



From the Cockpit – Class Rating Instructor

As I mentioned in the February FtC, last September, I started training towards a Class Rating Instructor qualification. I'm happy to say that I've now completed the course and passed the 'Assessment of Competence,' so I am now a Class Rating Instructor, or CRI. This means that I can train pilots who already have a license: to extend what they are permitted to fly, or to revalidate their license, which is required every two years.

For example, if someone has a PPL (private pilot license) but wants to fly an aircraft with a retractable undercarriage, they must first undertake 'differences training.' This is exactly what the name suggests – it trains them on the differences between what they have already flown and the new aircraft, in this case with respect to a retractable undercarriage. There's no test for differences training – once the instructor is satisfied they have reached a safe standard, he or she signs their log book and away they go.

The structure of the CRI training course may surprise you, as it focuses more on teaching, especially ground teaching, than flying. The course lasts about six days, normally split into two three-day weeks, separated by a couple of weeks to study, followed by an AoC, or Assessment of Competence. In my case, the AoC was delayed several times due to weather, so the whole process has taken over six months, rather than the four weeks I expected.

A minimum of just three hours of flying training is mandated, although most trainee instructors need five or six hours to reach the standard needed, as I did. There are various techniques that need to be mastered, the first of which is to fly from the right-hand seat. The norm is for the pilot in command to take the left seat, so of course trainees need to be on that side, and the instructor must take the right-hand seat. It's surprising how different that simple change is – the view through the windscreen during turns is different, and because the throttle is in the middle on most aircraft, the instructor will need to get used to flying with opposite hands. Again, this takes some getting used to.

One of the points that was drilled into me was that it's no good speaking to a student if they are busy flying the plane, as they won't take in much of what is said, so it had to become routine to take control first, freeing up processing cycles in the student's brain to take in what I was saying. For an experienced pilot, not much attention is needed just to fly the plane level or in a climb-out, so for me it was mostly a matter of getting used to taking control before providing feedback. Clarity is also important, so there's no ambiguity in explanations and instructions.

As I said earlier, the flying is only part of the course, and as I have a lot of teaching experience it wasn't worth

spending 25 hours being taught to teach in a classroom. Pre-flight planning (for a training flight) and briefing are new to me, so we spent some time focusing on these. Also, the complexities of the rules never cease to amaze me, and we need to know where to find the various regulations, forms and so on.

What any pilot or instructor is actually allowed to do is referred to by the CAA as *privileges*, and of course these are complex, arcane and confusing, and also buried deep in the CAA website. In fact, the syllabus for the aforementioned differences training is shown in only one place, in a document that is no longer active. Nobody is going to find that unless they know where to look.

When I started my AoC, the examiner told me, 'this will be like no assessment you've ever had before.' He wasn't wrong – we started at 9am and finished at 4.30, so I had a very late lunch! Some of the time was spent waiting around for the aircraft to come free, but I was kept fairly busy. The actual flying part was only one hour in the air, in an aircraft I'd never flown before (a Piper PA-28 Cadet), though it was similar to the Piper Warrior I'd been flying the day before. The rest of the time was spent with me briefing the examiner (who was playing the role of a student pilot), answering dozens of technical questions from the ground-school syllabus, making a technical presentation to assess my teaching ability, and de-briefing afterwards. The examiner didn't expect me to know everything, and I learned as much from the examiner during the AoC as any other time in the training course. It was clear that, once my instructor had decided I was ready to take the assessment, passing it was a foregone conclusion. It didn't feel like that at the time!

So now I have a newly minted CRI certificate (temporary, pending the CAA re-issuing my license with the new rating added – for a large fee, of course). One of my colleagues hasn't flown since gaining her microlight license several years ago, so needs to retake her test. I'm going to be training her to prepare for the test. I'm also available for weddings and bar mitzvahs, at very reasonable rates (as I can now charge people to train them). Seriously, though, it means that someone else is paying for my flying, even if I choose not to charge them for instruction.

One of my first exercises will be to train a couple of technicians from the University to fly (properly) on the new flight simulators, which are detailed in another article in this newsletter. They have been playing on the University's desktop simulators for a long time, but have never been formally trained, so know nothing of the various drills and checklists needed in the real world.

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