

Checkride (notes from all over)

My CFI told me that the FAA people are downright mean and flunk 4 out of 5 flyers just for spite. DE's are a little more understanding, but even they have to be sure to flunk a certain number of students or the FAA will start to suspect them.

Fact is that most FAA rides are shot down before getting off the ground. Having an airworthy aircraft and being able to find the required information in the logbooks has been a MAJOR checkride difficulty.

I did some of my worst flying in the last few months during the checkride but managed to pass anyway. So here's some advice for you newbies from an incredibly experienced pilot (-: 1.2 flight hours, < 1 day total :-)

- read the checklist of things to bring in the front of the PTS (or you may end up forgetting something very stupid)
- fly recently before the test
- don't schedule a late afternoon test if you know the examiner wants a x-country trip to the West
- try to relax. I didn't really fly well until I got under the hood and blocked out all distractions and nervousness.
- make sure the examiner has a headset so you can use yours
- Sometimes it's the little things that demonstrate the depth of your knowledge. The examiner said he liked:
 - perfect altitude and heading hold under the hood (why couldn't I do that without the hood?)
 - leaning during long taxi to keep the plugs from becoming fouled
 - beautiful slip down to the runway after coming in too high during the engine off emergency, landing right on the markers.
 - taught him how to open the door (Warrior door has 2 latches and if you open them in the wrong order, the door can catch)

Advice on checkrides in general:

1) Be Prepared.

- know your a/c [flight manual, journey log/paperwork, systems, etc]
- know your airport. If you are flying to a different airport where the examiner is, go there *before* the checkride to familiarize yourself with it
 - know the area [and map!] where the checkride is going to be conducted. You're not going to fly a hundred miles on the ride, but be sure you are familiar with the surrounding area in all directions
 - know the test. Read the test guide. You must do what the guide specifies, within the tolerances. Get the "How to Pass the Private Pilot Oral Guide"
 - know the examiner. Talk to students who have done rides with him. What are his tricks and stunts? His "gotta-knows?"
 - "No surprises" is the objective here.

2) Practice does not makes perfect, but practice of the right kind will give improvement. Do lots and lots of practice flight tests, as complete and realistic as possible. Consider flying with other instructors, so you get used to having a stranger in the right seat evaluating your flying [see "no surprises" above].

At your stage, flying with different instructors [of which the examiner is one] is really good for you. Each will notice something different, and will help you polish your skills.

3) Remember, if you flunk the flight test, you still have a day job

Relax, do your best, and good luck!

Experience:

Wow am I frustrated. I got all cranked up and prepared for my private pilot check ride, met with the examiner who discovered that all was not in order. For my long cross country trip I had calculated the distance based on my route, but distance from airport to airport was just under the required 300 miles. 23 stinking nautical miles short. So I hope anyone reading this does not make this mistake. It is not exactly spelled out in the FARs how to calculate the mileage for cross country trip, at least as far as I can determine, so it is an easy mistake to make.

You've just learned the cardinal rule of FAR interpretation: don't interpret. Take everything literally. If you're still unsure of a regulation, play it safe and plan for the most pessimistic interpretation.

Also, it's a good idea to be paranoid and recheck everything about a week before your checkride. A few days before my Instrument check ride I found a flight that was logged as a X-C that wasn't. Momentary panic was followed by frantic planning of one more X-C flight in the remaining time. Fortunately I found that I also had one flight logged that WAS a X-C that wasn't logged as such, and that put me several tenths over the requirement.

Well, I really enjoyed the first one, so I guess its not so bad to do it again. I just figured my next cross country would be with a private pilot's license

That's the attitude! You'll be doing many more X-C flights in the future. This one just requires an instructor's signature.

Experience:

I went for my checkride on Thursday. After a whole week of overcast cloudy, hazy, foggy, rainy weather, where I figured I would have to reschedule, the skies were crystal clear, bright, blue and sunny. The examiner started with the weather briefing, which I had done already by logging on to DUATS and used to work out the XC flight plan. We went over the flight plan, spent some time on the charts and discussed route/altitude philosophy (i.e. not what is legal or required but what is safe). Then she gave me four W&B and performance computations to do. She finished with 30 minutes of topic-by-topic questions and I felt I was doing pretty well.

Then after the oral, the examiner asked if I would mind rescheduling the flight test! ARGGHH! She had to take her husband to the doctor by 1PM, it was 11AM and she didn't think we could pre-flight, fly, and process paperwork in time. Well, I bowed to the inevitable, and rescheduled to Friday AM. There was now some risk as the long-term forecasts said that the rain and clouds are supposed to return for this weekend. But Friday AM would *probably* be OK.

