't you do that last week?' and then you realise that you tried to rush it. You failed to play the music with feeling and, instead, wanted to finish the piece. Quickly, you call a friend and play the piece over the phone, but your friend cannot appreciate what you have achieved. That feeling you have inside you from achieving a task that involves hands, feet, eyes and calculations appears simple to those who have not tried to do it, and is already an old habit to those who can. Ahaaaaa, it is the same syndrome as learning to land – ooops, I mean 'fly the plane, fly the plane, fly the plane!'

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