

Transition Training

by
Pierre Smith

About 7 years ago, the EAA and other safety organizations were becoming increasingly concerned about the number of first flight accidents and fatalities. The advent of 200 MPH homebuilts that were "twitchy" with high sink rates and some with terrible stall characteristics cost the experimental family dearly in many cases, with freshly built \$100,000 plus airplanes auguring in after many years of sweat and money building them and little flight time before accidents. There was no formal transition training in place but only rides in other similar airplanes and often no familiarization at all before first flights!

The EAA contacted the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and held a meeting to discuss these accidents and what could be done to lower the rate. One of the biggest obstacles was the Government itself, in that the FAA regulations did not allow the use of an Experimental airplane to be used for hire or rental, thus precluding transition training. The FAA then authorized the EAA to be responsible for a transition training system whereby CFIs with RVs, Glassairs or whatever, could get a waiver from this regulation and charge for their airplane and their instructional time once their personal Phase 1 time was over. (Usually 40 hours for a new airplane in the near areas, around a 60 mile square block).

The EAA quickly came up with a very simple but effective system with only a single sheet of paper to fill out....your name and address, Licenses, hours, medical certificate, etc. and type of airplane. I applied for this waiver as soon as our Phase 1 was over for our RV6A and received the waiver in a matter of days..(private enterprise at work <g>). The initial agreement with the FAA allowed the EAA five years to administer the program and then see who or what entity would manage it after that period.

I designed what was basically a Private Pilot check ride syllabus, modified to suit the individual's needs and got busy immediately with students from as far away as California (1) and Missouri, Maine, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and the Southeast with about 65 to date, who have all flown their own airplanes since. I'm not allowed to do any "Birthday for pay" rides or basic instruction for a beginner student pilot, just licensed pilots who have either built or bought a flying RV. Our own Don Bush is one of the latter.

In 2007, the five year EAA administrative period was over and the FAA decided to start administering the program. This darn near disgusted me with the reams of paperwork, faxes, inspections and a new set of Operating Limitations for me and the airplane . . . a typical government run operation, very time consuming and wasteful but I finally endured it all and still continue with the training. This is usually 3-5 hours required by their Insurance company and consists of 15-20 landings and takeoffs and a bunch of airwork to include all stalls and emergency procedures.

The net result of all this has been a drastic reduction in first flight accidents and fatalities and is a huge success, all because of the EAA HQ's push for our safety. It really has been very gratifying to get e-mails or phone calls back telling me of their successful first flights. The same guys are now coming back for BFRs as well, so we stay in touch. The RVs are probably the most docile of high performance homebuilts to fly, when compared to the Lancair's high stall speed and tendency to snap at the stall. It has been fun and I've met some of the most unusual types . . . one gent was a machine gun manufacturer from South Carolina. There are no RV trainers north of the Mason-Dixon line and only about 6 or 8 of us Nationwide, doing RV transition training.



There were many RVs at the 2007 Keith Brock Fly-in held at Pierre's home field at the Louisville, Georgia, airport (2J3). Some of those RV owners had done transition training with Pierre.