Wouldn't you know, Friday, this morning, the day was pretty bad, despite clear blue skies, as most every airport within the region was IFR due to low-level fog/haze! Below 3 mile visibility by takeoff time, despite the morning weather check calling for 4-5 mile fog/haze *improving*. The examiner apparently felt a little guilty about having me trade a perfect day for this one and had me go out Special VFR rather than rescheduling again. At the reporting point given by tower we were VFR

so I started the first leg of the XC, as the next airport was reporting 4 mile visibility. However, I hadn't gone more than 3 minutes when our marginal VFR clearly dropped below 3 miles visibility and I had to abort.

The examiner had me check another airport 12 miles to the east and it turned out they were just at 3 miles visibility, so we diverted there. She had me do a soft-field ldg which was barely passable. I did a quite decent soft-field t/o. Then she had me do a short-field ldg, and I came in too high *twice*. The only good points I got for those were declaring go-arounds and not attempting anything stupid. And I had just done beautiful short and soft fields landings just earlier this week.

Well, she told me to ask for a straight-out departure, so I figured I had blown my ride, but that maybe she would allow a re-test on just the weak points after further instruction. She had me put the hood on Climbing out of the airport and I did well climbing and maneuvering on that part, so that may have helped put me back in the running. She then did two unusual attitudes on which I was OK on one and indecisive with the throttle on the other though still recovered it.

Then she had me do a VOR cross-fix for lost position location and I ended up putting us 10 miles east of the last airport, to which she said "Really?". I said, "Yes, by the bearings". She had me take off the hood and I could identify enough landmarks that I could tell we were 8 miles to the west of the airport. But after redoing the bearings and getting the same result, I was able to demonstrate to her that one of the VOR receivers was 40 deg off. So I got credit for it and the equipment got a squawk.

We were over the practice area, so then we did stalls, MCA, steep banks, turns about a point, and S-turns, which were all OK. Then she pulled the throttle and declared an emergency engine out. Went through the procedures correctly, but had a hard time seeing a suitable field because of the visibility and by the time I did, didn't have enough altitude to be assured of making the field if it had been for real. Sigh... nothing was working out right.

Finally, she had us head back, which required a Special VFR again. She gave me one more chance for a short-field and I finally did that one OK (I think I got bonus points for doing a decent slip on the approach) and I taxied off to refuel/tie-down. As I hit the brakes and went through my shutdown checklist, she said, "Well, you know you goofed a couple of times didn't you?", "Yes, I sure did". Pause... other shoe. "I'm still going to pass you since I saw enough evidence that you really have the necessary capability. You showed some good judgment, though you were anxious and the bad visibility and equipment problems didn't help."

So I passed after all. I think she cut me some extra slack on the short-field because of the good performance on the written and oral, the Special

VFR conditions, and the conservative judgment. I'm sure it also helped that I always had positive control of the airplane. I was less than happy at my sloppy performance, knowing that is not the best I can do. At the same time, I think I'm much better off not having "aced" everything, as there would have been some danger that I would actually have gone off thinking I knew how to fly. Today I was reminded that I was still learning, even as the Temporary Airman's Certificate was signed off and placed into my hands.

Anyway, I thought that I would post a summary, for those who are/might be interested. I went to a FAR 141 school, at Aurora Aviation, (3S2) in Aurora, Oregon.

Start date: 05 May 95

Solo date: 25 Jul 95, (after 16.8 hours dual)

PPSEL date: 09 Jan 96

Totals:

Night: 0.8 hours

Hood: 2.2 hours

Cross Country: 16.6 hours

Dual: 35.9 hours

Solo: 26.0 hours

Total time: 61.9 hours

Total landings: 211

Required books, charts, etc: ~\$200

Written test fee: \$60

DE fee: \$150

Total cost: ~\$4900 + toys*

(*I bought a lot of toys, like 2 pairs of headsets, video's, GPS, FlightMap, etc... that are not really needed for someone, but can be fun :-)

My checkride was quite the trip. The oral was a little over 2 hours, and we went up for 0.7 hours of the practical. The weather started getting worse, so we headed back to the FBO. We both have Cel phones, and asked the dispatcher give us a ring if the weather cleared. (It was going to clear around 2pm, if my prediction held true.) Around 2:30, we took off for part 2 of the practical, for a total of 2.1 hours in the air.

