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FAMILIARITY BREEDS GOOD TRAINING

A lesson from Cirrus on instruction standardization

» *By Jason Blair*

THE CIRRUS MODEL WAS BUILT ON INCREASING SAFETY IN THE AIRFRAME FOR PILOTS AND INSTRUCTORS.

CIRRUS AIRCRAFT HAVE become a prominent part of the general aviation landscape over the past decade. Cirrus staff conducts and promotes training with instructors and pilots that is different than the traditional approach and has the potential to help improve safety.

I am an active pilot in Cirrus aircraft and regularly conduct practical tests in SR20s, but until recently I had never flown a Cirrus with the Garmin Perspective system. Cirrus instructor Mark Eagan and I set out on a flight to Cirrus headquarters in Duluth, Minnesota.

My training was designed to familiarize me with the aircraft and avionics, and to ensure that I know what it takes to train other pilots according to Cirrus standards. Cirrus wants to make sure that every instructor who provides training is fully qualified and the training that they provide is going to make owners and operators safe pilots.

The Cirrus model was built on increasing safety in the airframe for pilots and instructors. The focus of this approach is in-depth instructor proficiency in and knowledge of the aircraft and its systems. Instructors who meet Cirrus standards are given the seal of approval as a Cirrus Standardized Instructor Pilot (CSIP).

CSIP certification requires recurrency every year. The company makes sure that instructors who bear the CSIP designation continue to keep their skills sharp, their knowledge current, and their proficiency growing. This diverges from the traditional, every-two-years FAA minimum knowledge demonstration that instructors display to keep their certificates active. This diverges from the traditional,

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Instructor standardization isn't a new concept. It has existed in larger, more complex aircraft; in specialty training environments; and for specialized flight operations for a while. It wasn't until recently that the concept was applied more to GA aircraft used in training and personal travel. The CSIP program represents one of the first direct efforts by a manufacturer to ensure that the instruction given to its owners and operators complies with manufacturer recommended practices. The goal is to keep accident rates down.

As aircraft instrumentation becomes more customized to specific airframes, and the avionics become more integrated with aircraft systems, it is harder for instructors to transition between airframes. Modern instructors must not treat every aircraft as another engine and airframe. Managing the systems in a technologically advanced aircraft is an integral part of flying it safely—something that can't be taught if the instructor isn't familiar with its operation.

Instructors need to know when to say, "Sorry, I'm not the best instructor for that," and recommend one who is more appropriately qualified. For pilots, this means that the local instructor you have always used may not be the best person to teach you if he or she lacks experience with a particular aircraft. Pilots seeking training should interview any providers they are considering and search for an instructor who is completely familiar with—and competent in—both the airframe and avionics system.

Training from an instructor who is experienced in a specific airframe and avionics package will be more efficient, develop stronger competencies, and—in many cases—save valuable time (which directly relates to training costs). This is a model that students and the instruction community should look to, learn from, and begin to incorporate similar approaches into training for a wider variety of aircraft. If we do this, we will take a positive step toward enhancement of safety.

Jason Blair is a flight instructor and designated pilot examiner in Grand Rapids, Michigan.