

3 - HOW TO READ A LOGBOOK

More than just a slightly dog-eared souvenir for its owner, a logbook helps instructors speed up a trainee's progress and helps ensure that nothing vital has been missed in the training. It is a significant aid also to any subsequent instructor conducting, say, a check flight at another club - allowing the P2's level of experience, as distinct from his handling skills, to be assessed - or if the trainee has not flown for a long period.

During training, the instructor should write most of the comments in the trainee's logbook to ensure that accurate information is passed on to the next instructor(s). The trainee may, of course, write his own comments, but the word 'demonstration', say, has a more specific meaning to fellow instructors than to trainees. A trainee might write 'Wonderful flight. Instructor jolly pleased'; a comment which, while possibly true, conveys little practical information, but may tell you something about the trainee's psychology.

It is a legal requirement that all pilots keep an accurate and up-to-date logbook.

The Progress Cards that are commonly used during pre-solo training are effectively supplementary logbooks. Their chief function is to act as a checklist/reminder of exercises - and their logical progression - that need to be completed before solo.

ADVICE TO INSTRUCTORS

Always insist on looking at the logbook before flying. What you are looking for will depend to some extent on the pilot's experience, which you may or may not know about beforehand. Is the flight a solo flight that needs authorising; a visitor to the site, for example? Is it a check ride or a training flight, or a bit of both? After the flight(s), form the habit of writing something informative in the logbook. What you write will depend on the exact nature of the flight. Was it a dual flight for training purposes, or a check ride for a conversion. What was the result?

[1] What to look for in a Logbook

How current is the pilot?

- how many launches/hours in the last month/the last three months/the last year?
- watch out for the pre-solo pilot who has done 27 launches in the last year, but only two of these in the last quarter; they can do things that can take even experienced instructors by surprise. A solo pilot with the same history might be out of practice, but this will depend on the average flight times. Aerotow training, or soaring flights, can give a misleading impression of lack of currency - but one launch per three weeks is fine if the flights average an hour or more.

[2] How many years has the pilot been flying?

The solo pilot with a hundred hours in his first year deserves plenty of encouragement, but needs watching for over-confidence. Most solo pilots will average twenty hours or fewer per year, and if they have much less than this may be lacking in confidence, not to mention practice. The pilot's confidence is an important factor in his general progress and performance. The same is true of the pre-solo pilot, though a trainee who has done a hundred hours in his first year, and not gone solo, could rightly be regarded as phenomenally slow, and with that number of hours, unlikely ever to be alone in the air.

However, taking a long time to go solo is not necessarily the mark of a poor pilot.

[3] At how many clubs has the pilot flown?

A drifter? If so, why? His job may post him about a lot, or he may never have found a club that would send him solo. The solo pilot who drifts from club to club may also do so because of being posted about by his job. It may also be that successive clubs, alarmed by his exploits, have quietly suggested he go elsewhere, or, just as likely, disagreements with the club, its policies, its members, its committee, or whatever, have made a break necessary. Alternatively, he may just like extending his knowledge and experience by flying at other sites!

[4] Have there been any long breaks, particularly before the first solo?

This usually, but not always indicates frustration. Perhaps the trainee isn't a fast learner and it all took 'too long'. He may have been too poor to keep it up, or the club he was at might just possibly have been a bit dopey! Whatever the reason, the early solo pilot who has had breaks in training is rarely as good as the one who has learned continuously. Vital lessons like stalling may have been forgotten.

[5] How many launches did it take to go solo?

The average for aero-towing is about 20, plus 1 launch for every year beyond age 20. For winching the average is slightly higher at 20, plus 2 launches for every year beyond age 20. There are usually good reasons for figures that are much higher than these; poor instruction, perhaps, or lack of instructional continuity, ie. too many different instructors. The trainee may have been ready for solo for ages, or he may be a slow learner. Equally, most of the training may have taken place during the winter, or on unsoarable evenings. Don't assume that the trainee is the one who has the problem!

[6] How long did it take to go solo - in months?

Well under a year should be the norm. Attendance on a week's course should have got him at least halfway to solo. Longer periods might indicate that he has forgotten much of what he has been taught, or that he has suffered some of the problems mentioned in the previous paragraph.

[7] When did the pilot last do any launch failures - real or simulated?

What are his total hours? Is he solo? If pre-solo, at what stage? From his level of experience, would you expect him to be able to cope if there was a break?

[8] When did he last do any stalling or spinning?

Will he recognise the approaching stall, and are the recovery habits correct? Previous comments in the logbook, even in the training syllabus sheet, may not always provide sufficient information on this, particularly if the trainee or solo pilot is unknown to you.

[9] How experienced and current is the pilot on the type of glider to be flown?

Don't expect too much if the glider is a new type, particularly if the trainee is early pre-solo. Even quite experienced pilots can appear remarkably clumsy if the new type is significantly

different from anything they have flown previously. Does the pilot require a type conversion briefing? If he has done fewer than six flights on type, or appears nervous, then a swift re-brief would be in order. Can he reach the rudder pedals, get full travel, and still be able to put the stick fully over to both sides? Can he reach the cable release? Is it easy for him to fully open and close the airbrakes? Is he able to get full forward and aft stick movement?

[10] Does the pilot appear to be 'off checks'?

Is he an established solo pilot? Does he constructively criticise his own flying by making comments in his logbook? Is the remarks column empty? High hours cross country pilots might simply note the turning points, distances and times for a flight. A newly solo pilot, on the other hand, may well create several stanzas of blank verse out of a ten minute flight. Pilots occasionally don't write much in their logbooks because of shyness, and to save themselves any potential future embarrassment! Does the pilot seem self-satisfied or complacent? Be wary of pilots who are very selective about who they fly with. They may be super-sensitive to any sort of criticism, yet very uncritical of themselves.

[11] Can he soar yet?

For solo pilots, soaring flights of an hour or more are the ones to look for. It is usually good news if pre-solo pilots have managed a few flights of, say, half an hour or so, as they will have had plenty of practice in coordination etc, and will be a bit more relaxed about flying.

Questions and Answers can amplify comments in the logbook and help break the ice with the trainee, be they solo or pre-solo.

WHAT TO WRITE IN A LOGBOOK

Don't be afraid of making your comments on more than one line of the logbook, if it seems appropriate. A basic entry for a pre-solo trainee would include -

- what was demonstrated on the flight
- what the trainee flew well
- what was attempted, but didn't quite work out. Be honest here, but avoid giving offence
- your suggestions to the next instructor as to the content of the trainee's next flight. For example, '*Trainee to attempt the launch but may require prompting throughout. Demonstrate spin and recovery. Should attempt circuit and landing without prompts*'. The next instructor won't then have to use most of the flight finding out things which you already know.

For an experienced solo pilot who has just had a conversion check, the obvious comments would be *OK for the XYZ*, or *Needs more practice at ...* (possibly adding a very brief reason why). It is not usually necessary to write an essay for a solo pilot.