

# Hurrying to an accident...YOURS!

■ ■ Years ago, in the early part of the 20th century, people took time to enjoy life. The home was the center of most people's world, and the family life pattern was based on the home and its facilities. Granted, there were a few of today's conveniences missing—TV, electric lighting, even inside plumbing in many cases—but people actually took the time to talk to one another and to relax a bit, and if something wasn't done today then it was scheduled for tomorrow.

Now though, progress is measured in many instances by how fast we can rush through our daily activities and, further, upon how many of these various doings we can pack into an average day. The successful businessman can always squeeze in another appointment, or attend another meeting, or make another sale (and acquire another ulcer).

Nowhere is this feverish pace more evident than at the average airport. Watch a harried businessman-pilot as he arrives for an all-important business trip. He's late already because of a longer than expected meeting, and his tardiness was compounded by the heavy traffic on the expressway leading out to the field (to say nothing of his state of mind after having to fight all those idiots in his way). He throws his briefcase into the back seat of the plane, jumps in, and hits the starter button.

The engine roars, and Mr. All-American Business pours on the coal, taxiing away from the line in a cloud of dust which blankets a nearby plane being gassed, not to mention blowing oil cans, ladders, and what have you the length of the ramp.

Reaching the end of the runway, a quick mag check, a fast swing out and line up, and away he goes. Not a bad takeoff, either, if we disregard the fact that the engine misses a few times, quits cold, then grudgingly comes to life again a few feet off the end of the runway. A quick, close-in pattern with a power-on landing, and an ashen-faced pilot pulls up on the ramp.

Would you believe? He honestly doesn't know what caused his near tragic incident. Surely somewhere along

the line during his student days his instructor told him how to warm up an airplane engine properly, giving careful attention to temperatures and pressures, and that mag check r.p.m. is not sufficiently high to give an accurate indication of how the engine will perform during the high r.p.m. incurred during take-off. While modern aircraft engines are well designed and constructed, they still require TLC (tender loving care), which includes sufficient time to warm up before being subjected to maximum load conditions. Probably our overworked businessman has heard this, but just overlooked it in his hurry to be off and going.

At that, our pilot was lucky—his plane had been pulled out of the hangar for servicing, and was neither chocked

*If you take the wrong shortcuts on the ground or in the air, your flight may end in disaster. A long-time observer of pilots in a hurry tells of pitfalls that can be avoided*

by JERRY MARLETTE / AOPA 25803



nor tied down. Jumping chocks always makes for an interesting operation, and the sight of a plane dragging a long tie-down rope is always good for a laugh (except possibly for the unhappy chap who left one tiedown rope securely fastened; and who, in attempting to break loose, swung around in a half circle and chewed up the wing of the plane tied down next to his spot).

A few other little gremlins which always seem to enter the picture just before flight time include water in the gas, ice or frost on the wings, birds' nests in the engine compartment, a loose cowling access door, or a gas cap which has been mounted in reverse. While usually plainly noticeable on even the sketchiest preflight, these items, to the rue of many pilots, have been ignored at one time or another, with embarrassing if not expensive results.

Another hurry-up operation which seems to be becoming more and more prevalent is fast taxiing. While we have all been advised from our first student days to taxi at no more than a fast walk, many taxiing planes today could easily outdistance the fastest sprinter, if not the average racehorse. A fast departure from the line or gas pit (disregard the dust, the run-over ladder, and the external power unit still plugged in), and a quick run out to the runway (pass those other slow pokes—we're more important and in a big hurry, besides). One possibility is always intriguing: what would happen if the fast-moving plane arrived at the end of the runway and the brakes didn't hold it? Would it go off to one side, through the taxi-strip lights and into the mud or down the bank into the stream; or would it sail out onto the active runway in front of

into a strange plane, sooner or later he passes it off as just so much more superfluous material, covering items which he knows by heart anyway, and which just take up more time, which he doesn't have enough of to begin with. In a fixed-gear-and-prop primary trainer, possibly true; in a complex single-engine retractable or a light twin, either of which is as sophisticated as the fighter or transport plane of two decades ago, such callous disregard of a tried and proven help can be not only expensive, it can be fatal.

