

Tally Ho – Traffic in Sight

Simple Technique Helps You Spot Traffic More Quickly

“Traffic, Traffic.”

Nothing quite jars you from your 2,500 RPM-induced reverie like that squawk. While the traffic display on the Garmin and/or MFD gives you a good idea of the azimuth (one o'clock, two o'clock, etc.) to the target, the elevation can be hard to visualize. Until now!

By some wonderful cosmic coincidence, the tangent of a one-degree angle is almost exactly one-sixtieth. Why is this so great? It means an airplane one nautical mile away and 100 feet above us, is almost exactly one degree above us. This fact lets us quickly derive the elevation to our target.

The number shown on the traffic display (which is given in hundreds of feet), divided by the range to the traffic in nautical miles equals the elevation to the target.

So looking at figure 1, the aircraft at our 11 o'clock is five degrees below us (-05/1 nm). The target at one o'clock is two degrees above us (+06/3 nm).

Next, we convert this degree number to a visual picture, also an easy task. Extend a hand at arms length, fingers together and parallel to the horizon. Each finger is approximately two degrees thick. For maximum accuracy, remember for typical cruising altitudes the horizon is about one to two degrees

below us; rather than putting your hand on the horizon and counting from there, start one finger thickness above it, and count up or down, as appropriate.



Figure 1



This may sound tricky, but after practicing a few times it becomes second nature, and will help you acquire traffic much more rapidly.

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