

Coaching Corner...

Currency versus proficiency...

By PCS National Coach, **Chris Thompson**



As we slowly continue to come out of lockdown I was musing, along with reading numerous articles on the same lines, about the fact that many of us had not have flown for some time. Solo flying had its limitations but thankfully dual instruction is also now allowed, so, while we maybe have now become *current*, how *proficient* are we?

Currency and proficiency are not the same thing. The ANO sets minimum standards for currency, which has a lot to do with staying legal, but not much to do with being a competent pilot. We all hopefully remember the 'three landings in 90 days' rule and many of us are governed by either our own group currency rules or maybe the standing orders of your flying club stating something along the lines of, 'if you want to rent then you must fly the aircraft every 30 days'.

We can all look up the airspace rules about 'visibility' and 'distance from cloud' etc, but are we able to actually fly in conditions that are close to the minimum limits specified? After all, three kilometres visibility is only around two runway lengths of most small airfields and airstrips!

Bottom line? Flying is not just like riding a bicycle. Individual needs vary, but for the majority of us, meeting the above requirements (and nothing more) is simply not enough. The obvious solution to the currency problem is to do more flying. But when it comes to

Above This Emerald pilot was landing at last year's Rally in a 90° crosswind from the right. He is literally in the process of touching down after kicking it straight and putting aileron into wind for a clean touchdown. Such skills demand proficiency as well as currency.

proficiency – being prepared to handle any situation with which you might reasonably be presented – quality actually beats quantity. Fifty hours of circuit work in the past year, all of it on benign days, might make for smooth light wind landings, but it will not count for much the first time you're faced with a 15kt crosswind.

Overview

Both currency and proficiency have similar definitions and they do complement each other, but neither one is a replacement for the other. Being current means that you have met the requirements to act as a pilot in command of an aircraft within a certain period. Being proficient, according to the OED, means the ability to do something well because of training and practice. You can be current without being a proficient pilot, but if you are proficient, most likely you have also met the currency requirements to get to that point.

If you lose currency you probably also lose some proficiency, but currency is one (and only one) factor affecting proficiency.

Being current

Learning how to become current may be as easy as reading the training manual for the type of flying that you are going to do. To act as pilot in command of an aircraft, you need to have accomplished your 'one-hour

with an instructor' or a 'proficiency check' within the preceding 12 calendar months. To be able to carry passengers, we all know that you need at least three take-offs and three landings within the preceding 90 days. For night flights with passengers, one of the landings needs to be full stop at night, not touch and go.

Becoming proficient

Many of the articles and studies that have been collected on this subject stress that one can meet the above currency requirements without becoming proficient in the operation of an aircraft.

Proficiency in an aircraft includes not only the knowledge and skill you need to operate normally, but also those you may need when things go wrong, such as knowledge of the emergency procedures for the aircraft that you fly, as well as type of flying. Maintaining proficiency in aircraft of different categories and classes can be more of a challenge due to the different skill sets that are required.

The main similarity is practice. To become proficient, you should practise your skills in an aircraft. It is best to do this with an instructor to make sure that you are doing so correctly, but you can also achieve this on your own.

There are many ways to become a proficient pilot; one way is to become current and then practise more on your own until you feel you are fully competent in the aircraft. You can also solicit assistance from many sources, including an LAA Coach, an Instructor, or even



Above For navigation practice, some of the PC simulator programs are very useful.

a computer software program. Practise what you know and then develop further onto more complex things.

Practising performance manoeuvres by yourself is not as rewarding as demonstrating your skills to another pilot. You do not always have to fly yourself under the watchful eyes of a Coach, because a fellow pilot can still demonstrate ways to perform a smooth short field landing that may have been taught to him or her differently.

If you want to practise a manoeuvre that you do not normally perform, such as soft field landings, then an hour or two of instruction from a Coach is likely to accomplish much more than a number hours of going through it on your own.

PC simulators

One of the newest areas of training that you can use to your advantage is the use of computer simulator programs. Using an inexpensive VFR simulator or Navigation program can provide good graphics for the procedures to improve navigation techniques.

The 'feel' of a simulator 'aircraft' may not be what you are used to, but the programs are getting better as the technology improves. ■



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