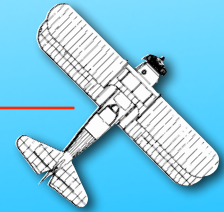


THE BEARING LINE



A STEARMAN FLIGHT UPDATE
JULY 2024

Editor

Welcome to the 2nd edition of the The Bearing Line from Stearman Flight. A shout out to Capt. Bill Austin for being the inspiration. I can't hold a drip pan to his creative writing style and wit.



Our President has been very active in attending the T-34.s for their spring "Knock the Rust Off". The T-34 signatory shares our values in safety and competence. They remember why we fly formation: to have a heck of a lot of fun with proficiency through training and practice. Julie also flew with the Spokane

Stearman Flight folks. Jay Pemberton has been training old and new Stearman pilots. He is now a designated Stearman Flight instructor. Congratulations, Jay. Your skills in Stearman flying and instruction help unlock the secrets of flying the Stearman proficiently in formation. You are a model for all of us.

John Lohmar, whose name is synonymous with air safety, is a retired Airline Captain and check airman, managing partner for Air Safety Investigators, holds multi Reno air victories, is long time Stearman Flight member, Stearman owner and NATA check pilot, and good friend. He has added a Safety section to our fledgling newsletter. John is a pilot's pilot and he speaks and writes were the rubber meets the runway.

President's Corner

Stearman Flight is working to increase our interaction with other FAST signatories. Two years ago, David invited two members of the T-34 Association to his Barn Venture event and it provided some valuable exchange among the two organizations. The T-34 Association recently invited us to attend one of their clinics to share more ideas and I hope to continue these visits to help all the FAST signatories gain insight on the unique part of each group's operation. I was fortunate to attend the April T-34 Clinic "Knock the Rust Off" in Sebring, FL. The



Julie (Chatty) Thomas

group uses this as a warm up and practice for their mass arrival into Sun-N-Fun. Overall, our operations are very similar for clinics. It was interesting to witness their radio usage procedures, which are quite different from Stearman Flight. This is due to the fact that T-34s have two radios and can hear much easier than our open cockpit. My hosts were Gary Donovan and Billy Smith, who were extremely



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gracious and allowed me to sit in on multiple training sorties for a wingman. I look forward to visiting more clinics of other signatories. I envision this will increase our camaraderie and exchange of best practices.

Julie Thomas Check Pilot



Carey & Sam Hardin



Selena (Boss) Hodge



Carey & Anita Hardin

WHO'S WHO? A PROFILE OF THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE OUR ORGANIZATION TICK.

Carey Hardin, Sam Hardin and Selena Hodge are the heart and soul of the Secretary and Treasurer positions of the Stearman Flight signatory. Carey leads the Stearman Flight Secretary & Treasurer group and also has been the clinic chairman since the beginning. He is one of our most experienced Check pilots. Sam is our records chairman and a 2-ship flight lead and is very busy man raising a large family. He owns and operates a coffee supply company and still finds the time to be the records chairman. Selena is the executive secretary, spreadsheet Queen, mail lady extraordinaire, shipper and all around helper with a smile who keeps all the records organized and up to date. All three are cut from the kind and gentle Southern cloth. Stearman Flight is blessed to have them keep us organized.

SAFETY is Paramount

I was working in the hangar a couple of weeks ago trying to chip away at the never-ending list of hangar and airplane projects. It was a beautiful day, but I had things that needed



Captain John Lohmar

to be done and decided to work on them. Of course, I was running late, and it was late morning before I got to the hangar. One of the airport regulars stopped by for the “How are you doing, what are you working on?” conversation, and before I knew it it was lunchtime. My Sweetie had fixed me a great lunch, so I sat down to eat. Now it’s early afternoon and I’m getting frustrated because most of the day has gotten by me and I haven’t accomplished anything yet. “So, stop whining and get to work,” I said to myself and that’s exactly what I did. Airplane project priority number one quickly revealed a lack of the correct parts, but only after several screws were dropped, which of course, rolled under the rear seat where they are next to impossible to see and retrieve. Screws retrieved and parts on order, I set my sights on a hangar project that I had been putting off for months. On short order I figured out (of course) that I had neither the correct parts or correct tools for that one. Now it’s late afternoon/early evening and I am hot, frustrated, and tired.

