

## ***Staying competent without flying***

*By Chris Hope, Master CFI*

Ah, we are moving into that time of the year when our friends across the southern tier of the country say, "come on down. The flyin's great!" And the rest of us are hunkering down and waiting for spring. And getting frustrated because the weather is cruddy, the taxiways are covered with snow, the hangar doors are iced over, and all in all, it is another not-nice day for flying. And we can just feel the rust starting to accumulate in our flying joints. So, is there anything we can do to keep ourselves sharp over the winter? Well, yes, there is.

Let's make it clear at the outset that nothing truly replaces flying for staying competent at flying. Well, unless you have access to a good instructor and a Redbird simulator. And, if you do have a Redbird and good instructor, get on it. Not only can you replicate all of your regular VFR and IFR flying, you can practice a lot of "what-ifs" that you may never see any your regular flying.

OK, simulators are fine. What else? There are some options. Let's stay in the sort-of simulator area for a while. Do you look at a Garmin 430 or G1000 or similar glass in the plane you normally fly? Don't let those button-pushing skills atrophy. From the Garmin website you can download the simulators for both of those systems. A free version of the GNS 430 comes from: <http://www8.garmin.com/include/SimulatorPopup.html>. (If your glass panel has a name other than

"Garmin" check their website or give them a call and see what they have.)

Garmin sells a DVD version of the G1000 simulator for \$25.00 and up, depending on your plane. It is available for purchase at <https://buy.garmin.com/en-US/US/in-the-air/flight-decks/g1000-/prod6420.html> Speaking from experience, I found it worth the money to purchase the same software from Sportys.com and add the training video to the package.

Both of the Garmin simulators can be used without a joystick. In fact, there is no need for a joystick at all with the GNS 430 since that unit is only used for navigation. But using a joystick with the G1000 is a real plus since that system includes all of the primary flight instruments as well as the navigation systems.

Any other simulators available without spending a lot of money? I still like the 2004 version of Microsoft's Flight Simulator. Unfortunately, Microsoft discontinued it but you may be able to find a copy somewhere on eBay. Or, you can purchase X-Plane 10. There are several free aircraft simulator packages available that I have not looked at. The key to using a desktop simulator in a meaningful manner is that you need at least a joystick and high-resolution flight display. What you are trying to get out of this software is practice in flight procedures. You will not get the same feedback from the yoke /

stick that you are accustomed to from the aircraft, but a decent program will at least allow you to control the “plane” in flight and while you simulate radio calls and will allow you to keep yourself current on maintaining altitudes and airspeeds for your aircraft and your home area.

But as they say, “But wait, there’s more.” Want to keep yourself on your toes regarding regs, weather, aerodynamics, and all of the other knowledge areas? I can’t make you as smart at a ten-year old, but I can help you regain that knowledge you once had when you first passed your Private / Commercial / Instrument exam. There are several websites that offer FAA questions and answers, some with a fee and some for free. I hesitate to list names, because I have seen them come and go. And some that I liked six months ago are not available, only to be replaced by new sites. But Google or Yahoo on “FAA test questions” and you will see a list of options.

On the subject of FAA written tests. – I love to match wits with the FAA and their bank of questions, but I really don’t want to pay \$100 to take an exam. And I certainly don’t like the pressure of being graded. Why not buy or borrow one of the Private / Commercial / Instrument Pilot training courses? You can read at your leisure, and there is no one looking over your shoulder saying, “I can’t believe you missed that one.” A lot of public libraries have some of these on hand, or you can buy test guides by ASA, Gleim, or Sporty’s, just to name a few, for not much

money. Are you a member of a club or other regular gathering? How about throwing out a dozen questions next time you get together and see who is as hot as they say they are.

Looking for some detailed specific training? If you want to go “on-line”, you cannot beat the Air Safety Foundation and their massive catalog of free courses. Check out their list at [www.aopa.org/Education/Online-Courses.aspx](http://www.aopa.org/Education/Online-Courses.aspx) and dive in. Some of the courses that I especially found beneficial: Aging gracefully, (one regarding pilots, one regarding aircraft); Navigating Airspace, and Navigating Special Use Airspace; and a half dozen on particular weather phenomena.

Are you the kind of pilot who prefers face-to-face contact rather than face-to-computer? AOPA and the Air Safety Foundation take their shows on the road on a regular basis. Join your fellow pilots when they show up in your neighborhood. And if you are not receiving invitations to these seminars, perhaps you did not tell the aviation world that you like to be invited. The reason all of your flying friends have been invited and you have not is that they signed up on [www.faasafety.gov](http://www.faasafety.gov). Click the link, and create an account in the box on the right side of the screen. This will give you access to a ton of local seminars, as well as the on-line seminars and safety videos produced by the FAA.

And I would be remiss if I did not mention IMC Clubs as a means of

gathering with fellow pilots to talk about surviving (and thriving) in the clouds. I spoke at length on the subject in this space last month, but I continue to stress this group if you fly IFR.

On another note. With cold and blustery weather on its way, take a little more time to preflight the plane, and yourself. And if you meet a stranger who needs some help getting out of a snow bank I suggest that you pitch in and give him a hand. Best wishes for this holiday season.



*Don't just practice until you get right. Practice until you don't get it wrong*

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