

“Are we there yet?”

By Richard Bertoli, CSIP

As pilots, we represent an extremely small percentage of the general population and many of us take pride in our achievements that set us apart from the masses. Yet, we love to share our passion for flying with our non-pilot friends and family, encouraging them to join us on weekend trips and \$100 hamburgers, then assuring them that flying in a “little plane” is perfectly safe. What can we do as “captain of the ship” to make these trips enjoyable for our passengers, while also addressing safety and proper care of the aircraft?

The most thorough passenger brief starts days before the flight. It’s important for your passengers to understand that there is no guarantee that you will depart or return on the proposed date and times, due to circumstances beyond your control, i.e. weather or maintenance. Traveling light should be suggested to those who you feel might need such a recommendation; you know who they are. A “Dos and Don’ts” document is attached to this article that could be emailed in advance of the flight, which stresses sleep, proper nutrition and hydration to ensure a comfortable voyage.

When is the last time you looked at the audio panel supplement in the aircraft POH? Knowing how to control the intercom volume and squelch for the front *and* rear seats is a necessity. The “Pilot” or “Crew” isolation buttons can be life savers when flying with young children. In-flight entertainment is something else to consider; do you know how to patch a DVD player or iPod into the audio system? It’s the little things that can make the difference between an enjoyable flight and airborne bliss.



Before boarding the aircraft, show your passengers where to step and what handles to use, or, more importantly, where NOT to step: *flaps*, and what “handle” NOT to use: *the door piston*, which bends very easily. Instruct them to remain clear of the propeller and to avoid contacting the fuselage with sharp jewelry, baggage, or abrasive material. Be sure that the fragile (and invisible) cup holders are fully retracted, as they *will* get stepped on and broken. Try to preflight the aircraft alone while passengers wait in the FBO or terminal area, so that the procedure can be conducted free of distraction and without an audience.

The Cirrus POH offers little in the way of passenger interaction, except for this note from the Normal Procedures checklist:

Ensure all the passengers have been fully briefed on smoking and the use of the seat belts, doors, emergency exits/hammer, and CAPS.

While these items are essential and should certainly be addressed prior to engine start, this brief alone does not a memorable flight make! Why not play airline captain, like you’ve always wanted to, and inform your passengers of what you’ll be flying over, ETE, ETA, weather at the destination, estimated ground speed, and

so forth. Once the avionics are up and running, you can show them where to look for all these figures on the MFD, in addition to the flight planned route and current location of the aircraft. A “North up” presentation on the map, if only temporary, is usually best for the latter, as familiar geographical landmarks emerge when zoomed out far enough. It’s also a good idea to inform your passengers of the different sounds they may hear during the flight, especially the autopilot disconnect tones, traffic and terrain warnings. Put yourself in their shoes hearing a loud “Beep-beep-beep-beep”, followed by “Traffic, traffic!” as you approach the runway (ground) at 100mph! The non-pilot would have no idea that you’ve simply disconnected the autopilot and the “traffic” is only an aircraft holding short of the runway for departure with his transponder on ALT. Keep it light; humor can be an effective method of instruction and of calming nerves, but avoid giving the impression that you don’t take this stuff seriously.

The inevitable, “What’s this? What’s that?” questions posed by the curious, may have to be deferred until the cruise flight portion of the trip, to avoid unwanted departure delays. In fact, any unnecessary conversation should be kept to a minimum until out of the terminal environment, especially if flying IFR. Most people use the “sterile cockpit” rule below a pre-determined altitude, e.g. 3000 ft AGL. Once airborne, don’t forget to utilize the extra sets of eyes for traffic surveillance, which could be turned into a fun game for the young ones. Whether or not you decide to use the right seater as a “co-pilot,” is up to you, though frequent fliers can be a valuable resource during high workload periods.



The passengers should be made aware that their comfort and safety are of the utmost importance to you. They are literally putting their lives in your hands. If the successful outcome of a proposed flight is ever in doubt, don’t go. We won’t delve further into the personal minimums and risk management strategy in this article, but all that stuff really comes into play when it’s not just your life you’re fooling with. It often helps to discuss potential risks associated with the trip among the passengers to gauge their tolerance of turbulence, bad weather, bladder control, etc. Keep them posted throughout the flight, always consider the option to divert and land, if necessary, and don’t forget the sick-sacs.