To heck with it I thought - I’m going flying. It was still a warm, but pretty day and I thought that at least this day wouldn’t be a total bust. I called home, told my wife I was headed out, and jumped on the tug. Which was out of gas. Of course it was. On my way to the gas pump I noticed a bit of wind picking up, mostly a crosswind. Not beyond limits, but enough to be interesting. As I was fueling the tug, I shot another glance at the windsock (no change) and noticed that the warm Texas sun was beginning to cast some longer shadows. I took my flight suit off, put my tools away, swept the hangar floor a bit, and went home.

“How was your fight?” I heard as I eased through the back door. “Didn’t go.” “Why not, it’s such a beautiful day?” “I don’t know - too hot, too tired, too distracted, too dehydrated, too frustrated, too much wind, too much in the wrong frame of mind.” “Sounds to me like there were just too many toos.” My wife has a way of putting things very succinctly. And she was right - there were just too many “toos.” If you were at NWOC last winter or read his article in the Summer issue of “Skylines” you are familiar with Rusty Lowry’s Warbird Operational Risk Assessment Checklist (WORA). It is a great too and I recommend that you use it. But on this particular day I did not use a formal risk assessment tool. I assessed the risk the same way us humans have been doing it for hundreds of thousands of years. I simply listened to that little voice in my head, that slightly gnawing feeling in my stomach, that said. “This is quickly becoming not such a good idea.” Indeed, there were just too many “toos.”

So, use a formal risk assessment tool like the WORA checklist or the FAA’s “I’M SAFE” checklist [2023-10_Fit to Fly.pdf \(faa.gov\)](#) when it’s appropriate AND always do a gut check. Listen to that voice. It’s most often right. Stay Safe.

The **IMSAFE** checklist is an acronym that stands for the following factors, which pilots use to self-assess their fitness for flying before a flight:

1. **I – Illness:** This one is self-explanatory, but it’s essential to consider even minor illnesses. Flying requires good concentration, decision-making, and the use of almost all your senses. Even a light cough could hinder communication on the radio, and a slight headache might lead to poor decisions. Additionally, mild illnesses can be exacerbated due to changes in air pressure during flight. If you’re not feeling 100%, it’s safest to delay the flight. [Consult an Aviation Medical Examiner \(AME\) or a doctor with aviation experience if you’re unsure¹.](#)
2. **M – Medication:** Taking medication without understanding its side effects can be risky. Even a simple headache tablet might make you too drowsy to fly. Always consult your doctor or Aviation Medical Examiner about the effects of any medication you’re taking.
3. **S – Stress:** Psychological stress can impair decision-making and reaction times. As a pilot, you have a responsibility to yourself and your passengers to perform at your best. Address external stress factors before flying, and recognize when stress levels are elevated.
4. **A – Alcohol:** Never fly under the influence of alcohol. Not even a drop. [A general rule is to allow at least 8 hours from bottle to throttle, although some airlines have more stringent restrictions of 12 or 14 hours for their crew¹.](#)

5. **F – Fatigue:** Fatigue affects cognitive function, alertness, and overall performance. Ensure you're well-rested before flying.
 6. **E – Emotion:** Emotional states can impact decision-making. [If you're experiencing strong emotions, consider how they might affect your ability to fly safely?](#)
- Remember, the IMSAFE checklist is endorsed by the FAA and is a fundamental part of pre-flight preparation. [It ensures that pilots are physically and mentally prepared to operate an aircraft safely?](#)

John Lohmar Check Pilot

INSTRUCTOR

The Four Forces & their impact on section takeoffs.

Many of us love section take offs. They are the ultimate expression of trust, teamwork, focus, situation awareness, competence, excitement, grace, timing, coordination, reflexes, control, and finesse throughout the dynamics from brake release until safely airborne. That's a lot to accomplish in a very short time without error. But error is always lurking. Conscious of it or not.



David (TBolt) Burroughs

Memory has erased the first ones I performed multiple decades ago. All I remember is that they were usually the highlight of the flight. Thrilling. Challenging. Rewarding. They set the tone for the flight. All I remember John Rettick and I began

to realize, however, that danger is actually more insidious in a Stearman than we realized.

It isn't always about the danger we cause ourselves, but also the danger caused by the other pilot, the airplane's quirks, and other circumstances we never fully understood nor thought deeply about—physics.

One of those dangers includes the four forces acting on the airplane, how the airplane is rigged to minimize those forces, and the pilot's technique to avoid/mitigate/stop 'the left turn tendency' that can terrorize everyone involved—

instantly. Error to terror only takes a 't.' This is especially critical in a scenario where lead is on the downwind side of a left cross wind, is focused on watching his left wingman (rather than straight ahead) and at full power lifts the tail too high too quickly unconsciously failing to see the heading and airplane turning left toward the wingman.

