

GETTING TO FLY-INS IN ONE PIECE

OR, THE HAZARDS OF GOING THE FINAL MILES.

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We try to include at least one flying safety feature in each issue of the RVator. Some of the topics covered are admittedly rather basic, and might be considered an insult to the apparent training and skill of most readers. Our purpose is to reach that few percent of our readership who fall into the "at risk" category, and are in very real need of basic instructions. Our broader purpose is to present a review of flying safety basics to our general readership. We feel that all of us, with good skills and practices, can always benefit from the mental exercise of review, and hopefully refresh our knowledge and reinforce our resolve to be the best and safest possible pilots.

We have all heard the old axiom that flying is hours and hours of sheer boredom, punctuated by moments of stark terror. While this sounds rather melodramatic, it can be true of a long flight to, and arrival at, a major fly-in. There is a lot of open sky between your home airport and a destination like Oshkosh, Lakeland, Arlington, WA, Chandler, AZ, etc. Then the sky suddenly becomes very crowded indeed. There are some very real hazards involved which merit some thought. We have experienced many arrivals which were very routine and almost anti-climatic. Others, about half of them, have involved some elements of frustration and significantly increased risk. While I don't want to resort to scare tactics, I do feel that we all need to pay special attention to some cautions.

PLANNING YOUR ARRIVAL

Major fly-ins such as AirVenture, Sun'N'Fun, and even regionals such as Arlington and Copperstate, publish arrival procedures. Don't leave home without them! For smaller fly-ins, check the NOTAMS for special fly-in traffic patterns, radio frequencies, runway closure times, etc. Be prepared to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem when you arrive.

One essential planning item is that of arriving with a good fuel reserve; an hour or more. At a major fly-in, it is entirely possible that you could encounter a delay of this length (in an arrival holding pattern), or the need to divert to another airport.

LANDING CHECKLIST

Mainly, don't forget your normal landing checklist because of the pressure and distraction of the heavy traffic, extended approaches, and other abnormalities. Gear up landings (not a problem with RVs) are common at fly-ins, presumably for this very reason. In the event of a last second go-around, you don't want to find that you have left your prop pitch setting at cruise pitch, or the fuel selector left on an almost empty tank, or the fuel mixture left on cruise lean. You might want to tape a "Use the check list, stupid" note on your instrument panel to help you remember.

DISTRACTION

The obvious admonition of "don't become distracted" sounds trite and simplistic. But, with all of the additional inputs, how can the pilot *not* become distracted? Maybe we should consider how to best manage distractions. For instance, if there is an unusual airplane in the air and you are trying to figure out what it is, that constitutes an unnecessary distraction. Concentrating your sight on the parked airplanes on the airport or on the line of cars on the airport road is an unnecessary distraction. Discipline your mind to concentrate on only those inputs which are essential to the safe conduct of your flight.

TRAFFIC VIGILANCE AND TEAMWORK

If you have a passenger on board, instruct them to keep a constant visual scan going for you. Have them look rearward and in sectors difficult for you to see while you concentrate on your primary flying duties. In the vicinity of major fly-ins, the air traffic is many thousand percent greater than in general air-space. Even when on a well organized approach such as Oshkosh, you cannot be assured that all planes are flying the same direction on the approach course. We have seen planes flying reciprocal headings and many other "deviations."

In the worst case, a passenger can be a detriment. The passengers, in their excitement, can easily distract the pilot by pointing out interesting but non-essential landmarks, or by engaging in non-essential conversation. Also, the pilot can distract himself by putting on his "this is your captain speaking" cap and pointing out objects of interest. While this is often a good idea, now is absolutely the wrong time.

OVERLOAD!

In a worst case situation, a pilot can simply become fatigued to the point of becoming a hazard to himself and others. Sometimes it is necessary to fly in a crowded holding pattern for an hour, perhaps in hot, gusty, crowded, and/or low visibility conditions. There are probably many planes, closely spaced, once the approach course is re-opened. There will be aggressive and incompetent fellow pilots to watch out for. If it gets to be more than you're sure that you can handle, what do you do next? You can always pull out of traffic, divert to some nearby airport for a breather and try again when traffic is a little lighter.

Or, when you recognize that you are becoming overstressed, you might try some sort of relaxation technique, like deep breathing, so that you feel in better control again. If there is another competent pilot on board, have them hold the controls for a while, or in some other way help relieve your stress. A nice upper-back message would do wonders. (see, there is a hidden purpose for tandem seat airplanes)

RADIO PROTOCOL

In addition to pre-planning the required radio frequencies, be prepared to communicate efficiently and effectively. Fly-in approach procedures usually specify a minimum of communication; often you will be requested to listen and comply with instructions without responding or engaging in two-way communication. With an extremely heavy traffic load, there simply isn't time for textbook perfect radio phraseology. I can remember times when I would have liked to reach through the radio and strangle someone out there who, totally unprepared, insists on prattling on-and-on tying up the frequency while others were in dire need of instructions. Be prepared; keep transmission to a minimum.

FORMATION FLYING

Formation flying is a skill which requires study and practice. Experienced formation pilots won't fly formation with people who they don't know are qualified. Most non-formation pilots become nervous when within a thousand feet of another airplane. Yet, approach procedure for many busy fly-ins require much closer than normal spacing. In a very real sense, this is formation flying. You may be asked (expected) to fly with 1/4 mile separation. A quarter mile is 1320 ft., or about 1/4 the length of the runway at many airports. Just imagine that there is another airplane at the far end of the runway, and three others evenly spaced between it and you at your end. That's a

lot closer than normal, and you'd better be able to recognize and hold this spacing, and if possible keep out of the wake of the airplanes ahead of you. The next time you are at the airport, locate a spot about 1/4 mile from a parked airplane. Then pick some frame of reference to gage its relative size. Try holding your hand with the thumb extended, between your eye and the airplane. Move the thumb toward your eye until its width equals that of the span of the airplane. This should be about 38 inches from your eye. You can use the same gage in flight to estimate the distance of the airplane ahead of you.