

Building Quality Flight Time

It's the "Catch 22" of aviation—you can't get a good flying job without a sufficient number of hours, yet it's difficult to accumulate the hours you need without a job that allows you to build them. Until the demand for pilots far outweighs the supply, this twist of fate will surely remain with us. So what's a pilot to do?

Much has been written on how to build flight time, exploring paths from flight instruction to banner towing to wing-walking. Rather than review what's probably old news to you, I'd like to emphasize quality as the determining factor; you should acquire flight time that can do you the most good rather than just filling spaces in your logbook.

Isn't all flight time valuable? Well, yes and no. For example, a pilot with 11,000 hours total time certainly had the quantity required, but unfortunately for him, the quality was somewhat lacking because only 50 of those hours were in multiengine airplanes. The regional airline he hoped to work for noted both his lack of total twin time as well as twin currency and suggested he reapply when he could show recent experience in line with their stated minimum of 300 hours ME time. That being his goal, he returned some six months later with the requisite time and was hired.

Another pilot queried us about her 1,800 total flight hours, 1,700 of which were multiengine Second-in-Command (SIC) time, not understanding why she'd been



ignored by most airlines to which she'd applied. We pointed out that with only 100 hours Pilot-In-Command (PIC), quality of flight time was the issue. Airlines hire captains, not permanent first officers, and they need to know that you have the skills to successfully upgrade based on your prior experience. With very little PIC time, her ability to command an airplane was a question in their minds.

The importance of multiengine and PIC

Once you've accumulated 1,000 or so hours of total flight time, you should ideally have accumulated at least 100 and preferably 200 hours of multiengine time. It's a tough and expensive process, but early planning as to how you'll acquire the time in a systematic manner can make the job easier and ensure your flight time will be counted toward an airline's total hiring requirement.

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Often, the 500-hour pilot with 245 ME will have a better shot at a regional FO slot than one with 1,000 hours of total time and 175 ME. Quality can make up for quantity if you demonstrate that you also possess the maturity and judgment of a more experienced pilot. But don't make the mis-

take, as one pilot did, of assuming that just because he could log his right seat safety pilot ME time as PIC, that an airline would consider it as such. They felt that without his hands-on control, it was basically useless time, and gave him only 50 percent credit for the 100-hour package he had purchased at a time-building FBO.

However, don't change your way of logging flight time just to please an airline, as did one UAL hopeful. Check the FARs to determine the proper way to log PIC time that may be questioned later on. If it's legal to log it as PIC, then by

all means do so. Remember that your logs may be inspected by future employers, all with varying flight time requirements. There's no reason to exclude FAA-qualified hours from your permanent record just because a potential employer won't let you count them toward their own special requirements for accepting PIC time. Instead, learn their definition and, if necessary, use a separate column to keep track of a special-interest item.

Build time specifically toward your goals.

As you build flight time, be sure that your experience is varied and will help you achieve your future goals. If your dream is to become an Alaskan bush pilot, concentrate on tail-dragger time and mountain landings. Airline bound? Then understand that chasing bush jobs in backwoods locales won't give you the radio skills and instrument proficiency needed to operate safely and confidently in the high-density traffic areas into which most airlines fly.

Teaching flying can net you some very useful skills. Often, when I counsel new pilot clients who lack interest in becoming CFIs to help build time, I point out that airlines hire pilots into the right rather than left seat, and some experience in this area would be very beneficial to their ultimate goal. Even if you never instruct, having the rating teaches you an enormous amount about professional aviation that would take many years to acquire in normal recreational flying. Personal experience has proven to me that most former CFIs make superior first officers, having acquired patience, persistence, and the ability to pay attention to details to make sure the job gets done right.

Whatever your goal, planning each step carefully will help you achieve it in the minimum time with the fewest wasted steps. Consider completing your advanced ratings in a twin, to build ME time at what's basically half-price. Don't, however, neglect to get a single-engine rating on your Commercial, should you decide to get your initial



Private or Commercial license in a twin. Expecting to fly multiengine ships all the time is a surefire prescription for disappointment in the employment arena because employers will frown at your lack of basic qualifications.

Flying to places you've never been before is important because the process requires careful flight planning and weather interpretation. If your PIC time reflects some experience in instrument, cross country, and high-density traffic flying, not just repeated round trips to comfortable nearby airports, you'll find chief pilots taking your resume seriously. As you accumulate more quality time, update your file every 50 hours or more to let them know you're actively flying, are a current job seeker, and are eager to work for their company.

Keep in mind that you can get a flying job with the right kind of flight time. Determine the type of flying hours that will do you the most good, given your particular situation. Then, using all of your cockpit resource management (CRM) skills, consider all the possible alternatives before you undertake any course of action that will affect your future flying career. If the decision requires some major concessions, seek professional input to ensure a successful result.