

***Single Pilot IFR*** – a short article written for Sportsman's Market Inc.

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Preparation + Practice = Success + Confidence

Single pilot IFR can be safe and enjoyable even though the first few times can be quite exciting and to some extent unnerving. A local instrument pilot recounts the first time he attempted an NDB approach in IMC to Lunken airport, Cincinnati, OH. He was cleared to intercept the inbound bearing and cleared for the approach. It was raining lightly and he was in the clouds. Looking out of the window was no consolation – only a milky white haze greeted him. For an instant, he could not determine when he should start the inbound turn. So he turned the Cherokee 180 to parallel the inbound course. Immediately the air traffic controller called and said he was turning too soon and to resume his previous heading. This account illustrates the need to know a procedure to the point that you don't have to figure it out in the air – it should be automatic. Successful single pilot IFR depends not only on the amount of your instrument knowledge but also must include a lot of practice in actual IMC, with a competent instructor.

Single pilot IFR is a science and an art. The only way to become competent and comfortable is to practice, practice, and practice some more. Areas of practice should include; mental gymnastics, use of a Flight Training Device, VFR under the hood with a competent safety pilot, and actual IFR with your flight instructor.

Regarding mental gymnastics, consider practicing various approaches in your living room – or wherever you are comfortable. Set the approach up as you would in the airplane. Have the necessary charts out. Go over all the information you will need to assimilate before you begin the approach. Practice talking to air traffic control out loud. The idea here is to learn how to always be ahead of the airplane. Things can happen quickly and in close succession in the cockpit. You must be able to stay ahead of developing events. The only way to do this is to know what will occur and in what sequence. You will not be able to stop the action in a real situation to decide what comes

next. So, when you can do an approach, in your easy chair with ease, you have begun to understand the various aspects that make up a successful IFR flight.

Practicing IFR in a flight training device is also quite helpful. Now-a-days, you can rig your laptop or desktop computer to play a similar role. This kind of practice helps train you in flying the procedure, timing the approaches, and talking to the controller. All quite helpful in making single pilot IFR tasks become more automatic. Don't, however, believe that sim training is sufficient, in itself, to make you an IFR pilot. Both psychologically and physically the airplane is quite different. In the cockpit there can be quite a lot of noise – rain beating on the fuselage. Often there is some degree of turbulence bouncing the aircraft around. In the real situation, you can't turn it off and walk away. The sum of these factors can take quite a toll on psyche and nerves causing stress – even to the point of fatigue. Thorough preparation is the best anecdote to stress.

Look for good VFR days that you can practice approaches and maneuvers under the hood with a competent safety pilot on a regular basis. This actual flight preparation is vital to your ultimate success. Flying with precision under the hood is preparatory to flying actual IMC with your instructor.

There is no substitute for practice with a CFII in actual conditions. Try to get as much weather flying under your belt in as many seasons of the year and flight conditions as possible. The more experience you accumulate in actual weather conditions the better. Knowledge is definitely power in single pilot IFR.

Okay, you arrived. You passed your IFR check ride. So now what? Many flight instructors teach their students to pick the weather they want to fly in rather than to just accept whatever kind of weather presents itself on a given day. This takes planning. A good way to begin is to depart, for example, in VFR, fly in the clouds for a part of or all the en route portion of the trip, and descend and make the approach in VFR. The idea here is to get experience in tougher weather situations little by little. Don't put yourself in a position you're not familiar with or feel competent to fly. On your second or so solo

adventure into IMC, choose a situation in which the departure and part of the en route portion of the flight is made in IFR and the approach and landing is in VFR conditions. On a subsequent flight, choose weather that provides departure and most of the en route in VFR and the approach and landing in IFR with decent ceilings and visibilities. Little by little you are increasing your experience and skill level to cope with more stringent weather conditions. At some point down the road you may be prepared to fly the complete flight in IFR conditions. Then again, you may decide that you want to limit yourself to only certain weather flying scenarios. Don't force yourself to fly in any condition that you are not prepared for and feel comfortable with.

You get the idea. Each time you fly IFR you are choosing the weather situation you are comfortable with and not allowing the weather to overwhelm you. You are honing your skills and building confidence. You have arrived at your goal, you are an IFR pilot. Your diligent preparation and practice has paid off. You now have acquired all the necessary skills to fly successfully and confidently in the world of single pilot IFR.