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How To Fly An Airplane

Before starting to take flying lessons, it is always the best policy to take a short trip as a passenger in order to familiarize yourself with the feel of the air, and to obtain a knowledge of the airplane, airport and the surrounding district. This also gives the instructor a chance to sum up the pupil and note any characteristics which will require special attention. Some pupils have trouble hearing, some find it hard to relax, and others have a fear which must be overcome before the lessons can proceed with any degree of success. Therefore altogether no dual instruction is given on this trip, a certain amount of knowledge is obtained by both pupil and instructor. Back on the ground the instructor explains what has taken place in the air, but like a lot of things in life, the theory is easily understandable and straightforward, but requires practice and more practice before a high degree of proficiency is obtained. As for safety, flying is as safe as you make it, and the emphasis is on YOU!

Now you are ready for your first dual instruction. It will be simple, but make sure you understand what is expected of you; only by doing this will you get the most out of the lesson. First you must learn the use of the controls, everything is there for some practical purpose, not to make the plane look more impressive, and producers strive to simplify the control in order that the plane may be handled more easily. There are three main controls, the throttle (similar to the accelerator on a car, but hand operated), the rudder (similar in action to the steering wheel on a car, but operated by the feet), and the stick which causes the aircraft to bank (it does for the plane what a banked turn does for a car). The stick has two functions, it gives the plane lateral control and moves it in the pitching plane, that is up and down.

For the first lesson the instructor will take you up in the air to a safe height and give you control and let you practice straight and level flying (straight and level meaning constant height, speed and direction). Also you will practice medium turns, climbing and gliding. You must learn to co-ordinate your movements to obtain smoothness in the air. The old saying "handle an airplane like your best girl, gently" is a very good rule to remember! With about two or three hours practice at enough to go on to your next stage these exercises you should have of instruction. But first a review of your lesson so far, and a practice in co-ordinating your throttle and air speed again.

Now you will be ready for your first day on circuits and bumps (landings and take-offs) and 140 mean bumps. You want a good knowledge of the procedure, review your speed for stalling, climbing, take-offs and landings for your airplane. The take-off is getting the plane in the air safely and comfortably. It sounds easy, and it is easy, but only after a certain amount of practice with your instructor. He will show you how, first he will impress upon you the reason for having an ample run, clear of all obstructions on the take-off path, and for keeping straight into wind. This principles are (1) open your throttle and keep the plane straight, (2) raise the tail up to flying position, and (3) fly gently off when the air speed is sufficient for flight. Hold the plane level for a few seconds to gain a safe flying speed, then climb. The instructor will have you practice take-offs first, until you are doing reasonably well, then you will be able to try landings. Landing is the art of putting the plane on the ground gently at stall-

ing speed. If the plane lands above the stalling speed, it is apt to bounce or bounce, and it is stalls while it is still at eight or ten feet, it will hit the ground hard and bounce badly. Therefore you must be as close to the ground as possible in the landing position (one to three feet) with the plane at stalling speed, to make a good landing. Of course you will bump and bang at first, but with practice and instruction you should soon learn the proper method, and how to use your throttle and stick to adjust the bounce. If you bounce, you must level the plane, gain your lost speed with more throttle, and set it down again. Landings probably require more practice than anything, as you must accustom yourself to the landing attitude and your eyes must acquire a fine point of depth perception. You will find that with two or three hours you are becoming quite confident, and obtaining what is known as air sense.

At first there will seem to be too much to cope with at one time, but soon you will find that your speed, turns, climbs, glides, take-offs and landings all fit into a pattern and are comparatively easy.

Now the second stage of your instruction begins. You have enough knowledge to solo, but not enough practice. About eight hours are required before your first solo, and so far you have only five or six. About the only new things your instructor will teach you are stalling and spinning and how to recover. However, you will not be required to do this during your first solo and it is only taught in case an emergency arises.

Your instructor now tightens up on all the lessons you have learned and checks details very thoroughly. You will probably become slightly irritated when he does not and you solo, but remember he knows the game and will send you off when he is satisfied that you are ready, not before. He has a reputation to keep as well as his aircraft. Pupils often, just before solo, get a little discouraged, due mainly to their desire to run before they have learned to walk. It happens to all of us and we must try to overcome it.

During your next lesson, without much ceremony, your instructor will probably check out when you are ready to take off, saying, "Well let me see what you can do without me." By this time you may have been grumbling to yourself that you would show the old so and so what you could do a circuit just as well as he, and this is the frame of mind in which he wants to catch you for your first solo. That is, slightly annoyed and very determined to show him that you are worthy of his efforts.

Here it is, you are all alone, too excited to be nervous, and thinking twice as hard to make sure you do everything as you have been taught. There is no voice telling you to "keep her straight," "watch her air speed," "look out for other aircraft." It is up to you. You open the throttle, the tail comes up, and in a few moments you are in the air. It all seems so much faster, but you do not realize that the plane is lighter with only one person in it, as your instructor has told you it would be. You climb out of the field and look around to find you have, in the excitement, forgotten to turn early enough, so you make a rapid turn and head back to the field and your first landing. You look at the field and it seems like a postage stamp, so to comfort yourself, you start repeating all that your instructor has taught you. Down she comes, too fast, so you slow up; too high, so you slip off some height; now with the wings level, airspeed on the dot, and

the plane in the landing position, you are all set for your landing. You are a bit tense, but find you set the plane down as smoothly as your instructor. Taxiling in to the hanger line you stop the engine, hop out, and wait for showers of praise, only to be greeted with "not bad, but now that is over I will take you up and teach you some real flying." You suddenly realise that you are just beginning to learn, and there is no ending to this learning racket in flying.

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