

The Art of Flying

Robert N. Buck

An Eleanor Friede Book
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Flying—How Difficult Is It?

FLYING APPEARS to be complicated. It seems that way because of the depth of its theory, the complexity of the vehicle, the capriciousness of the element it works in, and the aiming it takes to have the airplane arrive where it is supposed to.

Yet how can anything that has its classic beauty be difficult? The graceful motions and cleanness of form make it appear as a unity of faultless action.

Dig deep into the magic art of flying and it can be complicated—the theories and study of aerodynamics, even the question of air flow over a wing, alone, can fill a book and leave much unanswered.

The machinery of the airplane—systems, electronics and all the stuff commonly known as the nuts and bolts of the business—is extensive and encumbered.

The weather, an unfathomable surprise element, is never understood completely. Its effects on an airplane can be discussed for long periods—and an element of awe often lurks in the background.

Navigation in this vehicle that has no bounds and can subtly slide off in any direction is not simple, although the magic of technology has taken it from an esoteric art to a matter of facts, figures and computer programming; the pilot needs only to push a

few buttons, tune a radio and “follow the needle” that gets the airplane where it should go. Of course a good pilot knows certain essentials, because even the most sophisticated gadget will, on occasion, fail; then knowledge of the art is needed. And knowing the art is useful so that one can periodically cast a questioning eye on the fancy gadgetry—watching where the compass tells us we’re headed is never a bad idea.

Difficult?

So flying is difficult and complicated. No! It really is not. There are essentials that once known will bring a quality that makes the remainder automatic. With these essentials firmly in mind new things are quickly understood, put in proper category and the fears coming from them made barren.

It is an impossible task to know all, but is it necessary? There are expert airmen who fly for a lifetime and never know much about flying in its complicated form. I knew such a pilot who had two of the four engines fail right after takeoff in a Lockheed Constellation. He staggered around the field on a hot Kansas day, going under a bridge in the process, and landed back at the airport safely. In the investigation the government inspector said that theoretically it was impossible! But he didn’t reckon on how well that pilot knew the feather edge between flying and falling.

People like that are knowledgeable on certain basics that protect them from all comers—they know fundamentals, tricks of the trade, and have a bag full of right and wrong things to do or not to do that they put together by experience, study and crafty observation. These are the smart fliers, and they do smart flying.

Simple?

After a lifetime of flying I am convinced that it is simple art, and nature meant it that way. I do not find myself, when I fly,

with a head full of facts and theories. The essentials have been part of my flying life; I don't think of them; they just happen, and they take care of the rest automatically. This isn't to say I don't have an interesting time trying to put theory and what I see and experience together, but in the rush of a busy time the essentials take care of me without thought.

In the beginning, of course, one must learn and be conscious of principles and procedures—think about them. This, then, says we go slowly at first, making certain we're doing the right thing. If a situation is more complicated than we can handle or it's moving faster than we can think about it, then we back off—turn around, land, don't go, or whatever. As experience is gained we can move into deeper areas, do it right automatically *if* we've learned the basics—the simple basics.

That's what we're going to attempt to do here—point out basics and explain key things that get people in trouble or keep them out of it.