Lack of understanding the four forces and how they can affect the danger factor of formation take offs is important to consider; especially the fourth one.

1. Torque
2. Propeller Factor
3. Spiral Slipstream
4. Gyroscopic Precession

-The torque of a 200 hp engine on a 2800 pound airplane is negligible in most flight regimes.

-P-Factor and spiral slipstream can affect the left turning tendency especially in a climb.

-However, the gyroscopic effect of the prop can be significant at full power when the tail is purposely lifted too quickly. The tail comes up, the downward (right) blade moves forward, the ascending (left) blade moves back. Hence, the nose and heading of the airplane move left. Not good if lead does this with a wingman on the left.

Although this is subconsciously corrected most of the time, the effect still exists and both lead and wing pilots would be well advised to consider this potential on every take off and especially during formation take offs.

Please comment with your experiences, techniques, and implications for all briefings.

Next, we can talk about spiral slipstream. Is it the major factor of the left turning tendency in level flight? Who says yes? No? If it does, why don't we notice it?

David Burroughs Check Pilot

Check out the New Formation and Safety Team (FAST) website.



flyfast.org

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ACTIVITIES

KFSS Spokane, WA



From Left: Jay Pemberton, Rod Tataryn, Jeff Hamilton, Addison Pemberton, Julie Thomas, Steve Payne

Julie traveled to the great northwest to update training techniques and standards. Stearman Flight has a large and expanding presence at KSFF Felts Field Spokane, WA. The camaraderie, professional approach and enthusiasm for flying permeates throughout the pilots, families and friends. Addison Pemberton, Jeff Hamilton, Jay and Ryan Pemberton have been FAST level carded members for almost two decades. Their passion for Stearman formation flying has ignited a growing number of new members and this trip helped to align their group to current Stearman Flight procedures and sharing ideas among different groups.

TBM Gathering in KVYS Peru, IL



Nine TBMs Attended

Stearman Flight had great opportunity to attend the TBM Gathering in Peru, IL in May.

Ben Thomas made the trip, starting from Starkville, MS for a total of 475 nm (one way). Julie Thomas joined up with him in northern MS.



Ben Thomas experiencing personal cockpit tour of Brad Deckert's TBM.



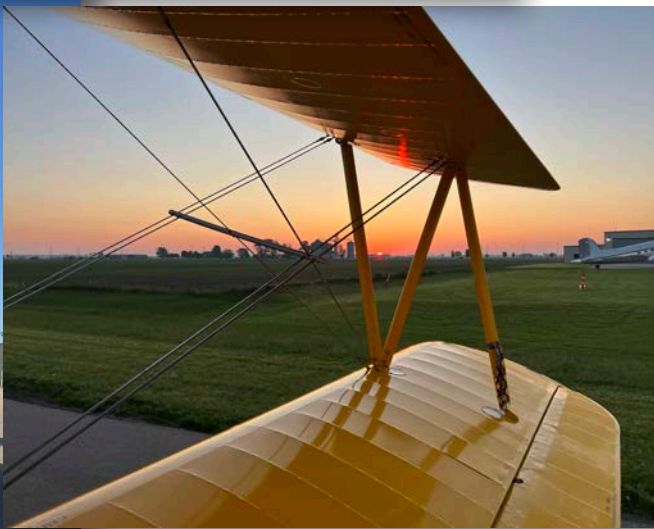
First night stop at the Rettick farm in Bloomington, IL

David Burroughs also attended. Amazing hospitality was provided by Brad and Jane Deckert.

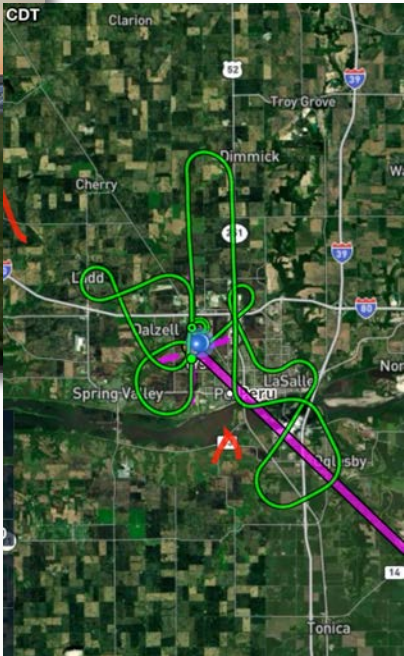
The highlight of the weekend was the Friday night Airshow by the Titan Aerobatic Team (formerly Aeroshell). That display was followed by the "TBM Glow" where all 9 TBM started and ran at full power in the taxiway in front of the crowd. The glow came from all the exhaust stacks. This was followed up with an impressive fireworks display.



