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THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE PIPER OWNER SOCIETY

MAGAZINE

WWW.PIPEROWNER.ORG
MARCH 2013 $9.95 U.S.

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Instrument Rating, the Right Way

Pilot Logs GATTS' Week-long Instrument Rating Program En Route to Dream Destination

Story and photos by Larry Hall

As I sit here overlooking the white sandy beaches and the emerald green water of the Caribbean, I reflect on just how I got here — to Cape Santa Maria Resort, Long Island, Bahamas — by flying our Archer III on IFR flight plans from our Alabama home.

My journey really began in summer of 2012 when I selected GATTS, Inc., (www.gatts.org) to finish up my instrument rating after seeing that the Piper Owners Society had established a partnership with them. I had started and stopped working on this rating many times over the years, but made a commitment to obtain the rating in time to fly to AirVenture 2012. The GATTS seven day training program in Manhattan, KS, was just what I needed—total emersion away from all distractions. After a couple of calls to GATTS President, Jason Wolcott, a plan was in place.

May 29, 2012 - My day began at 5:15 (out the door at 5:30) with a quick stop for coffee and a breakfast sandwich on the way to the airport. The two-legged flight plan was filed the night before. The first leg would be from home station KDCU to KTBN, Fort Leonard, MO; the second from KTBN to KMHK, Manhattan KS Regional. Total flying time would be 4:39 with a one hour break for fuel.

Fifteen minutes into the first leg, Memphis Center rerouted all traffic around a squall line that stretched from near Columbus, MS, to Paducah, KY. I took the option to go south beyond Columbus Air Force Base, then Northwest to KTBN. After turning the southern corner and on course to KTBN, I surmised that the diversion added an additional 1:30 to the first leg. After recalculating fuel burn and adjusting for greater headwinds encountered when circumventing the squall line, I knew I had also exceeded my personal minimum of a one hour fuel reserve. KUNO, West Plains, MO, was selected as the new destination. I amended the flight plan with Memphis Center for flight following and Jackson Radio for flight plan. With the new course entered into the Garmin GNS 430, I was off to an alternate. Ironically, it was one of the alternates that I had chosen in last night's planning session for this leg.

About an hour later I lined up to land at KUNO. I love these little airports with friendly people and low fuel prices! Soon the tanks were topped off and a new flight plan from KUNO to KMHK was created and filed. I was now 2:29 from destination.

The tower directed me to the field location of GATTS Training at Heartland Aviation. There I was met by an

View of the main entrance to Turbine Training Center and GATTS Advanced Flight Training.

Above Left: Jason Wolcott, President of GATTS, Inc., always smiling and ready to help.

Above Right: Entrance to Heartland Aviation FBO at the Manhattan Airport that provides ground support for the GATTS aircraft and personal aircraft used for training.

instructor who introduced me to the self-serve fuel service I would be using for the duration of my training. A hangar and crew car are included as part of the GATTS package, as is lodging at their scenic downtown Manhattan apartment. We hangared the plane, offloaded my bags to the crew car, and worked our way downtown. Day one had ended with an enjoyable cross-country from KDCU to KMHK, totaling 6:29 (1:17 greater than planned) and 541 miles covered.

May 30, 2012 – This was the day I began the adventure of earning an instrument rating. First, I finally got to meet Jason Wolcott in person. In-processing paperwork for the FAA and GATTS followed, and I was then introduced to my instructor. After completing a review of my log book, my instructor began laying out where my current skills fit into the program of instruction. I was pleasantly surprised when he noted a common error in my logbook where I had failed to carry forward instrument training hours due to my starting, stopping, and restarting of my instrument training in the past. Turns out I had already met the minimum number of training hours required by the FAA!

My personal training program consisted of skill refinement and confidence building with my panel in my airplane. Instrumentation included Garmin GNS 430 WAAS, KX155A, KMA24, KN62A, Garmin 496 (yoke-mounted for weather and back-up), and an Aspen EFD10000 in the panel driving an S-TEC 30 autopilot.

Whiteboard and chalk talk about the GATTS building block training methods followed. We started with learning rate of change based instrument flying. Wrapped into this are several concepts yet to be mastered including, workload management, "positional" and "situational" awareness, equipment, organization, and flight management. Before I knew it, it was time for lunch and then off to the airport to practice the day's lessons.

May 31, 2012 - The morning was spent on the whiteboard with discussion led by Dale Wolcott, President of Turbine Training Center, Inc. He first reintroduced the GATTS techniques of decluttering and demystifying instrument procedures. Then there was a brief review of two basic instruments: the turn coordinator and vertical speed indicator. He then moved on to the third, critical instrument, the HSI. Discussion on how to use all three instruments to manage the two critical goals of instrument flight—heading and altitude—followed. The remainder of the morning covered VOR intercepts, tracking, and hold entries. The GATTS procedure turn methodology enabled me to demystify holding pattern entries for both published and unpublished, as well as, procedure turns. After a quick lunch and a summary of today's learning objectives, it was off to practice what we had learned.

