You Want Me To Fly A *What?*

Most of us using a personal airplane for travel in the IFR system get into our destination on a visual approach, especially in the summertime. Only when we're out practicing or during periods of sustained poor weather—like winter—are we likely to shoot the full approach procedure.

And these days, that's not really a big deal. With the ongoing demise of ground-based non-precision approaches (NPAs) and proliferation of GPS procedures in their place, few of us get much practice in flying what were staples for the compleat instrument pilot only 15 short years ago. Using a so-called "legacy" procedure for practice won't buy us much when it comes to the ILS and GPS approaches we're most likely to encounter, but definitely helps keep us on our toes, especially if we hand-fly them.

That said, the biggest problem with practicing a for-real NPA these days is...finding one. Don't believe us? Unless you live way out in the boonies, chances are a public, in-service NDB or LOC BC procedure is hard to find. (It also can be hard to find an airplane with a working ADF.) Same with a basic VOR or VOR/DME approach. To come up with some likely candidates, get together with a local CFII, who should know where all the fun approaches are. Just be forewarned: You may have to fly a bit to get to some of them. That's okay—you'll get some straight-and-level in the bargain.

Of course, it's best to brief these on the ground before launching. One of the big things you need to remember with these approaches is the equipment is more sensitive—and tolerances are tighter—the closer we are to the ground-based antenna. This means, for instance, the airport won't even be close to where we expect it on the NDB-A into MGR, bottom, which places the transmitter 7.4 nm from the MAP. Another gotcha is when missing a LOC BC like at HQZ: We'll fly reverse sensing inbound, but normal sensing on the miss.