When deplaning, don’t let the passengers dash across the ramp to the nearest building. Children, especially, may not know to look out for taxiing aircraft or be savvy enough to avoid the jet blast of the low-slung Citation in front of them. You should consider them your responsibility until everyone is safely inside the terminal. Upon returning the aircraft, it’s a simple matter of common courtesy to clean up any mess that may have been left behind by children, pets, or particularly messy in-laws. Avoid snacks that crumble, stain, or are prone to causing “sticky fingers”; leave the jelly doughnuts at the FBO, OK?

Flying in a small aircraft is a privilege that few get to experience. We are working against a negative portrayal in the media, which stems mostly from ignorance, so we must do what we can to educate those around us. Take people for rides. They’ll talk about it for weeks. When they ask, “Are we there yet?”, show them how to figure it out; you may have a budding new member of the family on board.

10 DOS AND DON'TS FOR THE FIRST-TIME CIRRUS AIRCRAFT PASSENGER

Congratulations! You are about to have the ride of a lifetime in a Cirrus airplane. If you have never been in a light General Aviation aircraft, or even if you have spent thousands of hours in them, you will never forget this flight! The versatility, capabilities, and safety features of this aircraft are found in no other production airplane ever built. Here is a list of things you can do (and not do) to get the most out of your upcoming flight!

- DO** Get plenty of sleep the night before your flight – after all, you don't want to sleep through the flight of a lifetime!
- DONT** Change your daily routine – maintaining your body's natural schedule is the best way to ensure you cope well with the different environment you will experience in your flight.
- DO** Hydrate well the day before your flight – the air upstairs is drier than on the ground, so you may need the extra fluids.
- DONT** Drink too many caffeinated beverages before your flight – caffeine is a natural diuretic; you don't want to have your flight cut short because you have to answer the call of nature!
- DO** Eat normally before your flight – maintain your body's natural schedule!
- DONT** Eat exceptionally heavy foods (a lot of fats or bulk) – lighter foods (fruits, salads, pastries, etc.) will digest faster and keep you more comfortable.
- DO** Bring your camera (still is good, video is better!) – you will want a permanent record of one of the most unforgettable times of your life!
- DONT** Forget to turn off your cell phone – the Cirrus is a technically advanced aircraft that relies on a lot of electronics and radios that may get interference from your phone.
- DO** Pay attention to the passenger briefing – everything from the seat belts and doors to the parachute system are different from any other airplane you have flown in.
- DONT** Be afraid to ask questions – your pilot is like every other pilot, they love to talk about their airplanes and flying!
- DO** Be vigilant for other aircraft and ground vehicles – a big part of staying safe on the ramp and in the air is seeing and avoiding conflicts with other vehicles.
- DONT** Interrupt your pilot during the preflight inspection – while they will be happy to discuss any part of the aircraft or flying in general, an uninterrupted flow around the airplane ensures critical items are not overlooked!
- DO** Ensure your seat belt is properly latched – wear the lap belt low and comfortably tight on your waist with the shoulder straps resting between your shoulder socket and collar bone.
- DONT** Remove your seat belt at any time – you can not get out of your seat, so leave it on!
- DO** Observe the advanced avionics and instrumentation – the heart of the Cirrus flight experience!
- DONT** Engage the pilot in conversation on takeoff, landing, or any time while maneuvering close to the ground – even in the Cirrus, this is a high workload situation and requires the complete concentration of the pilot to ensure your safety.
- DO** Alert your pilot if you are uncomfortable in any way (too hot, too cold, nauseous, etc.) – the Cirrus has great climate controls and the pilot will do everything they can to make you comfortable.
- DONT** Smoke in or within 50 feet of the aircraft – nice interior, wings full of fuel: 'nuff said!

Before you know it (or are ready!) your flight will end. As the propeller stops turning and the avionics are turned off, you will be left with only the incredible memory of flying in the Cirrus and the video footage you took. While you are still on a high from this experience, complete these last two postflight actions:

- DO** Share your experience with others – family, friends, co-workers, clients, barbers, dentists, doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc. will all be interested in the story, pictures, and videos from your flight. Your account may encourage some of them to experience the wonderful world of general aviation themselves!
- DONT** Forget to thank whoever invited you to have the experience of a lifetime (and your pilot if that is not the same person) – flying a Cirrus aircraft requires a considerable investment of time and money, an investment that pays off immeasurably when someone says "Thank you!"

If you would like more information about Cirrus aircraft, please visit us at <http://www.southwestcirrus.com>. There you will find descriptions, reports, videos and more on Cirrus aircraft and the training that goes into flying them.

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