

Aircraft Hire – Getting

If you don't own an aircraft, you probably hire one when you want to fly. So what should you be thinking about before climbing into that cockpit?

Typically, students tend to do some basic research on who they want to fly with before they start training.

Who they select will also depend on the reason they want to fly. Are they getting a PPL for leisure flying, or a CPL to be a career pilot? Career flying could be aimed at airline operations, corporate flying, bush flying, lifting, spraying, filming, instructing, or offshore flying.

"All these things influence the choice of training provider," says Jeanette Lusty, CAA Team Leader, Flight Operations Adventure Aviation.

"However, when it comes to the aircraft itself, most people take it totally for granted that any flight school or aero club has everything taken care of. Maybe they shouldn't..."

It's never too early to figure out how to select a safe and airworthy aircraft. Someday you'll be on your own and will need to know how.

First Impressions Matter

Check that the hiring organisation or person is the legitimate owner or operator of the aircraft, says Peter Lechner, PPL holder and the CAA's Chief Meteorological Officer. "Whose name is on the certificate of registration? Do they have clear permission to hire out the aircraft? Closely read any hire contract material – are there any fish hooks?"

Make sure that the aircraft is airworthy. Does it look neat and presentable? Signs of fluid leaks, corrosion, or structural damage are all indications that the aircraft is not in good shape.

Tech Log

Once you've had a look at all the external and visible signs, have a look at the tech log of the aircraft.

The aircraft should have a current Certificate of Airworthiness. Any hourly inspections must have been completed and applicable Airworthiness Directives actioned. Check to see if there are any outstanding maintenance issues.

Mark Houston, CAA Flight Operations Inspector Adventure Aviation, says, "If you cannot access the aircraft documents, including the tech log, that's a warning to you. You may be better off looking elsewhere for your aircraft."

He adds, "Any structural changes or modifications to the aircraft that you can see should be CAA approved. For example, if a GoPro camera has been mounted on the aircraft, it requires CAA approval. If anything in the tech log is not clear to you, talk to the aircraft maintainer and sight the log books if possible."

Insurance

Carlton Campbell, CAA Aviation Safety Adviser, says, "It is important to check if the aircraft is insured, and what type of insurance it has. Check with the owner if your planned activity is covered – never assume."

Authorization

Carlton says it is also important to get clarity about the authorization and what it entails. "The operator, usually, through an instructor, authorizes the flight after ensuring that



ng the Basics Right

all flight safety obligations have been met. For example, if you wish to land at an airfield other than those listed in the AIP, does the operator authorization include this?

“Check the flight manual to see what the aircraft is authorized to do. If the aircraft can fly IFR, does the aircraft have instruments that are authorized to do this? Check form 2129,” he says.

Fuel

Always check who is going to fill up the aircraft. Also, double check engine oil minima and actual oil levels.

“Another thing that catches people out is the fuel dipstick. Do measurements account for the unusable fuel or not? Ask the owner,” says Carlton.

Availability

Marc Brogan, CAA Aviation Examiner Flight Training and Flight Operations, says, “Be aware of any time constraints the aircraft might have. Find out when it needs to be back at base, so that you have plenty of time to do what you want to do, and then get the aircraft back.”

Cost

Carlton advises, “Confirm with the owner if Airways and aerodrome charges are included in the hire rate, or if they are separate. Also establish how the aircraft hourly rate is calculated.”

That could be based on flight time (takeoff to landing time), or tachometer time (which is linked to engine revolutions per minute), or Hobbs meter time (which measures the time that an aircraft is in use), or by some other means.

“Otherwise, you may end up getting a much bigger bill than

what you originally planned for,” warns Carlton.

Don't Take Off Just Yet

It pays to check the following, in addition to your normal preflight:

- » tyre condition to make sure there is no sign of splitting or visible canvas;
- » radio and intercom operability by making a test call to Airways, if available;
- » the operability of navigation and landing lights by turning them on, getting out and having a look.

Other Equipment

Make sure you have pickets and chocks on board. First aid kits and survival kits may also be required for certain types of operations. How about control locks, and means of securing baggage? There should be life jackets on board for every person in the aircraft if your route includes flying over water.

And Finally...

Mark Houston says, “Treat the aircraft as though it was your own. Once you are airborne, look and listen out for anything unusual. Provide feedback on even minor snags to the owner afterwards. If in doubt, put the aircraft back on the ground as soon as possible.”

“Remember to do a post-flight check to assess the aircraft's condition after landing. Does it need covers, is it correctly picketed or hangared?”

More Information

Vector article “Before You Go”, March/April 2013. ■