June 1, 2012 – The morning was greeted with a brief orientation to the Garmin G1000 simulator. GATTS had configured it to look like the Aspen EFD 10000. My objective was to learn to incorporate the HSI in the scan and to intercept and track radials. For the following two hours, I intercepted radials, tracked radials, and published holding patterns and procedure turns. The MHK VOR/DME fix approach offers it all to include a DME arch. We stopped for lunch and then off to the airport. For the next two hours we repeated everything I had performed on the simulator. It was then that I began to understand how the GATTS process really works—more building blocks stacked upon others.

That night, we went to Junction City to attend the EAA Third Annual Biplane fly in. We were greeted by 25 to 30 bi-planes on the field and 15 to 20 other fly-in planes set up for overnight

camping. The main event of the evening was a visit from Jeffery Sikes of 'Miracle on the Hudson' fame. He kept a crowd of more than 200 mesmerized with this story of landing the largest glider ever in the Hudson River. As an aside, he indicated that he now holds a legal Sea Plane rating.

June 2, 2010 – I met my instructor at the airport and was briefed on the day's goals. We flew two complete VOR/DME procedures to include missed and back around. After lunch, it was back to the air to practice GPS approaches to include full missed procedures. Nearly four hours of practice today. Tomorrow was to be a cross-country day, so my homework for the night was to plan the long, cross-country flight.

June 3, 2010 - Weather conditions delayed the cross-country until the following day. In lieu of this, we focused on Flight Planning (using my Wing-X IPad application) and flying more approaches and holds. By now I'm steadily feeling more confident, but have much to improve on before I am really comfortable. By the end of the day (as with all others) my brain was "fried," but I felt good that I held nothing back. Homework: plan another long, cross-country for tomorrow.

June 4, 2012 - Today we flew the cross-country flight. The plan was to fly from Manhattan to Wichita and complete one or two approaches; then, to Topeka to fly another approach to a full stop. We'd then eat lunch at the on-field restaurant and hand fly with auto pilot assistance direct back to Manhattan, something over 250 miles. However, this was aviation training and that's not what happened.

About halfway to Wichita, my instructor presented me with an unplanned diversion. Out came the Ipad to figure a new route to the diversion airport. So much for Wichita! A new course was planned and put into the GPS, coordinated with ATC, and new frequencies set—intercept new course and fly the plan. It was to be a VOR approach to the new destination, go missed and head to Topeka. The approach was truly missed as I never saw the air field! It was a small strip in the middle of nowhere. The plan for Topeka was to fly and ILS approach, then

The Garmin G 1000 trainer I used. GATTS configured it to resemble the Aspen EFD 1000 PFD I have in my panel which made the time on the simulator feel comfortable and required minimal transition time.

circle to land on a different runway. I took vectors to intercept the inbound course to the ILS. This was a fun approach and circling to another runway was a different challenge.

When we arrived at Topeka, the on-field restaurant had closed for the day and there was no available crew car so we decided to fly back to Manhattan. My airplane flies on gas and I fly on food—and not very well without either! It was four PM when we taxied to the FBO, gassed up the plane, and hangared her for the night. Then it was back to the FBO planning area to learn the plan for tomorrow, which turned out to be preparation for a check ride.

June 5, 2012 – For the next three days we flew more holds and approaches for four to five hours each day. The winds never stop blowing in Kansas and it was beginning to feel like I was dividing time equally between battling the airplane and flying the approaches. I was physically and mentally exhausted from the past eight days of weather and training and didn't feel like I was ready for a check ride, so I called it off. Later in the day, I talked it over with my instructor and with GATTS President, Jason Wolcott. No problem, both realized I had given them all I had. I could just reschedule the check ride as soon as my calendar and theirs permitted. My instructor then agreed to give me another day of training. I gladly accepted.

June 8, 2012 – In the morning we flew to Topeka to fly the circuit again with ILS, VOR and GPS approaches and then back to Manhattan. The afternoon was devoted to preparing for the flight back home.

June 9, 2012 – It was a challenging nine days to say the least, but very fun. I believe I am a better pilot today than when I arrived, and I certainly know much more about the challenges of single pilot IFR. I returned two weeks later and devoted two days with my instructor getting ready for the check ride.

On July 16, 2012, I returned home an Instrument Rated Pilot and have since logged more than 67 hours of single pilot instrument flying including cross-country flights to and from GTO in Stevens Point, WI to attend AirVenture 2012 at Oshkosh. Plus, I've also logged several Angel Flights and numerous cross-country and international destinations—including the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic. And, I've done it in all kinds of weather and approaches.

Thank you GATTS! I could not have accomplished this without your superior training program. The training was tailored to meet my individual needs and they worked with me to ensure that I accomplished my goals. If you need total immersion as I did, this is the way to do it. Today, I am a proficient and competent IFR pilot.