Among the choice items which can be ignored easily by a time-pressed pilot prior to departure are such points as proper trim setting, fuel boost pumps on, fuel capacity, and engine instrument indications. Improper trim can result in trim pressures beyond the pilot's capacity to overpower (more than one aircraft has crashed from a stall on takeoff before the pilot could get it re-trimmed), and on some light twins it is mandatory that the fuel boost pumps be on during takeoff and climb-out, inasmuch as the plane is unable to climb should one engine quit following failure of the engine-driven fuel pump. Checking the fuel capacity requires no comment, and the case for engine temperatures and pressures was made above.

The check list again earns its passage during the prelanding preparations. Strangely, one of flying's most obvious assumptions—that a retractable-gear airplane should land with the gear down—is totally ignored many times every year. Strange, too, because every check list ever published for this type of craft specifically mentions putting the gear down and how to check its condition.

Too, the check list touches upon such other relatively important points as wing and cowl flaps, carburetor heat, airspeeds, and similar items, giving helpful hints on each. But the best check list in the world can't help the person too busy,

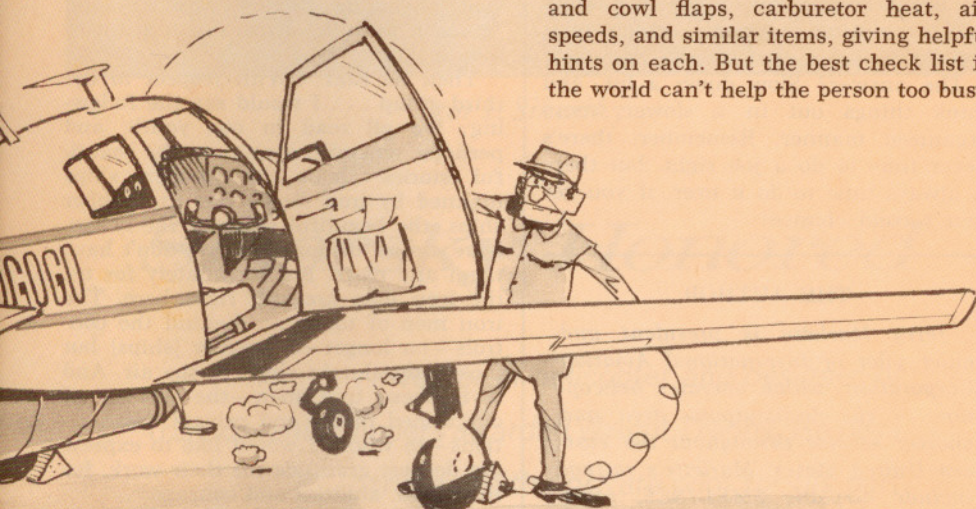
to read the instructions before going. Poppycock! Almost without exception, a passenger will feel much better seeing how carefully his trip is being handled, particularly if the pilot explains his actions while performing them. If a passenger objects, ignore him, and proceed with the list as planned. Persons unaware of the seriousness of flying often cannot comprehend the pilot's actions, even though these activities are for their benefit as well as the pilot's.

Another hazard which deserves some careful thought is the ever-increasing hurry to get on the ground at the end of a flight. Usually, the pilot is late and trying not to delay his bit-chomping passengers any longer; on the other hand, particularly at large and busy airports, the tower will often advise him, "Expedite your approach." For some reason, this short phrase creates a sense of extreme urgency in the average pilot, and he will throw all his training and judgment to the winds in an effort to get on the ground just as quickly as he possibly can.

You guessed it! In the mad dive for the field, the hapless pilot forgets one little thing: he doesn't put down the gear, and the resulting loud noises are simply horrifying. (Forget the expense—he "expedited," didn't he?) This has also happened when the cabin door has popped open. The loud rush of air, shouting passengers, and a general sense of near panic join together to force the pilot back to earth just as soon as he can get there, ready or not. Needless to say, this is a completely senseless reaction. While the rushing air is admittedly noisy, and loose papers and dirt are quickly vacuumed out, the aerodynamics of the plane are little affected, and there is very little danger of anything except some cold ears and noses in wintertime if the pilot will merely make a normal pattern and landing, close and lock the door, and then go on his way. On many planes, the door can be closed easily in flight. Going back even further, why was the door left so it could open? It's mentioned in your check lists, you know.