Checkride

My (First) Checkride (or... now I know what a pink slip looks like): Finally... After only 125 hours of training (80 Dual & 45 Solo) I got to take my checkride. As you may have already guessed, I didn't pass. I fell victim to one of the aeromedical factors that most of the training manuals don't discuss... the brain barf.

Frankly, I was nervous as hell, and I don't know why. I've always been one of those people who choke on tests. The oral went great. The examiner asked a lot of tough questions, and even a few that he didn't really expect an applicant to know the answers to; not to trick me, but to teach me some new things.

We spent about an hour on the oral and then it came time to get into the plane. I dutifully did the pre-flight while he sat in the plane; It was all of about 13 degrees out, and I guess he figured after I had I could survive 125 hours of flying I knew how to do this much. As we taxied to the runway, he asked for a short-field takeoff. I religiously pulled out the checklist and read down it... Taxied all the way to the end of the over-run... held the brakes then advanced the throttle ever so smoothly... called the engine instruments out loud and let her roll. Then somewhere just about the time I rotated it hit (the BB, that is)... all of a sudden I was attempting to do a soft-field takeoff. The plane lifted off and I leveled it out to fly in ground effect... without any flaps in, it just dropped back onto the runway, and to my horror he grabbed the yoke. I knew right then that was all she wrote!

Everything else went pretty good, except the plane got away from me for a moment under the hood. He wants to see me do more of that, but only wrote me up for the bad takeoff.

Well, if you've read this far, thanks! Now here comes the good part of the story; that is, what I learned, and what my fellow students can learn from this experience.

First of all, the examiner is not out to trick you, or to get you. I know now that I really had no reason to be nervous, and I know I won't be the next time. He coaxed me through some of the maneuvers and showed me a lot of little tricks that I hadn't learned from my instructor. After I did the stalls, he observed that I was still a bit timid about them, so he started doing a lesson. He first showed me that I didn't need to fixate on the instruments (since you can't see over the nose), but taught me to put my head against the side window and to look as far forward as possible. This allows you to line up a point on the horizon with the window frame and allows you to visually reference both attitude and yaw. I could hold the plane in the most ridiculous attitude, just on the verge of a stall using this approach, and because I could see, it wasn't as scary. He also demonstrated the C-150's ability to self recover from a stall, which I had been assured it would do, but had never seen.

Another thing... when you do your cross country flight plan, plan it all based on pilotage and dead reckoning... My examiner didn't want to hear about VORs... they're for emergencies! We flew all of about 8 miles of the trip. I pointed out one of the most recognizable landmarks in NJ (at least to someone flying out of my area) and that was it for cross country work.

Fellow students... look forward to your checkride (like any of you aren't) and look for it to be one of your best learning experiences. Keep your cool... Your instructor wouldn't have recommended you if you weren't capable of doing it.

Checkride:

I completed my private pilot checkride yesterday. Here is a long version of what happened, with the hope that it helps those of you who are soon to take the checkride (I know the other stories helped me).

First the stats:

Hours Dual: 35.3

Hours Solo: 10.2

X-C Solo : 4.2

Hood work : 3.6

Simulator : 1.1 (love those NBD/Localizer approaches)

Practice circuits: 1.1

Checkride : 1.4

I trained at Ottawa Aviation Services on the Katana, and would recommend them to anyone interested in the Ottawa area.

My first shot at the checkride got cancelled last week because of the weather, but Monday looked good. I called the examiner on Sunday to get my X-C route, but he was busy flying for a commuter airline, so his wife gave me the route (she actually gave me a better route than my instructor suggested, so there you have it).

I spend the evening getting my X-C/weight and balance/fuel all figured out. I had heard that this examiner really likes you to be well

prepared, so I did everything possible. I always get the current upper winds, and figure out the fuel/w+b the night before from that, because I find it saves plenty of time the next day. All you have to do is get the current upper winds, and add or subtract to compensate. Usually the fuel consumption ends up being almost the same, so the weight and balance is the same.

It turned out to be a good thing that I was prepared, because when I arrived for my flight the next morning (an hour and a half before I wanted to depart) I found my instructor busily dumping diluted antifreeze on my plane. It had snowed the day before, and my plane lacked wing covers....we were busy scraping off snow/ice for almost an hour, and the windchills were around the -40 mark, so it wasn't much fun. Did keep my mind busy though.

The weather was the only other factor. The skies were sunny, but the surface winds were 310 at 15 gusting to 25 knots. The north field at CYOW only has runway 22 during the winter, so it meant at 15-25 kt crosswind, or taxiing down to the south field and joining the jets on 32. I elected to taxi.

