

Short-Final Tricks

Are you abeam your landing spot but a couple hundred feet above the downwind key? Are you turning final and find you misjudged the wind and turned too early, ending up high and in danger of landing long? There are a couple of tricks you might use to moderate your rate of descent once you get close enough to the ground that you're in one of the key positions.

SLIPS

Remember that steep slip to final you practiced for your private check-ride? Don't let this vital skill atrophy. A slip (bank in one direction, opposite rudder to maintain ground track in the other) presents the side of the fuselage to the relative wind, and significantly increases drag. The added drag in turn increases rate of descent. The beauty of a well-executed slip is that you can lose a few hundred feet to get to your desired altitude, then return to coordinated flight and immediately return to best glide speed.

PROPELLER AS SPEED BRAKE

In airplanes with controllable-pitch propellers, reducing propeller speed is an essential part of attaining best glide performance. If you find you're a hundred feet or so high, however, you might find a quick advance of prop rpm can work as a speed brake, increasing drag and making you descend more steeply. This trick works in most airplanes with controllable propellers, which will continue to windmill in the governing range at glide speed as long as the propeller system itself is not damaged. Like a slip, returning to the low rpm position immediately restores best glide performance.

