

Fly, Flee, or Fold

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Winter Weather Options

As the last few leaves depart the trees and the air turns cold and crisp, every aircraft owner is faced with the same decision: to fly, flee, or fold up shop. The choice is often a difficult one with so many different factors to be taken into consideration, but here are some quick tips to consider that might help out your “go/no-go” process.

Fly

Congrats! You have decided to become one of those derring-do folks who scoff at the falling mercury and take to the skies in order to seek the freedom that can come with less crowded airways, clearer skies, and, quite often, better aircraft performance. But how do you prepare for flying in this winter bliss?

First and foremost, make sure you are physically prepped and ready to undertake flying in colder temperatures. To read more about how cold stress affects your personal performance, check out “Chilled to the Bone” in this edition of *FAA Safety Briefing*. The short version is that you need to keep your core temperature humming at, or very near to, 98.6 degrees. This means eating right, getting plenty of rest, dressing for the cold, and limiting exposure to the elements.

For your aircraft, winter ops will mean injecting things like de-icing and anti-icing into your normal regime. It might be your inclination to rush through your pre-flight inspection — after all, it’s *cold* outside

— but this is the time to be even more meticulous when scrutinizing your aircraft for issues. In particular, take extra-special care in your preheating process to avoid cold starts, engine damage, or fire. Be realistic in what you are asking for — is it within your aircraft’s capability? Better check the manual.

When taxiing, the name of the game is “nice and slow” because if you weren’t able to walk very steadily on the ice-coated surfaces leading out to your parking space, it is entirely likely that your 1,200-pound Piper *Cub* won’t fare much better. Once you have taken to the air, remember that winter weather is rather notorious for changing quickly. Weather and radar apps are your best friends. So is filing a flightplan, having a “plan B,” and carrying an ELT on board. Keeping night and instrument current is also a smart idea as the days tends to be shorter and visibility varies greatly.

Once you are back on the ground, chocked in, and ready to button ‘er up for the night, clean off any salt that may have collected on the flight surfaces or windshield, and if applicable, refill the deicing fluid (you can never have enough of that stuff!). Engine, oil cooler, air inlet, wing, and prop covers go a long way in keeping your aircraft snug as a *Cub* in a rug.

Flee

You want to keep flying but you have had *enough* of this winter weather. So you pack up your pride and joy and take off for more temperate ter-

ritories. Good on you, but here is what you need to know before you go.

If this is your first time heading south for the winter, you will want to research a new nest for your bird well in advance of actually moving it. Several aviation industry websites such as www.flightaware.com, www.aopa.org, and www.jeppesen.com, will offer reviews of different fixed-base operators. Some things to consider are: What type of aviation fuel is provided and at what price (always important!)? Is the staff courteous and professional? Are maintenance technicians on hand and if so, are they knowledgeable about your aircraft type? Do they have adequate tools and equipment? Are the facilities reasonably clean and up-to-date? And lastly, how are aircraft maneuvered in and around the hangars and parking areas? Are they easily-accessible, and if so, at what times of the day?

Next, check with whoever insures your aircraft to make sure your coverage allows you to fly in an area in which you want to temporarily relocate. Quite often insurance is based on the state so if you are moving your aircraft from Montana to New Mexico, there might be some new stipulations.

Benjamin Franklin once penned “in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” If you bounce between residences in two dif-

ferent states you’ll want to research how each address (and therefore each state) might expect to tax your personal property. Some states have registration fees, and other states have *both* a personal property and a registration fee. Check out the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association’s pilot guide to taxes (<http://www.aopa.org/Pilot-Resources/Aircraft-Ownership/The-Pilots-Guide-to-Taxes>). Doing so will make sure you are informed prior to relocating.

Fold (Up Shop)

You’ve decided that winter is good for so many things — football, holiday parties, baked treats, and snow days — but flying just isn’t one of them. No worries here. Many aircraft owners choose to “hunker down” instead of fighting the falling temps.

First, prior to the long winter’s rest, you should give your aircraft a good wash down and clean out. Then, even if your aircraft is hangared, you will still want to plug and cover up all of the access ports, the pitot tube, engine cowlings — hide all of the nooks and crannies so an opportunistic animal can’t seek refuge.

Place shields over the windows and on props, and cover up the wings and horizontal tail — in particular if the aircraft is stored outside. Many owners are fond of giving the entire airframe a good grease-down to discourage metal to metal contact and to provide an extra level of protection against the elements. Last, release the pressure on the parking brake AFTER chocking the tires, and consider removing the battery to prevent drainage.

When it comes to “pickling” your engine, you will want to refer to the manufacturer’s guidelines on temporary and long-term storage. Moisture is your enemy and I guarantee that every recommendation will be in an effort to keep your motor dry and corrosion free. Among other things the manual will address is how to: top off fuel and drain the water from it, re-service the oil (adding preservative oil is best) and hydraulics, and install desiccant plugs to control the humidity.


So there you have it; a quick down and dirty as to your three winter weather options. Each has its own special considerations, and hopefully this article gave you a little more insight as to which option might be right for you. Fly, flee, or fold — it is your choice! 



Photo by H. Dean Chaimberlain

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