

Things To Do While Descending

As you descend, use a printed checklist or a cockpit flow check to confirm everything is set as needed for the approach. For example and at a minimum, you need to confirm:

1. #1 COMM—SET (usually on the center or approach frequency in use)
2. #2 COMM—SET (usually on tower or the CTAF)
3. #1 NAV—TUNED and IDENTIFIED
4. #1 NAV Indicator (HSI, VOR head)—SET to inbound course (unless being used for primary navigation during descent)
5. #2 NAV—TUNED and IDENTIFIED as a backup, or for crossbearings or as part of the missed approach procedure)
6. #2 NAV Indicator—SET as intended for use
7. Altimeter Setting—CONFIRMED
8. Heading Indicator—CONFIRMED (accounting for magnetic compass errors)

Meanwhile, you've already tuned the ATIS/AWOS and know the weather at the destination airport. You've pulled out the plate for the approach you've been told to expect and/or brought it up on your EFB, and you've briefed yourself on what to expect (see the sidebar on the opposite page). The autopilot is flying the plane through the descent and all you need to do to engage the panel-mounted automation for the approach is push a button and the airplane will do the rest. Or will it?

What about power settings? A normally aspirated single descending from the low teens won't be generating much manifold pressure at first, but if you don't touch anything, you'll soon have both a head of steam and increasing power. Excess speed usually isn't something you want when preparing for an approach in actual, so consider establishing a maximum power setting—say, 23 squared—at least until levelling off at the altitude to which you've been cleared. Don't forget the mixture, either: You may be the type to leave it alone until short final or when levelling at an intermediate altitude, which is fine. But managing all aspects of the descent is still your job, and engine power certainly is one of them.

Which presumes, of course, you've been cleared all the way down to an altitude from which you can join a published segment of the approach. Especially in busy airspace, it's likely you'll get cleared to that aforementioned intermediate altitude. What will that do to your perfectly planned descent? It probably won't help, that's for sure, but isn't a crisis if your automation is up to the task. If not, go ahead and resume the previous descent rate when cleared, and then recompute a new, steeper one when you can.

