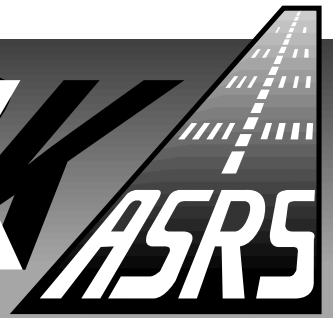


# CALLBACK

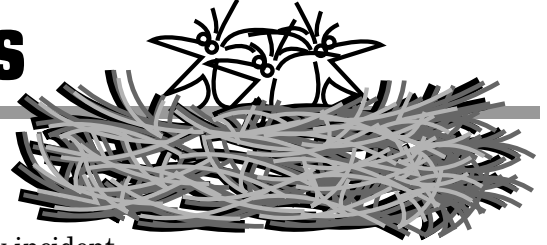
From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



Number 202

April 1996

## Pilot and Aircraft Tune-ups



Maintenance of flight proficiency—and sound operational judgment—can be challenging for both general aviation and professional pilots. Most air carrier and air taxi pilots rely on company training and check programs to maintain their currency. But even a short time out of the cockpit can cause a pilot to lose “the touch,” as described in this First Officer’s report:

■ *The Captain had just come back from a 3-week vacation, so we decided I would take the first leg. Shortly after rotation, I noticed a “mushiness” in the roll controls. I told the Captain that the controls felt weird. Once we got up to a higher altitude, the Captain took the control wheel and rolled it back and forth a few times. He gave it back, saying, “Well, I’ve been on vacation for a while.” I took this to mean he was diplomatically telling me he couldn’t feel any problems. Up at cruise altitude, the Captain studied the maintenance history and discovered that an aileron PCU [Primary Control Unit] had been recently replaced...The following day, we were dismayed to read that engineering found the ailerons to be primarily inoperative.*

The First Officer looked to the Captain for confirmation of the flight control abnormality, but the Captain’s recent absence from the flight deck left him out of touch with the aircraft’s “feel.” The FO sums up his report with several disturbing questions about the crew’s decision to continue the flight with mushy-feeling controls: *What if we had lost an engine on takeoff with a strong crosswind? What if we had encountered wake turbulence on short final?*

A general aviation pilot, in turn, discovered that touch-and-goes may not be enough to reestablish currency:

■ *Not having flown my aircraft for four months, I was performing the three required touch-and-goes to reestablish my currency. On my second approach, I heard two pilots reporting their positions [also in the pattern]. My attention was diverted as I attempted to visually confirm their actual positions. Thus, I neglected to perform my “GUMPS.”*

*On short final, a horn sounded, which I incorrectly interpreted as being a stall warning horn. I believed that if it was indeed the stall horn, it may have been malfunctioning, given that my airspeed was well above stall speed. I heard the prop “ting,” and realized that the horn had been indicating gear up, not stall. I concentrated on maintaining control despite the inevitable consequences.*

*Despite over 600 landings in this aircraft, I now believe that I should have been accompanied by an instructor. A pilot still lacks proficiency after a period of inactivity and is vulnerable to errors.*

An air carrier check pilot reported a lack-of-currency incident (in the form of an altitude deviation), and offered this excellent advice, applicable to all:

■ *You get rusty when you don’t fly, and you lose your edge. Stay realistically current, not just legal.*

## Aircraft Check-Ups

Having the aircraft in top shape is equally important for a safe flight, as this government pilot learned.

■ *I was on an IFR flight plan at FL190. I became nauseous, had tingling in my arms and hands, and my eyes were burning and watering. I got on oxygen, which seemed to help for a while, but then the symptoms returned. [At my destination], I asked for a special VFR clearance and radar vectors to final. I declared an emergency to receive priority handling. After an uneventful landing, I was met by an ambulance and transported to the hospital. Tests were inconclusive.*

*A hole was found in an air duct in the aircraft, and it is possible that exhaust fumes were piped into the cabin. The hole has been repaired, and the aircraft now has a carbon monoxide detector in it.*

Many reporters can attest to the value of a carbon monoxide detector, since a problem like this is unlikely to be noted on preflight. If an aircraft has not been flown for a period of time, a mechanic’s inspection may also be a good idea. The next reporter encountered a similar hidden source of trouble.

