

Avoiding The LOC Accident

Staying out of the weeds really shouldn't be that hard, yet hundreds of pilots each year figure out a way to bend an airplane. Here are some of the reasons, and what you can do to keep from joining them.

AIRSPEED CONTROL

"Failure to obtain/maintain airspeed" is a common phrase in accident reports after a loss of control, usually on or near a runway. It's not too hard to figure out what's going on: the airplane either never accelerated to liftoff speed or it was allowed to decelerate.

Yes, variables like weight and wind figure prominently in the likelihood of a successful takeoff, but if that's the problem, the answer is to remain on the ground.

COORDINATION, PLEASE

Those two oblong objects at the ends of your legs? They're called "feet," and in an airborne airplane they're used on the rudder pedals to control yaw and—in conjunction with the ailerons—to help ensure the quality of turns. On the ground, we use them to activate the wheel brakes—sparingly, please—and to steer.

ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS

Put down the smart phone, the newspaper or the water bottle and fly the airplane. If you often fly with passengers, consider implementing a "sterile-cabin" rule during critical flight phases. If you're mostly solo, play with the gadgets when cruising at altitude with the autopilot engaged (which never is an invitation to disengage your brain).

Outside of the en route environment's straight-and-level regime, where you can relax your guard a little bit, always remain focused on the task(s) at hand. Oh, and double-check the doors are closed and locked before takeoff.

PLAN AHEAD

If you've ever asked yourself, "Now, what?" you've been behind the airplane. Especially when it comes to planning takeoffs and landings, as well as traffic pattern entries and exits, there shouldn't be any surprises regarding where, when and how the airplane will be maneuvered. Think ahead.

Flying straight and level—while en route, for example—is a great time to sort through the charts and plates you'll need at the destination, load up the #2 comm radio with its ATIS and other frequencies and come up with some plans. Foremost among them should be to fly the airplane. Always.

