



NEW PILOT INTERVIEW WITH ROB HOHMANN

Marcelo Morichi

1. When did you take your practical test?

A: After weeks of weather and life delays (in addition to a decade-long break from training), I completed my practical test on 2 January 2022. A fitting start to the new year.

2. How long did it last?

A: I honestly can't remember. I've compartmentalized the day deep down in my subconscious. But according to IACRA - 1.5 on the oral, 0.6 on the flights.



3. Who was the tormentor (Designated Pilot Examiner)?

A: Piet Barber, Summer Son of Skyline Soaring Club

4. What were the flight conditions that day?

A: They weren't great for soaring, but okay for a PT: KFRR 021815Z AUTO 23005KT 10SM SCT050 16/12 A2968 RMK AO1

5. How many flights did you complete? What do you remember most vividly about that flight?

A: It took three flights to get it all done. On the first, we conspicuously towed to the north side of FRR around 2000 MSL before getting a wave-off from the towplane. I released and did a normal pattern entry and a slip to land. The next was a tow to 3k where we did some slow flight, steep turns, and a stall or two. During the oral, one of

the PTS items I blanked on was compass turning error. I hadn't studied it since my Private Pilot check ride a long time ago. The DPE graciously allowed me to look it up. In flight, north of the field on a southerly heading, he asked for a turn to 180. I knew it was a slight turn to the left as we were already heading mostly south. But the compass swung the wrong way. So I changed the direction of the turn to the right and made a complete 360 to arrive on a heading of 180. Point made, DPE. The lesson stuck, however, and during my instrument checkride a few months later I handled the partial panel stuff with aplomb, navigating complicated airspace with only a whiskey compass and sheer, unencumbered, natural talent.

6. How did you prepare for the oral portion of the practical test? What was difficult about that part of the test and what advice would you give other students preparing for it?

A: I find that I learn best by studying the material two or three different ways. For me, this meant reading the Glider Flying Handbook front to back, highlighting all relevant sections of the FAR/AIM, and then picking up a copy of Bob Wander's excellent book, Private Pilot Glider Checkride Made Easy. The book condenses all the knowledge you'll need for the PT into a single source, and omits anything you won't need to know for the test. From there, it was easy to identify areas of weakness in my knowledge, which I could then bolster with the aforementioned FAA pubs. Soaring weather was one such area (and one which I'll never completely comprehend), and for that I found an excellent resource in AC-00-6B. Find an old paper copy if you can; the illustrations are awesome.

CFI-G Allison Diaz was also kind enough to spend a couple of hours doing a mock-oral with me on Zoom a few weeks before my checkride. From this I learned that I still didn't know anything about soaring weather which prompted a deep dive into how Earth's atmosphere works.

7. Who was your first passenger after you became a pilot?

A: My partner, Jesica, was my first passenger after I became a pilot, a day after my check ride in a Cessna 172 down to EZF for milkshakes. My first passenger as a *glider pilot* was her mother, Welda, during SSC Family Day at Burner Field this year. I invited Jesica and her mom out for the day to see what soaring was all about. They both had reservations about me flying airplanes with no engine. After watching ops for a few hours (much longer than I expected them to hang around), Welda said quietly and unexpectedly, "I'd go for a ride." My turn in the queue happened to be coming up so I said "Let's go!"

After 30 seconds on tow, she asked if we could make it a quick flight. I radioed ahead and asked for a pattern tow. But somehow we got to 3000' MSL where I released and did a few slow turns left and right. Her nervousness subsided a bit and I kept the dialogue going, pointed out a few landmarks, the location of the field and the airplanes on the ground. It was about a 13 minute flight, but she hasn't stopped talking about it and with a bit of encouragement I bet we'd see her back at the field for instruction someday.

8. What is your most memorable flight since you became a pilot?

A: Ask me again in a year. I've only had six (?!?!?!?) flights since I got my rating, and three of those were with Ron Wagner yelling at me from the back seat.

9. What are your goals as a glider pilot for the next two years?

A: Bronze badge, commercial glider, and CFI-G.

10. If you met with Robb when he started his flight lessons, what advice would you give him?

A: I'll parrot the advice a grizzled old CFI gave me during a year-long training slump in powered

aircraft: “Time, money, and passion - you can’t succeed in aviation if you’re ever missing one of those three things.” I find that to be true still to this day.

If I could give two pieces of advice, it would be the above and “always preflight the airsick bag.”

11. What are the two things that Skyline Soaring Club does well in developing new pilots? What is the one thing that could be improved?