■ *I had preflighted and run the engine up...and I proceeded to take off. At about 100 feet AGL, I smelled fumes; at 200 feet AGL, I saw smoke; at 300 feet AGL, I turned back to the airport. Initially I thought it was an electrical fire, so I pulled the master switch off. I realized this was not the problem, so I turned it back on and called on CTAF to announce an emergency landing. I landed safely and nothing was damaged. The fire was the result of a bird’s nest that had been [partially] removed. When the airplane’s owner removed the nest, some [remaining] papers and straw had become lodged between the cylinders and caught fire. I couldn’t see or feel these articles on preflight.*

It would have been helpful if the owner had mentioned the nest to the reporter, as a “heads-up” for potential problems. ▲

### ASRS Recently Issued Alerts On...

A confusing arrival procedure into Bogota, Colombia
Separation of an SF-340 propeller blade leading edge
Failure of an EMB-120 cockpit window support beam
Alleged need for a B-757 speed brake warning system
Confusing signage for runways 28/23L at Cleveland, OH

A Monthly Safety Bulletin from

The Office of the NASA  
Aviation Safety Reporting  
System,  
P.O. Box 189,  
Moffett Field, CA  
94035-0189

### January 1996 Report Intake

Air Carrier Pilots	1661
General Aviation Pilots	547
Controllers	80
Cabin/Mechanics/Military/Other	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2313</b>

# “A Little Madness in the Spring...

...Is wholesome even for the King,” declared Emily Dickinson. Spring madness can encompass graduations, horse races, birthdays, engagements and retirements. Reporters share some sobering experiences of airborne celebrations gone awry.

## Senior Prank

A high school senior engaging in “an act of celebration” almost ended up not having anything to celebrate.

■ *I rented a plane to practice flight maneuvers. During the flight, I decided to fly over my high school. [In a few days], I was to graduate with honors, and had received an appointment to the Air Force Academy. Unfortunately, but not deliberately, my altitude descended below the legal level.*

*Upon landing, I was met by the county sheriff. The high school officials had called them because of my low flying. I met with the principal to apologize. I was suspended and not permitted to attend commencement exercises with my senior class.*

*I did not want this to jeopardize my scholastic or career plans. The incident has taught me to pay closer attention to my altitude, especially over populated areas.*

## Win, Place, and Show

A traffic watch pilot, monitoring traffic congestion after a race, reports another incident over a populated area.

■ *In the vicinity of a horse racing track, following a big race, I dropped two rolls of toilet paper, as a kind of celebration. The paper unraveled and harmlessly descended, as a streamer.*

*A short time later, Approach asked if I had seen an aircraft which was reported to have dropped toilet paper. I did not answer. With my understanding that I was not creating a hazard to persons or property, I thought there was no harm done. I was the only aircraft in the area.*

Any dropped object may be potentially hazardous, even if only as a visual distraction for motorists.

## Blue Room Blues

Next, a passenger experienced a memorable birthday as a result of a minor cabin equipment problem. The Captain explains:

■ *Just prior to pushback, the Flight Attendant came forward with the bathroom doorknob in her hand. She advised me that she could reattach the knob just by pushing it back on the shaft. I directed her to do that...Enroute the knob came off again with a passenger in the bathroom and the passenger couldn't get out. The Flight Attendant was able to free the lock from the outside.*

*The passenger had never flown before, had just graduated from college, and this was his birthday! He took the whole thing good-naturedly, and said he would have quite a story to tell his future grandchildren.*

Since the aircraft was still on the ground when the problem first occurred, the wisest course probably would have been to request a mechanic to properly secure the door handle. Alternatively, if passenger load and flight time had permitted, the lavatory simply could have been locked so the situation would not recur.



## Blowing Smoke

■ *The pilot was on a mission to skywrite a woman's name. "...#1." Her imaginative boyfriend had ordered the service. The pilot was proceeding down the river, and ran into a portion of the Class B airspace [in proximity to an arrival / departure route] prior to contacting Approach. The delay in radio contact was due to frequency congestion on the Approach frequency. After contacting Approach, the pilot did ask for and receive permission to skywrite at 9,500-10,000 feet.*

The reporter was impatient with the frequency congestion and eager to get to the task at hand. Unauthorized entry into such busy airspace could have become a serious hazard for other aircraft in the vicinity of the arrival / departure corridor.

## Going Out with a Bang

■ *I made a normal takeoff and was climbing out, when my Inflight Coordinator informed me that the very heavy beverage cart had broken loose from the first class galley, rolled down the aisle of first class and come to rest after damaging the partition between first and business classes. The Inflight Coordinator and the Flight Attendant had rushed to hold the cart in place until the airplane [had stabilized], enabling them to resecure the cart.*

*It occurred to me that any other action on their part might have triggered a high-speed abort, with possible consequences such as blown tires, a runway excursion, evacuation injuries, etc. After I arrived, I filled out a report commending the Inflight Coordinator for her presence of mind, and then retired, as the next day was my birthday!*

A final preflight check of the security of the beverage cart latches might have prevented this mishap. Given the situation as it occurred, however, the cabin crew did a fine job of minimizing the problem. What a way for this Captain to retire! ▲