Back to the expedite bit: while a good pilot will try to comply with a tower request to keep traffic moving, he certainly will not let the tower stampede him into any action, be it takeoff or landing or whatever, until both he and his ship are prepared for it. If not ready, so advise the tower. If this results in a delay, use the extra time for another check to determine complete readiness.

An in-flight emergency which still occasionally confronts us is that of single-engine operation of a twin. While the experienced multi-engine pilot will slowly but steadily run through his single-engine procedures, the novice type will attempt to do everything at once:



that landing big jet? Some interesting thoughts here, what?

Another old friend usually gets ignored in this mad rush into the blue—the check list. While almost every pilot conscientiously and carefully reads and uses this helpful item when he first gets

or in too much of a hurry, to take the time to read it.

Similarly, some pilots will not take the time to read the list because they mistakenly believe their passengers are either in too big a hurry to delay or will not have confidence in a pilot who has

all forward, all back, all up, all down, all out. True, the procedures should be accomplished as quickly as possible in order to clean and trim up the plane, but such speed should always be commensurate with safety. This means proper and complete identification of the dead engine, with the correct resultant adjustment of all engine and trim controls. Many a comparatively simple and safe single-engine operation has resulted in a fatal accident when a panicky pilot hurried through his procedures, inadvertently killing and feathering the live engine, then being unable to restart it in time to make a safe landing.

Here again, the hurry to get on the ground after the single-engine emergency has resulted in many accidents. Today's twins, almost without exception, can be maneuvered on one-engine safely to an airport for landing, providing proper emergency procedures are followed. True, this will require reading the plane's handbook and/or flight manual.

Increasingly, the victim of all this hustle and bustle is careful flight planning. Such quaint little items as out-of-date charts (sometimes none at all), planned use of frequencies which were changed a year ago, or even a destination airport which upon arrival has sneakily been changed to an apartment project—these occur everyday, with pilots rushing right by current charts and flight information manuals. (No time. Must hurry, and all that, you know.)

Weather is also still a problem. While most pilots today check their en route weather more carefully than they did even five years ago, there are still too many cases where weather planning is seriously slighted, if not skipped altogether. "If it's good here, it should be good there, and we'll check it along the way." So reads a popular fallacy.

Another dangerous practice is the hurry to get off in marginal weather conditions. Granted, you might be able to see for four miles here, with ample ceiling in this area, but how about en route, especially in strange areas? Can you make it all the way without sweat? If you must be positive, look at it this way: bad weather is good, because it can only get better! So stick around awhile, and have another cup of coffee, to let weather conditions get to the point where you can make it in comfort. After all, do you want to close that big deal in the funeral home today, or in the customer's office tomorrow?

Suppose you do get off all right and get close to your destination before the weather goes to pot, is it too bad to get in, with a precautionary landing in order? Pressing that last short distance has removed many otherwise careful pilots from the flying scene. One of

the most tragic incidents was one where two lightplanes were being ferried to an airport alongside a large lake. Approaching the field, the two pilots were told by the tower that there were scattered heavy thundershowers in the area and that one shower was over the field at that time. The first ferry pilot acknowledged and advised that he would circle in the clear till the shower had passed, but the second requested an immediate landing clearance. The tower cleared him to land, at his discretion, and he penetrated the shower area. With his visibility severely restricted, he lost sight of the runway on approach, and when he sighted it again he was almost over the end of the strip, high and fast. Cutting his power, he forced the plane onto the runway, then tried frantically to brake it down as he rapidly approached the other end.

Unfortunately, the combination of excess speed and wet runway was too much, and the plane slid off the end of the runway into the lake, where it sank in less than 10 feet of water, with the pilot trapped inside. Some 15 minutes later, the storm had passed, the weather was good VFR, and the first plane landed safely. When the crashed plane was lifted from the water, all instruments and systems checked normal, and the gas tanks still contained over an hour's fuel. The cause of the accident? Pure and simple hurrying to get on the ground, with no emergency existing or even imminent.

So what does it all add up to? Aircraft are becoming more complex and better performers, but the poor old human mechanism still basically functions at the same performance level at which it has struggled along for centuries. (Physicians and psychiatrists can argue this problem at length—it's much too complicated for us average pilot types!)

The answer? Slow down a bit, and think things out in a slower, more organized manner. Remember, there's never time to do a job right, but there is always time to do it over, if you get that second chance! □

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