



## Rental Aircraft 101

In the May/June 2014 edition of *FAA Safety Briefing*, we focused quite a bit on aircraft certification and the care and feeding that goes into keeping your aircraft airworthy. The articles in that edition were written primarily for aircraft owners, but the information also applies to the wide, *wide* world of aircraft rentals.

Those who do not own an aircraft typically have to rely on a local flight school or fixed base operator (FBO) to fulfill their flying needs. If you are a brand new student of flight, rental may be almost inevitable.

When learning to fly, you probably took the utmost care in selecting a training program and certified flight instructor (CFI) that was conducive to your needs, location, and budget. If you *haven't* started yet and need to know more about making either of those selections, then this edition of *FAA Safety Briefing* is definitely for you. But did you apply that same care to selecting your aircraft? Or did you just leave that up to your instructor?

Hmmm.

While your instructor will likely take care of the details while you are under his or her guidance, some day you will eventually be out on your own. It's never too early to plan, so you might want to take note of a few things that can enhance your flying experience when it comes to selecting a safe and airworthy rental aircraft.

Much like when meeting a new person, first impressions can go a long way. The aircraft should look reasonably clean and well-maintained, with no major signs of corrosion or structural damage. Keep in mind, though, that beauty is sometimes only skin deep. Even though an aircraft may look pristine on the outside, it could be hiding some major flaws on the inside. In order to get a better understanding of what nasties might be lurking beneath the surface, you'll want to review the maintenance logs.

A side note here: if a rental agency or FBO is unwilling to disclose its maintenance logs to you, take it as a warning to walk away. As an operator, you are responsible for the airworthiness of that aircraft while it is under your control. So you have a right — in fact, you have an *obligation* — to do a thorough pre-flight before taking to the skies.

Look for completed annual and hourly inspections. Make sure the pertinent airworthiness directives and safety bulletins have been addressed, and that all applicable placards and manuals are located in the

aircraft. Closely scrutinize the information in the logs to determine if major maintenance or alterations have been done. If so, make sure you understand the ramifications of that maintenance. If you have questions about *anything*, talk to the attending maintenance technician before you take the aircraft.

Once you are ready to crank 'er up and continue with your pre-flight, make sure that everything on the aircraft works as advertised. For anything that does not work, you'll need to ensure compliance with regulations — 14 CFR 91.213, to be precise. Even if legal, think hard about even minor squawks. Squealing radios or fuzzy windscreens can become a safety of flight issue.

Last, but certainly not least, it is also a *very* good idea to carefully review the insurance policy on the aircraft so that you are aware of what is to be expected from the rental agency, and from you in case a mishap occurs. This is particularly important if you are taking passengers up in the aircraft. The verbiage in the policy can change based on how many occupants are onboard, and you don't want to be caught unaware. Though not a requirement, it is also an excellent idea to have your own personal renter's insurance.

Once airborne, take note of anything that seems out of place — a rough engine, avionics squeals or feedback, unusual knocking or banging, and anything out of the ordinary. Be prepared to brief the maintenance crew and the FBO shortly after landing. If all goes well with the flight, consider noting what you really enjoyed about the aircraft for the future. Once you find a "keeper," you can build a relationship with that rental and continue to seek it out for use. This is a great way to establish your own baseline for what is normal and what is not.

I've written in a previous article about *caveat emptor* — let the buyer beware — but the concept absolutely applies to renters as well. Learning to fly can be equal parts exhilarating and overwhelming. Since the last thing you need to be worried about is whether your aircraft is up to the task, your first priority is to ensure that it is.

---

*Sabrina Woods is an assistant editor for FAA Safety Briefing. She spent 12 years as an aircraft maintenance officer and an aviation mishap investigator in the Air Force.*