David Burroughs served as the Safety Officer for the weekend



Dawn patrol on Saturday, making an effort to wake up the whole area.



The Wright 2600 can spill oil at a massive rate... here is a crew member scooping oil up with a dustpan

Saturday featured a Veteran's parade on the flight line and continuous flying displays. An excellent weekend with good weather made it a treat for all in attendance.

KMAW Malden, MO



the weather rapidly cleared by 1100L. We rushed back and flew the wings off the four remaining stearmans.

The list of achievements:

- Rod (Speedo) Hightower -
Requalified 2-ship Lead FAST card
- Howard (Dino) Thomas -
2-ship Lead proficiency check
- Sam (Beaner) Hardin -
2-ship Lead proficiency check
- Marshall (TBN) Thomas -
4-ship no. 2 position qualification
- Ben (TBN) Thomas -
4-ship no. 3 position qualification
- Julie (Chatty) Thomas -
4-ship Lead FAST proficiency check
- John (Mustang) Rettick -
4-ship Lead FAST proficiency check

Heidi (Butter) Hightower began her qualified 2-ship wing training.

Speedo and Butter had a few very productive Basic formation training flights. Ask Heidi about her new callsign.

Keep an eye out for Malden in your schedule for next year. The fuel is cheap, airspace is wide open, hospitality is gracious and the fellowship is world class.



Howard Thomas

Marshall Thomas

Stearman Flight gathered for one of our favorite formation clinic venues, KMAW Malden, MO Thur 30 May - Sun 2 Jun 2024 for proficiency flying and FAST requalifications. Check pilot David (T-Bolt) Burroughs and Instructor Craig (Dumpster) Davidson drove down from central Illinois. Their help and talent was greatly appreciated. Check pilots Julie (Chatty) Thomas and I (Mustang) arrived a day early to get our much needed formation practice before our annual proficiency checks. Seven Stearmans were scheduled to arrive. Unfortunately, Roy Kinsey and Carey Hardin were hampered by persistent Pensacola and Starkville thunderstorms. Three Stearmans left on Friday because of the forecast of rain the rest of the week. As was our good fortune, the only weather issue was Saturday morning. After a mouth watering breakfast at KDXE, Dexter airport cafe



A publication of

Stearman Flight young guns



Ben & Marshall Thomas, Heidi Hightower



Trying not to be noticed



Pete Jones

The last weekend in June Pete Jones became Stearman Flights newest wingman. Pete, Julie & Ben Thomas and Carey Hardin gathered at KSTF for formation training and fun. Julie was Pete's IP, Ben the dedicated flight lead and Carey as the Check pilot. Congratulations, Pete, and welcome to Stearman Flight. Rumor has it Pete doesn't wear a flight suit because David (TBolt) Burroughs does.

Teaching your Children Big Things - Stearman style

It has sometimes proven pragmatic to leave teaching our own children big things to other professionals. Many parents understand the dynamics and benefits of this approach with such matters as learning to drive, as well as

learning many other things in life. The benefits of this approach have proven valuable for our family and our children have expanded their circle of mentors and friends tremendously. It's not to say that as parents we have not mentored and taught our Son and four Daughters many things. Just not everything.

So when Daughter number 3 recently



Rod (Speedo) Hightower

declared that she wants to learn formation in our Stearman and desires to be a candidate for 2-ship wing then lead I was thrilled! This seems like a natural next adventure in her aviation journey and suites her focused approach to achieving big things. It also fits her core value as a team player. Then I was really pleased and proud when she asked if I would be her IP (instructor pilot) at the upcoming Stearman Flight Formation clinic in Malden, MO. That girl knows how to warm a Dad's heart! A minute was spent thinking about how I would answer this invitation, so I finally said "I would be very happy to do that. However, there is an important condition, and that is at any time you wish to fire me as your IP, you may do so with no hard feelings or disappointment." She immediately agreed and accepted the condition. A bit too quickly it felt in my heart. However, I remained stoic and we sealed the deal with a big hug.

