

> INSTRUMENT QUALIFICATIONS



Ask anyone who holds and uses an instrument qualification what is the most important safety aspect of instrument flight, and the answer will invariably be currency.

We're not talking about the blistering cost of obtaining an IRI. Whether you hold an IMC rating or a full IR, the skills of instrument flight can quickly be lost if you do not regularly exercise them. Sadly, many holders of the UK IMC have been taught that their rating is little more than a get-you-out-of-trouble ticket, a poor brother to the gold-plated Instrument Rating – nothing could be further from the truth. Whether one has invested £5k for an IMC or £20k for an IR, the same rule applies to their safe use – use it or lose it!

The IMC trains its holders for instrument flight and instrument approaches to levels of accuracy not dissimilar to that of the IR – indeed apart from the (sensible) 1,800m take-off and landing visibility limitation, and of course the Class A restriction, the two ratings are operationally identical. But fail to keep either current and they can be a liability; the confidence of the 'back-pocket' rating soon evaporates when everything outside turns white.

Although we've reported for quite a while now that LAA continues to work with the CAA to relax the restriction, the fact is that no matter how competent or well equipped, all LAA Permit aircraft are at present limited to day VFR operation. But that does not necessarily mean that instrument currency cannot be maintained in a Permit aircraft.



Foggles being used for instrument flying practice (photo: Sportys.com)

So long as the Permit aircraft is flown day VFR, and for VFR-on-top operation the pilot holds either a JAR-FCL PPL or has an IMC/IR on his CAA PPL, there is nothing to prevent him or her from donning a set of foggles, taking along a competent safety pilot and flying the aircraft by 'sole reference to instruments and without external reference'. Indeed, column 9 'Instrument Flying' in the CAA-approved logbook is defined by ICAO Annex 1 as being there for just such a purpose. As long as you are qualified to do so, i.e. you hold a current IMC rating or IR, and the Permit aircraft remains under VFR, this is perfectly legal.

CAP 393 provides the legal guidance on simulated instrument flight. It requires that the aircraft is fitted with functioning dual controls and that a safety pilot is carried in a second control seat of the aircraft and who has, in a two-seat aircraft, adequate vision both forwards and to each side of the aircraft. Additionally, for practice instrument approaches in LAA aircraft, it is also important to inform the controller beforehand that you will be conducting approaches in VMC only, and are unable to comply with IFR or enter IMC if requested (Rule 24).

Of course the aircraft needs to be fitted with appropriate instruments and indeed these days very many are, whether of conventional mechanical design, or an integrated glass-cockpit suite. And because the aircraft is not operating under IFR, the onerous requirements for 'approved' instruments do not apply. Indeed, suitably equipped Permit aircraft are perfectly capable of legally being used to renew an IMC rating.

LESS THAN A TENNER

En route instrument capability can, as mentioned before, be readily maintained using foggles, and this is an area where perhaps the greatest safety advantage can be obtained by maintaining currency. Whether flying straight-and-level, or intercepting and tracking a navigation aid such as a VOR, taking time to fly on instruments for at least a portion of each trip when a safety pilot is on board is time well spent.

Once your basic instrument skills start to improve, consider getting back into practice with instrument approaches. These can be performed at any UK aerodrome with a published Instrument Approach Procedure (IAP) and don't need to break the bank.

A morning of telephone calls to around 40 aerodromes with IAPs revealed some startling facts about the cost of performing a pre-planned 'training' instrument approach and go-around, i.e. not landing. Putting aside Farnborough's £500+ fee, prices ranged from zero at Glasgow and £2 at all Highlands & Island aerodromes, to over £45 at Norwich, Biggin Hill and Belfast. The smallest aerodromes with limited IAPs were often by no means the cheapest.

The fact is that a radar-vectorised ILS can be performed for under a tenner at 13 UK aerodromes, five of which are inside controlled airspace, suggests that this will certainly not break the bank and these are where LAA members should perhaps take their custom.

At the other end of the scale, 16 aerodromes charge over £20 for a single instrument approach, seven of which are not even inside controlled airspace! And most encouraging was one major airport in the middle of the country which not only charged below £10 but was of the firm view that it would happily see light aircraft using its ILS if only to help encourage them to operate within the commercial traffic environment; truly a breath of fresh air, especially given the constant imploring for 'small' aircraft to stay away from controlled airspace. Given the amount of time the controller is attending to you whilst performing an instrument approach, a tenner really is great value.

If all this sounds too good to be true, it's not. Retaining instrument currency not only helps make you a safer pilot, but the additional bonus of having instrument hours in the logbook is that, when the proposed simplified EASA 'PPL-IR' comes into effect, up to 30 of the minimum 40 hours of instrument flight time may well be credited from existing instrument hours logged. This is a major advantage in countries such as the UK, which allow instrument flight without a full IR.

If you don't have an IMC rating, now is the time to take the plunge. For those who do hold a current or expired IMC, get back behind the dials and take positive steps to improve and retain currency. Not only will it help ensure a safe outcome if you really do get caught by bad weather (or even cross-Channel haze) it will help provide a fast-track route to a full EASA IR when the time comes. ■

Cost of a pre-booked training instrument approach and go-around

Under £10

Glasgow
Durham Tees Valley
East Midlands
Leeds Bradford
Hunberside
Inverness
Sumburgh
Kirkwall
Blackpool
Coventry
Dundee
Isle of Man
Guernsey
Scatsta
Stornoway
Carlisle
Yeovil
Alderney

£10-£20

Birmingham
Doncaster Sheffield
Southampton
Cambridge
Oxford
Bristol Filton
Hawarden
Manston
Gloucestershire
Lydd

Over £20

Londonderry
Prestwick
Bournemouth
Cardiff
Newquay
Bristol
Newcastle
Norwich
Aldergrove
Southend
Cranfield
Shoreham
Belfast City
Exeter
Biggin Hill
Farnborough

 ILS approach
 Other approach
Inside controlled airspace



PERMIT TO PRACTISE

Mike Barnard reports on how and where we can keep our instrument flying up to scratch in Permit aircraft