

# Staying Current

## *Alternatives to the Biennial Flight Review*

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AOPA 602336

Many pilots look upon the requirement that they submit to a regular review of their proficiency as a vaccination. True, it's "good for you," but isn't there a better way? Yes, there is an alternate to the flight check review for meeting the present currency requirements.

Let's look at the basic requirements for the biennial flight review (BFR), which was made part of Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) 61 late in 1974. Paragraph 61.57 states that "no person may act as a pilot in command of an aircraft unless, within the preceding 24 months, he has . . . accomplished a flight review . . ." In addition, the person giving the review must certify in the pilot's log book that the ride was satisfactory.

The regulations define the BFR as an exercise consisting of "a review of the current general operating and flight rules of Part 91 . . . and . . . of those maneuvers and procedures which in the discretion of the person giving the review are necessary for the pilot to demonstrate that he can safely exercise the privileges of his pilot certificate."

Most pilots realize that the BFR was instituted in the interest of safety. Its objective is to determine a pilot's capabilities and to show where, if indeed, his technique needs correcting. Exempt from the review are pilots flying under Part 135 or in operations requiring an ATP certificate, both of which have currency requirements already built in. This leaves private pilots and those with commercial tickets who do not fly under the above conditions.

For some pilots the BFR may be a blessing in disguise. The areas of low skill will be discovered during the review, and by revealing these inabilities, the BFR could prevent an accident.

So where do the alternatives come in? Look further in Paragraph 61.57 and find the section that states "a person who has, within the preceding 24 months, satisfactorily completed a pilot proficiency check conducted by the FAA, an approved pilot check airman or a U.S. Armed Force for a pilot certificate, rating or operating privilege, need not accomplish the flight review

required by this section."

These options are open to every pilot and are good ways to increase proficiency, rather than just reviewing existing skills. The alternatives tend to cost more than the BFR, but the pilot comes away with something to show for his money and time.

There are three general ways to satisfy the currency rules. The first is simple—take the BFR. The second and third are what we are concerned with here: adding a rating to an existing pilot certificate, or, going a step higher and upgrading the certificate itself.

Let's take a look at the idea of adding a rating. Within the means of the average pilot are the seaplane rating, the multi-engine rating and the instrument rating. Those with more financial freedom can opt for such things as a rotorcraft add-on or a multi-engine sea rating.

The first two ratings mentioned are relatively simple to obtain, both in terms of cost and time required. However, neither is accomplished without gaining new skills and a higher level of proficiency. The multi-engine rating, for example, introduces the single-engine pilot to a completely new class of aircraft. It may be that the first flight in a twin will also be the first in a retractable or the first in a plane with a constant-speed propeller. Regardless, training in more complex equipment is bound to increase one's aviation skill.

Likewise, a seaplane rating can also complement whatever certificate a pilot has. Again, the equipment is different, and there are new techniques to learn that will give the pilot broader knowledge. Accustomed as many pilots are to relatively tame single-engine, fixed-gear aircraft, a few hours driving a J-3 Cub on floats can be an enlightening experience on a windy day.

The third rating mentioned was the instrument rating. Obtaining this is by no means an inexpensive proposition. However, considering that the BFR is due every two years, a pilot can work on the rating during that period, upgrading his skills in the process, and finish with the ticket. Given that one

would fly a hundred hours a year, even a low-time pilot could build up enough total time to qualify.

Upgrading the pilot certificate, still another of the options, is really self-explanatory. Private pilots move to commercial, commercial pilots advance to CFI, and so on. Here the emphasis is definitely on aviation skills and the development of a professional attitude. Not that one must become a professional pilot, just fly like one.

Comparing the costs of a new rating with those of a flight review, one finds the review to be the least expensive choice. A BFR tends to cost between \$40 and \$80 for a pilot who must rent a single-engine aircraft. The difference in cost here reflects the extra time that might be needed in reviewing a pilot whose technique is found lacking.

A single-engine seaplane rating can be had for as little as \$175, assuming the pilot is current in land aircraft. For a look at what is involved, see "The Lowest Flight School" in the September 1978 *Pilot*.

To obtain a multi-engine rating the cost will run between \$400 and \$800 depending upon the type of aircraft used, the aptitude of the student and whether the school offers special rating package rates.

Upgrading a pilot certificate need not be too expensive. For example, during a two-year period it should be relatively simple to practice the maneuvers such as chandelles and lazy eights that are required for a commercial certificate. With a bit of dual and some time in a retractable, the cost should come to just a few hundred dollars over normal flying expenses. In the December 1978 *Pilot* article "The Single Engine ATP," there are some good reasons for certificate advancement.

Staying current, then, need not be as tedious as some would lead you to believe. For the pilot who strives to improve his technique and increase his ability, the FAR's point the way. If the BFR seems more of a chore than anything else, an extra effort to upgrade your license can be both rewarding and enjoyable. □