



# **BFR** – Not a Test but an Opportunity

'Amiable mediocrity' is a term coined by the American writer John Gardner, to describe a sort of benign 'close enough is good enough' attitude.

It could also be used to describe the attitude of some pilots to their biennial flight review (BFR).

Civil Aviation Rules mandate the BFR: a pilot cannot legally fly without having passed one in the previous two years (rule 61.39).

Ideally, says CAA's Training Standards Development Officer, David Harrison, the BFR process should start with the instructor and pilot mapping out what the review is seeking to achieve, beyond the tick boxes on the review form.

"That conversation should address things like the amount and type of flying that the pilot has done recently, and any specific areas that the pilot wants to look at. From this, a plan can be agreed for the conduct of the review and how long it should take.

"Both parties should walk away from the BFR, confident that the pilot is performing to at least the required standard, and ideally, something in excess of that."

CAA Aviation Safety Adviser Carlton Campbell agrees the BFR should be seen as a 'learning moment'.

"It's easy to aspire to averageness," he says. "But the real satisfaction comes from extending flying skills, becoming competent in areas previously beyond you."

For instance, wind shift plays a role in almost 60 per cent of all weather-related accidents, and Carlton says more than 60 per cent of those accidents occur during landing.

"So pilots should embrace the requirement to do crosswind circuits, to improve their competence and currency in that area."

Long time instructor, Bill Henwood, says he sends away pilots who want only a box-ticking review.

"This is a golden opportunity for them to improve, extend, boost and correct their flying skills, possibly the only chance recreational pilots might get to do that.

"I can't be bothered with pilots who just want to chug along, get the thing over and done with as quickly, and as quietly, as possible. They completely ignore the opportunity to learn to fly better."

While Bill Henwood believes there are instructors who will oblige such 'lazy' pilots by ticking off their minimal abilities, he believes the

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number of pilots wanting more from their BFR is increasing.

"They're demanding more from their instructor in terms of learning new things. In turn the instructor has to be open to doing more than just ticking some boxes, and moving on.

"Likewise, if the pilot doesn't suggest something, a good instructor will do so, encouraging them to develop their flying in some new direction."

Carlton Campbell says one way more established pilots can improve their skills is to ask for some mountain flying practice.

"BFRs these days require mountain flying skills, but that is not retrospective for pilots who got their licences before mountain flying became a compulsory test.

"But given New Zealand's mountainous topography, flying skills in such areas allows the pilot to experience far more of their passion.

"Also, even if a pilot limits themselves to a particular area, fearful to go anywhere else because it involves more highly evolved flying skills, I'd remind them that their licence allows them to exercise privileges *nationally*."

Bill Henwood agrees. "What if one day they're joined by a friend who might want to go somewhere new? Or family circumstances means they need to fly outside their literal comfort zone?

"They should be able to embrace such situations with anticipation and joy, not dread and anxiety."

One of Bill's clients is Michael Wood. A PPL holder since 2005, Mike flies with New Zealand Warbirds in a T6 Harvard, and a DHC-1 Chipmunk.

"I always enjoy the BFR because it's a really good chance to brush up on some of those skills and exercises you wouldn't necessarily go and do yourself.

"It's great to do all the forced landings, stalls, low – and slow – flying you don't tend to do as part of your normal weekend flying.

"I guess I just enjoy being put through the mill to make sure I can still do everything okay – that's the challenge for me.

"I don't understand people looking for the box tick. You've got to keep yourself challenged and make sure your skill levels are right up there."

Mike also has no time for the opinion of some, that instructors invite pilots to have extension training as a money-generating exercise.

"In an extra 30 or 40 minutes you can get in a couple of forced landings and a bit of low flying. It's not going to cost that much more to get those skills in, as long as you don't have to fly miles to do it.

"If you can afford two hours flying, you can afford two and a half hours to become a better pilot." ■