The first step is to get her back in fighting form with Stearman proficiency and the best way for that is "circuits & bumps" as they say in England. In other words, pattern work. A few short years ago, while preparing for first solo in the family Stearman, we designed an excellent pattern for both 16/34 runways tailored for the characteristics of high-drag biplanes with maximum safety and efficiency top of mind. What this means at Creve Coeur is a "close" pattern with turn points at defined altitudes and ground references, sight pictures for runway distance and a non-standard pattern for Rwy 34 that keeps flat fields and reachable runways throughout the pattern, thus avoiding the swamps, trees, bridge, power lines and mighty Missouri River off the departure end.

Perfect Stearman air is rare, but it happened in the golden hour of our first training day which made for fast progress removing the "rust". She was in great form after a solid hour + of nothing but circuits and bumps each to a full stop. The muscle memory and sight pictures held the standard she

crafted during solo training. A magical flight that ended with the exhaust flame plainly visible. With a few more days of great weather, she quickly shed her Cessna ways with full



Heidi (Butter) Hightower

command of the Stearman, and deemed ready for formation training by her IP.

Lucky draw on sortie 1 & 2 because John "Mustang" Rettick was the dedicated lead who delivers an outstanding briefing, a smooth and purposeful lead of the curriculum briefed and an efficient debrief including a spontaneous moment of humor that spawned a potential call sign. No safety issues, and a fun flight that went as planned. She flew well while figuring out how to place the machine where her mind knows it should be. The IP up front was notably quiet with few words spoken. The knee pad notes had only two items for improvement: 1. Keep lead on the horizon. 2. Too-early power reduction stagnated the first rejoin. And three items of encouragement and confidence building: 1. Excellent recognition of becoming acute then correcting to the bearing line. 2 - Excellent throttle control. 3 - The best pavement landing this ship has seen all clinic. A great way to end the day.

Sortie 2 was purpose-built to focus on rejoins, cross-unders and route entry-hold-return, while we made our way home to Saint Louis. The brief was for 5 three second breaks and rejoins, followed by 20 minutes of "free cruise" where lead held steady on course to Sikeston, MO while 2 practiced station keeping, route and cross under at her own pace. Again, a very quiet IP in front. I'm saving the coaching for after the debrief over some "Throw'ed Rolls" at Lambert's.

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She did well figuring out HOW to put the airplane where it is supposed to be in relation to lead throughout the entire formation flight.

So how did the family dynamics work out you ask?

Not only was I not fired, but a future contract is in the works!

We both agree it was an excellent experience, had fun while achieving her progress plan and look forward to the next training sessions!

The critical success factors turn out to be nearly the same as any other FAST Card candidate, except, teaching your own children Formation is exceptionally rewarding and a source of great pride. Some tips to consider when teaching your own children big things:

- Be your best self and remain professional
- Keep the “man-splaining” to bare minimum and keep things light and airy with good humor
- Understand the candidates goals and objectives for formation flying as well as their experience, concerns or fears. Listen carefully, talk little.
- Discover their learning preferences based on what has worked best for them in the past
- IP Teach in the classroom, Plan the Brief, Brief with clarity and efficiency.
- Let the candidate fly the brief and be a quiet instructor.

Take good notes focusing on the important items

- Debrief with clarity and efficiency - Was it Safe? Did it go as Briefed? Discuss the notable items in the sequence of the flight.

- IP Teach in the classroom (and not in the debrief). A great training manual is a key tool to help the candidate understand where their airplane is supposed to be at all phases of the flight

- Celebrate the good performances and focus on outcomes.

Rod Hightower Instructor

“Two Buckets”

A pilot, or student, has two buckets from which to draw throughout his years as a flyer. There is the Skill Bucket and then there is the Luck Bucket.

The Skill Bucket, also known as “Experience” (linked inexorably with decision making) begins its flying life journey with you, you guessed it – totally EMPTY.

The Luck Bucket begins its flying life with you, for the sake of this theory – completely FULL.

The basic principle states that as you proceed through your flying career and begin to fill your Skill (Experience) bucket, you unavoidably consume from your Luck Bucket.

Continuing throughout your flying and training evolutions, which adds to your skill and experience, you naturally and simply use up your luck. Luck in this reference is considered to be a commodity in which supplies are finite. Whereas, Skill in this reference is something that can be enhanced, added to, and is therefore infinite in terms of its potential supply. I can certainly attest to this notion, with many examples from my own flying career, that this “theory” has merit and therefore value. I would bet you have some stories of your own. The overall concept is to *fill* your Skill Bucket before you *empty* your Luck Bucket.

