Now, how does this work again?

Knock the rust off your flying skills and don’t be an April fool, says Flight Training Liaison & Safety Officer John Teesdale

• Take some refresher training with an instructor.
• If you have an NPFL, you must fly an hour with an instructor every two years anyway, so why not have it as your first flight of the season? And every year, not every two?
• If you have the old PPL(M) where an instructional flight is not compulsory, why not have it as your first flight of the season? And every year, not every two?

SPRING is springing, and lots of insects and animals are emerging from hibernation. Many microlights will also be seeing the light of day for the first time in months. Owners will be busy cleaning the winter dust and dirt from their machines, checking for mouse damage, charging batteries, pumping up tyres, draining old fuel (modern mogas goes off very quickly) and generally sprucing up to speed. Not just flying skills either – how good is your preflight planning? Weather? Notams? Current chart? IMSAFE? Read the Skyway Code pp27-30.

The problem is, although we know that flying skills and knowledge are perishable, we don’t see the rust until we go flying. Which can be too late.

Oops, forgot to check the Notams. And those nine red Hawks look familiar. Oops, forgot to check the chinslap. Damn, that’s the prop gone. Oops, what’s that big runway with passenger jets? Oh crikey, I’ve gone west, not east.

So, what do you know about human factors, the cause of more than 75% of accidents? Ask your…

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Oops, bit low on this approach… just raise the nose a bit… oh dear, it’s all going a bit wobbly.
SAFETY

• Are you aware of the advantages and shortcomings of GPS? A recent survey by the CAA on the causes of infringements found that proper use of moving-map GPS could have prevented the infringement in 89% of cases. But beware – if your software is not up to date, or you have no Wi-Fi where you are doing your planning, you may not have the latest information – this has caused infringements!

• Do you use the fuel's ability to evaporate (its volatility) at a specific temperature? So as temperature changes with the seasons, so does the fuel's ability to vaporise.

• Ethanol complicates the situation, as it has an effect on octane rating (how much a fuel can be compressed before burning) and RVP (volatility). Additionally, Ethanol is hygroscopic (able to absorb water). Certain factors affect water uptake, such as the percentage of ethanol, the overall age of the fuel and its storage conditions. RP offers the following advice:
  • The storage life of petrol is one year when kept under shelter in a sealed container.
  • Once a seal is broken, fuel-storage life is six months at 20°C or three months at 30°C.
  • The storage life of petrol in fuel tanks is one month.
  • This can be extended by topping up with one-third of fresh fuel, which restores the volatile components that will have evaporated.
  • Keep the tank at least half full to stop water vapour from being sucked in and condensing.
  • Check your fuel for signs of phase separation, this is where the Ethanol/water mixture visually separates and sinks below the rest of the fuel (which is subsequently reduced in Octane, as the Ethanol was previously boosting it). Fuel in this state must be discarded and replaced with fresh. Our general advice is that if the fuel has been standing for any reasonable period of time, take it out and put it in the lawn mower!

A wake-up call

By Steve Uzochukwu

LAST month we ran an abridged article on wake turbulence written by David Acton at NATS. The AAIB has just provided us with a practical example of the theory we read, with a bulletin on a flying incident which was a direct consequence of wake turbulence.

On 15 September last year, a Quik GT450 suffered a very heavy landing with damage to the landing gear and distortion to the underside at Perth Airfield. A helicopter took off while the GT450 was on the downwind leg, and the assessment was made that the wake turbulence would have dissipated by the time the flying was landing. While holding off, the aircraft encountered turbulence and the instructor applied full power, but the aircraft still made heavy contact with the ground before continuing the go-around.


USEFUL CHECKS when waking an aircraft from hibernation

• Use fresh fuel!
• Debris inside tanks
• Fuel filter
• Blockaded breather
• Carb bowls and rubber sockets
• Condition of hoses
• Exhaust
• Plugs and caps

AIRFRAME & SYSTEMS

• Tyre condition and pressures
• Wheel bearings
• Brakes
• Lubrication – controls
• Cable tension
• Battery condition – if it requires charging, use the correct type of charger (lead acid or lithium)
• Electrical Instrumentation / avionics
• General Signs of corrosion / contamination / damp

Water / moisture / insects in pitot and static lines

Circlers

Hangar rash

Look for signs of leakage

Be mindful of temperature, does the radiator need blanking adding or removing?

Service bulletins – have any appeared since your last flight?

Propeller – check the torque of bolts, this is essential for wooden props as the normal tension and contracts due to moisture exposure, ie from winter to summer (see photo)

April fuels!

By Rob Mott, Chief Inspector

ONE of the main issues during the winter lay-off relates to fuel, don’t get caught out. Petroleum provides seasonally alter the fuel blend from summer to winter. Why do they do this? It turns out, for good reason…

So, to summarise, it’s very tempting on the first good day of spring, when you are all excited, just to jump in the plane and go, but this is truly not a good idea, and has caused accidents and infringements.

As with all flying, good planning and being current gives you the best chance of staying safe and avoiding an infringement. This isn’t just theory – it’s fact!

Enjoy the new flying season, and fly safely.

Below

Broken bolts on a wooden propeller due to insufficient torque. Motty asks us to point out that the glorious pink fingernails do not belong to him!