A: I think mentorship is more important than flight instruction in developing safe, competent, confident pilots. Yes, we need to meet the standards defined in the PTS/ACS to prove to the FAA we’re competent not to bump into things with airplanes. I’m not arguing that. But that’s the absolute bare minimum and SSC doesn’t develop bare minimum pilots. It’s the mentorship offered by the SSC instructors and membership that keeps students motivated and challenged. Off-hours emails and phone calls with CFIs, hangar flying at the field, discussions over the listserv, etc. I dare anyone to come out to the field on an ops day and NOT go home knowing more about the sport, or discovering some previously unknown facet of soaring to explore further. What could be improved? I don’t know but I wish Ron would stop yelling all the time.



YELLING? WHO’S YELLING?

Ron Wagner

SSC Member Ron Wagner is a regular contributor at Quora, where he recently answered this question posed by a Quora reader.

QUORA QUESTION: My flight instructor yells at me if I make mistakes. Is that a normal practice? I used to be really excited about flying, not anymore.

Yelling is never an acceptable teaching technique and most of these answers say you need another instructor. But if you’ll read my two stories below, you’ll see, “maybe not.”

If you overlook the point I make here, you’ll be missing an important aspect of becoming a pilot-in-command.

I have been yelled at twice in my flying career and both times I fixed it instantly, in the air and it never happened again with either instructor. Interestingly, they were on the opposite ends of their careers. One was brand new—a Second Lieutenant who was less than a month out of instructor school. The other had been an instructor for more than 60 years—so this story illustrates that even an experienced instructor can fall into bad habits.

YOUNG GUY: AIR FORCE

One day during USAF pilot training, the IP in the back seat started yelling at me for not



accomplishing the task that needed to be done. It was one of the most challenging things to learn, which is to rejoin on lead during formation flight.

THE TASK: *Imagine the aircraft in the back being half a mile away and needing to rejoin the wing of lead. We approached lead with 50 knots of overtake speed (lead at 350 vs. us at 400), and then hit the speed brake and throttled back at precisely the right time.*

Too early and we’d end up short and have to creep up on lead. You’ve seen Top Gun and you know that in a combat

environment, lead cannot risk stable flight while wing takes their sweet time to slowly settle into position. Wing must tuck in quickly so lead can start maneuvering again. With 50 knots of overtake, the whole maneuver should take well under a minute.

If we were too late in slowing, we theoretically would fly harmlessly past lead with three feet of wingtip clearance. But an overshoot, combined with a three-foot lateral error, might see us all ejecting.

Admittedly, that task can put an instructor on edge. However, a good instructor can teach that in a calm manner, with no yelling, and will know when to take over the controls.

I yelled back at him to say that there was no way I would ever get it while my head was spinning with two sets of conflicting thoughts. One, my train of thoughts as I was processing how to accomplish the task my own way. Two, his stream of thoughts which were out of sync with mine. I needed to close down the conflicting thought stream.

I didn't realize until the debrief after the flight that the last words I said were, "Just shut up and let me fly."

He was dead quiet the rest of the flight. On that very same—and very silent—pass I tucked right into perfect three-foot separation position.

After we landed, I figured I'd end up in the squadron commander's office for some REAL yelling.

But no.

We returned to our briefing table and he sat quietly for several minutes and then said that he realized he had a lot to learn about being an instructor.

We had an excellent, long talk and he never yelled again. He turned out to be my favorite instructor who gave me one of my coolest tips on flying the T-38. He was a great guy, but he was young, inexperienced, and nervous.

OLD GUY: GLIDERS

At age 69, I decide to add "glider" to my ratings so I went to one of the



commercial glider schools and flew with their most experienced instructor, who had previously been an air force jet pilot himself.

On about our second flight, that veteran jet jockey actually pounded his fist on the side wall of the rear cockpit and yelled, "the string, Ron, the string." It had been 45 years since an instructor had yelled at me, but I remembered what to do about it.

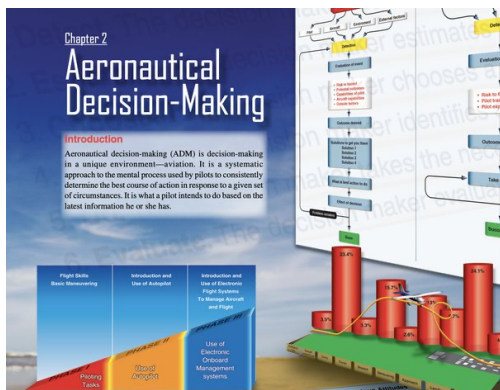
I said, "There's no doubt I have a lot to learn about using the rudder in gliders. But pounding on the wall and yelling is not an acceptable learning technique and I won't fly with you again if you yell even one more time. Now, if you'd like to use your decades of glider experience to teach some helpful rudder techniques to another old jet pilot, then I am all ears."

After that, we got along great, and I had my glider add-on rating three days later.

BE THE PILOT IN COMMAND

Flight students often overlook the basic principle that learning to fly involves the acquisition of two new skill sets. One is glaringly obvious to everyone: learning to fly the physical aircraft.

