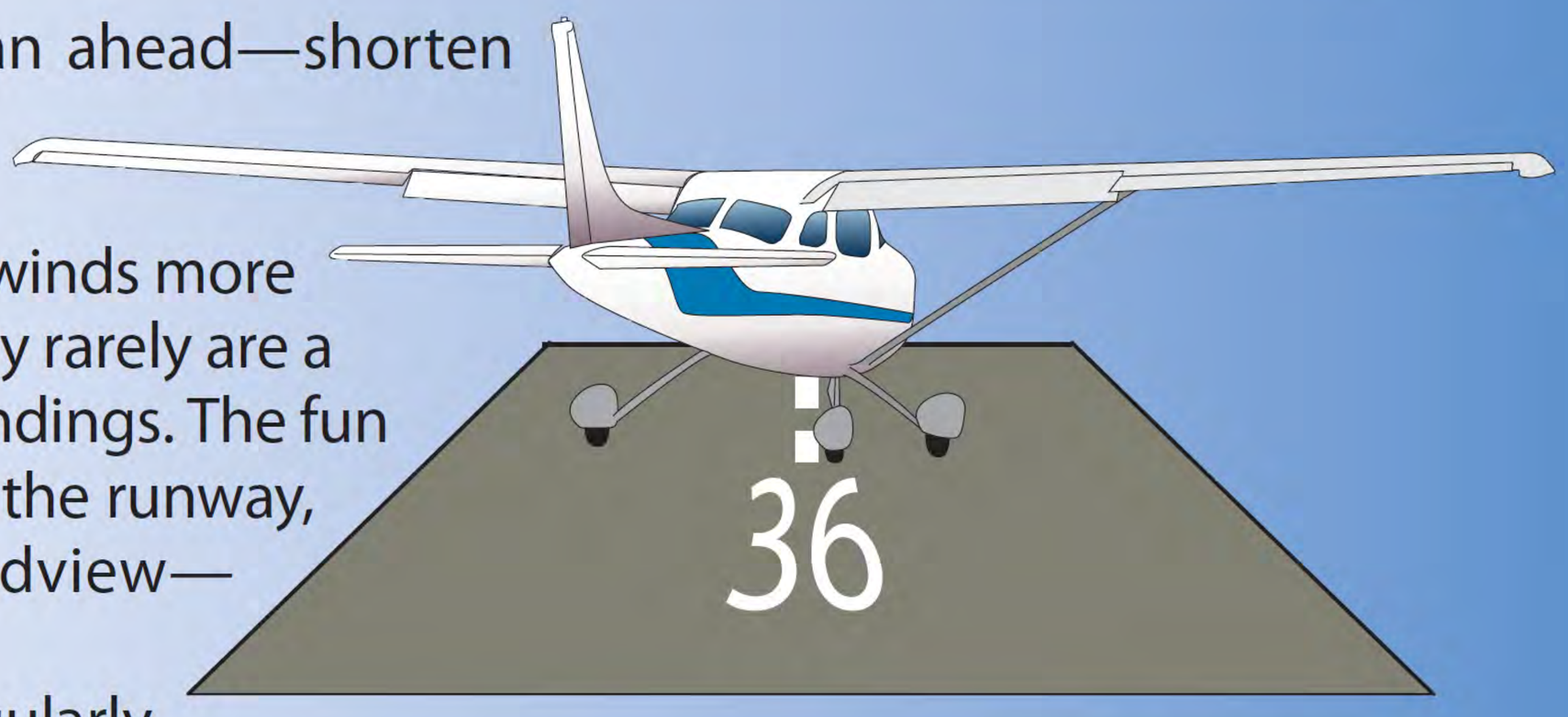
Don't Get Cross



Other than needing to plan ahead—shorten your downwind, crab on base and maybe use a bit more power on final—stiff winds more or less aligned with a runway rarely are a problem for takeoffs and landings. The fun begins when the wind—or the runway, depending on your worldview—can't get it together.

Crosswinds, of course, regularly contribute to reportable runway loss of control accidents and incidents (RLOCs). They also contribute to non-reported excursions into the weeds and the regular soiling of shorts. But there's no good reason for it. Here's why.

POOR PLANNING

How many times have you been surprised to learn there's a crosswind for your runway of intended landing? None? Good—that's the way it should be. There's simply no excuse for being surprised. There's also no excuse for botching the pattern: You know the wind will force you to crab into it on downwind, base and final, plus steepen or shallow out your turns. Why not just embrace this fact and get on with it?

DEMONSTRATED CROSSWIND COMPONENT?

Conditions in excess of your plane's demonstrated crosswind component (DCC)—a value found in the POH/AFM—shouldn't be a reason to forget your training and fail to execute a crosswind landing. Remember: The DCC isn't a limitation for Part 91 operations and represents only the maximum crosswind the manufacturer could find when flying that portion of the certification test card. We'll go out on a limb here: The average personal airplane on the average runway has adequate margins to safely and reliably operate in conditions at or slightly exceeding the DCC.

EXTREMES

Of course, the problem comes when conditions are far in excess of the DCC. This is when you get to do some of that pilot-in-command stuff you trained for and make some decisions. A good one might be to go somewhere else, where the wind is mo' better aligned with the runway and the DCC won't be exceeded.

If that's not what you want to do, then consider using a slightly higher approach/lift-off speed than normal: Many suggest using half the gust value, up to 10 knots. Consider, also, using all of the runway: Plan to touch down on the upwind side and allowing the wind to drift you to the downwind side as you slow and the tires gain traction. Feel free to use the runway's full length also. These two practices might be frowned upon in the pilot lounge, but anything's fair in love, war and crosswinds.

Finally, these techniques also can be used for takeoff: Start the takeoff roll on the upwind side, and plan to allow the airplane to drift toward the downwind side during the takeoff roll. Runway length usually isn't an issue in stiff conditions, but pay attention here, too. Finally, don't forget to use the ailerons to help keep things aligned as you want them and to keep the upwind wing down.