ON BEING IN A HURRY
BY
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Getting into a hurry can really get us into trouble when we get around airplanes. I can tell you stories. My friend Pat is an avid believer in the deadly effects of rushing. He spent a large chunk of his flying career splashing about in big Grumman Mallard amphibians.

Mallards demand some special techniques, especially when it comes to handling them on the water, in high winds and near protruding docks. In addition to operating in primitive, airport-free landing zones, Pat flew these monsters in instrument conditions and sometimes went into areas of high traffic density.

A professional pilot's passengers are always in a hurry. If they weren't, they'd be moving about in a much cheaper mode of travel. But Pat knew the truth to the adage: "If you are in a hurry, you are in danger."

He once told me that anytime he'd start feeling rushed during his work day, he'd head for the men's room, where he'd sit down in one of the stalls, close the door, and read the paper for a few minutes, or maybe just take a few deep breaths and break up the pace of things. It was one of the soundest safety practices I've ever heard of.

I can think of many examples. I was once going up with my favorite mechanic to administer his biennial flight review. We were going to use an airplane that belonged to a friend of mine, a little Cessna 150. I had the key, and the owner had told me to use the bird whenever I needed it.

So we did a fast walk-around preflight inspection and got ready to get in. We found some screws and bolts on the passenger seat. We moved them out of the way and strapped in. My mechanic ran the start-up checklist and hit the starter. The engine fired up, making a very peculiar sound. It was kind of a knocking, hissing noise, one of those things you don't like to hear. We immediately killed the engine and got out to check out the problem.

Come to find out, the engine had been partially disassembled for repairs. The exhaust manifold on one side had been disconnected, and the screws we had found on the seat were the ones that some other mechanic had removed.

We both felt dumb. Obviously, the preflight inspection had not been thorough – in fact it had been done in a ritualistic manner. Neither of us had thought we'd find anything wrong, and we didn't. That's sometimes what you get for being in a hurry.

Another speed demon had his Bonanza hangared where I worked, back in the middle-to-late sixties. This machine had a fuel injected engine that was known to be balky when you got ready to start it.

One day he fired up and taxied out, only to turn around and taxi back to the ramp. Then I saw something amazing. This solo pilot popped open the door and crawled out of the airplane, leaving the engine ticking over.

Seems that he had forgotten his briefcase. I later asked him why he didn't shut down the mill before he got out of the airplane. "That engine is good for only one start per day," he replied. "I wasn't about to try to start it again when it was hot." Anybody who has flown a fuel-injected engine of a certain

vintage knows of the problems that can develop during hot starts.

This gentleman had apparently decided to bypass the problem. We can all think of several things this gentleman could have done that would not have compromised safety. He could have had the control tower call down to the office on the phone and tell someone to come out and put chocks under the wheels. Or he could have passed his car keys to someone and had them get his briefcase. But this guy was in a hurry, and he ended up placing trust in his parking brake, a device well known to fail just when you need it the most.

One of the worst episodes I can think of that involves being in a hurry reflects badly on my own judgment. I tell folks about this episode in the same spirit that a recovering alcoholic tells about his tribulations during drinking days at AA meetings, in hopes that confession will be good for the soul and will keep yours truly on the path of righteousness.

I was flying to the Oshkosh convention of the EAA one year with my wife. We left after work one day in our little Piper Warrior and flew up to Memphis for an overnight stop. When we got up the next morning, my wife asked me if I had reserved a car. I hadn't.

I will omit the subsequent comedy of errors as we both tried to locate a rental car during the Oshkosh fly-in. To cut to the chase, the Wizard of Avis found us a ride in a place called Mosinee, Wisconsin, about a hundred miles out from where we were going.

We both thought that was a fine place to land, as it would get us out of the crowded airspace around the convention, and

we thought it would probably be a pleasant 2-hour drive through the Wisconsin countryside to complete the last leg of our trip.

I was monitoring the flight watch frequency, just for something to do, as we approached our destination. I heard a lady say she was coming up on the back side of a squall line that was approaching Wausau, and she thought she'd turn around and go back to Canada. The briefer allowed as how the line had popped up unexpectedly, and was moving rapidly toward the south-east.

I whipped out the map and discovered that Wausau was about thirty miles north-west of Mosinee. Ugh. Mosinee was where our car was waiting for us. We had the reservation number and everything. There was not another rental car available in a five-state area!

I pushed up on the throttle to make sure it was wide open. I leaned the mixture just a little bit to see if I could milk another knot or so from the little engine. Looking out toward the horizon, I sure enough saw some dark-looking clouds.

As I got in range, I started a full-throttle descent, trying to beat the clag. A turboprop commuter emerged from the grey area with his landing lights all lit up. I called him on the UNICOM frequency and asked him how things had been where he was coming from. He told me that he had beat the storm out of Mosinee, but that it was moving in pretty fast.

I strained forward against my shoulder harness. If ever there had been a pilot who was in a hurry, it was I.

So we made it in. I'll call it a tie. It wasn't until we were getting soaked, transferring our luggage into our gold-plated rental car that it occurred to me that I had just risked two lives

and a good airplane to get to a car. *If you are in a hurry, you are in danger*. Truer words were never spoken.

In later years, I became a designated pilot examiner, a position that came with a heavy load of role model responsibility. It got me to thinking about some of the easy ways we tend to screw up in little airplanes. I had screwed up a time or two, but I didn't necessarily apply this thinking to myself until John King, of the King series of training videos wrote a short article in *Flying* magazine. He said that folks who fly their own airplanes are not, generally, stupid, reckless, or suicidal. In fact, they are generally high achievers and have more education than the non-flying public. They tend to be creative and effective people.

He went on to say that when we read articles about how other people screw up, we typically react by shaking our heads and marveling at that pilot's stupidity, recklessness, or suicidal nature. In other words, we see a definite difference between the screwer-uppers and ourselves. Mr. King was pointing out, in that article, that those people were not very different from us, and that we should all look inside ourselves for the potential to do foolish, careless, and dangerous things in airplanes.

I took the article to heart, and thought back to times when I came close. I remembered the incident in Mosinee. I resolved to try to do better in the future, and to try to encourage others to do the same. I started telling my story to other people, often to the poor folks who were captive audiences during practical tests.

I think I'm a little safer now than I was at the time I had that race with a squall line. But I'm going on a trip up to Asheville a little more than a month from now, in an airplane I

share with four other people. One of those people has a very important trip to Orlando scheduled for the day after I'm supposed to get back. Six weeks before the flight, I am already feeling the pressure to get the bird back to him. I am wondering what kinds of limits I'm likely to push, in the interest of accommodating the needs of my friend. And I'm hoping the weather gods will be supplying a severe clear, CAVU day with winds out of the northeast, on the day I'm supposed to return to my happy home. I'm already starting the therapy to counter get-home-itis, and I sincerely hope that, if I am challenged by a questionable weather decision, I will not be found wanting.