But the other one, which is equally important, is learning to be the pilot-in-command, which requires



strong decision making skills. The FAA calls it [Aeronautical Decision Making \(ADM\)](#).

When I train new students, I do so by breaking those two skill sets into two clear and separate phases.

In phase one, I help them become pilots—learning to fly the physical aircraft. During that phase I totally plan their lessons for them and tell them what we’re going to do on each flight. That gets them to their first solo.

But the moment they have soloed, I switch gears. I tell them, “Congratulations, you are now officially a pilot. Now we’re going to switch to phase two in which you’ll become a pilot-in-command.” I won’t plan their lessons for them. I make sure they understand the syllabus and let them know that they should take the lead on figuring out future lessons.

I let them know that from now on, I’m there to guide them toward tweaking their flying skills, of course, but mostly for them to learn to take over. I’ll guide them in building their own lesson plans, but it’s definitely a different role from the pre-solo phase.

Sometimes, an instructor—or even a flight examiner—NEEDS to be told to shut up. Assert yourself. Be the pilot-in-command. Don’t hesitate to say “Shut up and let me fly.” You might be doing them a huge favor. If they don’t “get it,” then look for another instructor.

ONLY ONE KIND OF YELLING IN FLIGHT

Flying is too much fun for there to be any yelling, unless you’re letting out a joyous whoop to express how awesome it is.

Like catching [Wave Lift](#) in a sailplane.

Or cruising at more than 100 knots a few hundred feet above a mountain ridge in [Ridge Lift](#) in a sailplane.

Or making your first wing takeoff in a supersonic Air Force jet.

I clearly recall whooping with joy at all of those moments.



CONGRATS TO NEW PILOT!

With CFI Ron Wagner’s recommendation, Kevin Barrett added a glider add-on rating on August 8 after suffering through the inquisition of our very own DPE, Piet Barber!



AND ANOTHER NEW PILOT!!

Mia Anderson received her private pilot certificate on August 6, one week after her 17th birthday and before getting her driver’s license (which she did the following week)! She



took her dad, Brent, a captain for Southwest, as her first passenger. She plans to start working on her power rating next.



CONGRATULATIONS TO NERISSA ZOBELL

On August 6, Nerissa made her first solo and received her "A" badge from instructor Ron Wagner. This



could turn out to be a unique situation for Skyline, as not only does her father, Alex, have a glider rating, but owns TWO gliders, one in its trailer at KFRR, the other a "project" in his basement. So, look out in the near future for a father-daughter family of "his and her" gliders!! (A similar situation has occurred only once in the past, when husband and wife members Lisa Sergent and Tim James owned a 1-26 and a Blanik L-33.)



ANOTHER SKYLINER REACHES FOR THE SKY

Andy McGowan

In August, Maxwell McGowan (member since 2019) left to attend college at



Andy (Center) with his parents

the University of Oklahoma (OU) in Norman, Oklahoma. He graduated from South Lakes High School in Reston, Virginia with an International Baccalaureate (IB) Certificate. Max is studying Aerospace Engineering at the OU Gallogly College of Engineering and is a member of Air Force ROTC Detachment 675 (Bravo Flight).

It was a busy summer for Max. As a Cadet 1st Lieutenant in Civil Air Patrol (CAP), he attended a 15-day powered flight academy in June at Fremont, Nebraska. Although based in Fremont, CAP students flew to several historical World War II army airfields that conducted flight training of B-17s, B-24s, and P-47s. Max was the first cadet

student in the 2022 flight academy to solo, which earned him the call sign "Hoover," in honor of U.S. aviator Bob Hoover. Several days after returning from Nebraska, Max started a five-week paid internship with General Dynamics at Dulles Airport. Max had an outstanding experience working for the General Dynamics (GD) Corporate Headquarters Aviation unit. He shadowed the Chief Pilot, travelled on one GD mission, and became knowledgeable on corporate operation of the three GD Gulfstream jets based at KIAD...including a four week old, entirely-glass-cockpit G500 (photos available). Max met General James Mattis and raised some eyebrows when marshalling the CEO's jet to the hanger (based on his young appearance).

Max finished his internship on a Friday and left for OU on the following Sunday. He earned his PPL-G last November and is looking forward to returning to Skyline Soaring for end-of-the year gliding (perhaps a Thanksgiving Ad-Hoc Day). Thanks to all SSC members who helped Max become the safe, proficient pilot he is today!





Skyline Soaring Club, Inc.

is a private, 501(c7) non-profit organization, dedicated to the enjoyment and promotion of the sport of soaring. SSC is based at the Front Royal-Warren County, Va. Airport and is an affiliate club of the Soaring Society of America.

For information about the club go to
www.skylinesoaring.org

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