I was scheduled to pick up the examiner at Gatineau (CYND) at 11:30 and wanted to get an hour of circuits in beforehand, just to calm my nerves. Problem is, Gatineau has a ridge next to the runway (27) which produces turbulence on approach with even a small breeze, never mind a gusting crosswind.

My first circuit (remember, I'm trying to build my confidence:) I was doing fine on the approach. Fine, that is, until I got about 100' AGL on short final. The plane started hopping around like a bunny on steroids. It was dropping 20' in a blink of an eye, the shoot sideways, drop the opposite wing, climb 20', drop 30' well, you get the idea. I nearly cracked my skull open on the canopy. Things got so hairy as I approached the runway that I elected to go around. Additional circuits went a bit better, probably because I was more prepared for the rather severe turbulence, but also because the wind gusts dropped slightly.

I parked the plane after an hour of fun, and went to meet the examiner. Jean seemed like a nice guy (he flies King Air's, Caravan's and Citations in when he isn't examining nervous pilots). We sat down and examined my cross country preparations. A few questions about my route (for instance, what was that CYA area under my route?), and a question or two about my fuel planning, and we were off for the flight.

I had forgotten a hood, so I borrow their welder's mask hood for the flight. D'oh! How do you fit this thing over a David Clark headset?

I went through a preflight while he watched, we hopped in and were off. Started out on my simulated cross country, and luckily, we ended up right over my first checkpoint, about five minutes into the flight. Gave him my ETA, and we broke it off to do airwork.

Demonstrated slow flight (he later told me that he wanted to see the plane much slower, but my instructor had told me to keep it up around 60kts). Recovered the aircraft, and demonstrated steep turns through 360 degrees. Next came a power off stall with full flaps. Perhaps it was the turbulence, or maybe the plane didn't like me much that day, but as the nose started to drop, one wing headed for the ground as well. I recovered, but overcorrected and dropped the other wing. Throw in a bit

of aileron as well, and we were doing a lovely impression of an incipient spin. Quickly recovered (only lost about 200'), and continued on. Noticed him writing out of the corner of my eye. Decided to ignore it, and just continue on as best I could.

He then asked me to demonstrate an incipient spin. I asked him if the one I'd just done by accident could count, but he thought it best if I did a planned one as well:) Accomplished that without much fuss (didn't even lose any altitude).

He pulled the power for a forced landing, which we took down to a very low altitude before the overshoot. I forgot to take the strength of the wind into account (20 kts+ now) and so went to full flaps too soon. About 500' AGL I realized that we probably weren't going to make it, so I went back to take off flaps. This actually works in the Katana, so we picked up speed and altitude and glided in nicely. I wouldn't normally mess with flaps, but I didn't want to end up short. The examiner later cautioned that the flap trick would have caused big trouble in other planes, so it was probably not a good procedure. I think he gave me a 1 or 2 (out of 5) on the forced.

Climbed back up to 1000' on the overshoot, and then he asked me to pretend we were "dropping in for coffee" at a little private field that was close by. Did a precautionary approach, including the low pass (300-500') to check the runway for any obstacles or debris. Started to tell him (out of habit) that I would now make my Pan call, when I realized that it probably wasn't needed for a coffee emergency. At least I made the examiner laugh.

We then did part of a diversion, and after I had travelled for about five minutes, he asked me to take him back to Gatineau for a landing. On the way back, he asked me what I would do if I smelled a burning plastic smell during flight. Told him the electrical fire procedure for the Katana (master off and cabin air open) and he asked what would happen to the plane if the master was off. Hmmmmmm....hadn't given that much thought before now. Fumbled through an explanation of that.

Did a short field (winds were much calmer and less gusty at CYND now) and we made it a full stop! He congratulated me on the successful checkride, we went and did a debrief (during which we talked about my stall/incipient spin and my flap use during the forced), and I was done. He even complimented me on my skill with so few hours. I think that the delay in my medical (which forced me to do a lot of dual time on advanced skills before I soloed) probably helped me in the end. Once I finally got my medical and soloed, I was able to quickly go through the X-C and instrument work, and polish up for the practical.

I told the examiner afterwards about my experience with the turbulence during my circuits, and he said that he had arrived with the King Air earlier in the day and even that plane was bounced around pretty badly by the ridge turbulence.

Now I just have to get another 0.8 of solo X-C, 0.3 of simulator time, and I'm done!