So, even if you were to only use the two-bucket theory as a tool during those postflight moments of clarity when your personal debriefing includes thoughts of “I’ll never do that again!” It is well worth the deployment of its theoretical premise. This is the very essence of a pilot’s painful process whereby we gain experience, which informs good decision making, yet emanates from bad decision making. Otherwise known as a beginners unusually high reliance on something as difficult to define and quantify as luck, to get by until more substantive skills and experiences can be attained.

Whether we see the validity of utilizing the Two Bucket principle as a self-critique tool or not, I think we could all agree that, relying solely on luck as a primary tool in avoiding pilot induced errors is a losing proposition. To look at this another way, if I have more experience than you do, it may be because I’ve simply gotten away with more bad decisions than you have.

Captain Jay Allen

Jay Allen is a CFII, retired corporate pilot , airport board member, airshow pilot and general aviation enthusiast and a friend of mine since 1972 as line boys at KBMI.

OP-ED

There are 2 organizations conspiring to get you grounded and permanently out of the air other than as a paying passenger in the cattle carts of the commercial airlines. This is what I learned based on my recent experiences and is



particularly important for the benefit of the aging aka Burroughs. Hightower. The Thomas kids read no further, go fly.

Let's look first at the insurance industry. We have long been told in the aviation press that if you stick with the agent and underwriter you have that they will continue to provide coverage as you progress

through life. There are warning signs that this is not so and just the siren call of the underwriter. Suddenly you find they want an annual medical and the BFR becomes an AFR. Then you are alerted that next year will be no solo. All of that has happened to me. Then there were the problems a couple of years ago as underwriters started to drop out of the business. What do you then do when the company covering you pulls out of the market and you are dropped like a hot potato? Now you have to go cap in hand to the market and today with fewer carriers that don't seem to be bothered about doing business the answer is often no without even a "sorry".

Getting coverage for an octogenarian is near impossible and 80 seems to simply be a red flag. Record, qualifications and currency seem to matter nought. Just "no". The myth of Avemco being the place where aging pilots can go for coverage is apparently not so and I hear they will no longer touch a new client over the age of 75. So what to do? Well if you were used to comprehensive insurance try to get liability only. Good luck with that and it may not make any difference. An additional problem is that some agents may not be prepared to go work for you for the small commission they will get for a liability only policy. So what to do? I did get a new insurer (to me) to give me a policy for the Stearmans with a very high premium for full comprehensive when I was 79 but I have 1500 hours in

type. More recently at 80 liability only for a Cub but I had zero time in the Cub where open policy is 500 hours tail dragger and 25 make and model. I suggest you investigate which companies still offering GA coverage might continue to cover you as the years roll by. No guarantees but you need to be with a company that would insure you today as an octogenarian. That may not do it either but is the best you can do. Let's hope the market changes before you get to that point.

Second is the FAA medical system. There are 8 or 9 disqualifying medical events, including a heart attack, and experiencing any one of these immediately invalidates your medical certificate and you enter a protracted period to regain a certificate. First you must get through the required medical issues to get fit and then go to your AME and get the medical reissued. But ... it has to go into the FAA system at OKC for review and then if a special issuance medical is sent to you, you can fly again. This is a deep black hole.

In my case, after my AME issued me the class 3, it took 6 months to get the special issuance and then only 6 months was left to fly with it then start the process all over but likely not as medically exhaustive. You can call OKC as many times as you like and a friendly person will give you the same answer "that it is in process" but no indication is given when it might see the light of day. The situation is blamed on just a few MDs and "hundreds of thousands" of cases. It seemed to me the application went into an in tray and sat gathering dust for 6 weeks before moving to the next. I must add that the regional flight surgeon's offices are much more responsive but it seems they have no more authority than your AME. Is this a prime example of the "deep state" at work? The article below that AOPA recently published is, in my opinion, spot on the mark.

<https://www.aopa.org/news-and-media/all-news/2024/april/pilot/flight-md-a-better-way>

What to do? Well not much if you need a class 1 or 2 and must let the process play out but if you only need a 3 and the flying seasons are passing by too rapidly then with a class 3 in hand seriously consider basic med. The evidence is that there is no difference between accident rates due to medical reasons between class 3 and basic med and the insurance industry seems to agree. So why not? Don't get a higher level of medical than you need.

Should you have another of those disqualifying events I presume the basic med certificate becomes invalid but what you have to go through to get re-qualified I don't know. But maybe then it is time to go fishing or mow a grass runway.

John Hodgson 4-ship Flight Lead

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