

Finding Quality Aerobatic Instruction

Choosing which aerobatic flight school/instructor to train with is an important decision. The more confident you are in your choice, the more successful and enjoyable your training experience will be.

Following are some guidelines and suggestions for what to consider and how to go about making that decision.

What are your Aerobatic Flight Training Goals?

Before looking for an instructor, decide what type of aerobatic training you want. Perhaps you are looking for a CFI spin endorsement or upset/unusual attitude training to become a safer GA pilot. Or you may want to learn aerobatic flying for Sunday afternoon recreation.

Many pilots want competition aerobatic training either at an entry level or to prepare for the next higher category of competition flying. If air show flying is your goal, you may want to develop an air show routine or qualify for a low level waiver.

Whatever your aerobatic flying goal is, it is essential to take a comprehensive spin training course to prepare for any single pilot aerobatics.

Where to Look for Aerobatic Schools/Instructors

Quality aerobatic training can be offered by a flight school or by an instructor who operates independently.

The International Aerobatic Club provides a Directory of Aerobatic Schools on its website: www.iac.org under "How to Begin." The schools/instructors listed in the Directory are not rated or endorsed by the IAC.

You can get recommendations from your local IAC Chapter. Experienced IAC members will be able to offer suggestions. If you are not an IAC member, join at www.iac.org under "Join."

The best aerobatic flight school and/or instructor for you might be located some distance from your home airport. So don't exclude the possibility of spending vacation time learning aerobatics far from home.

Whatever the source of the recommendations, develop and use your own selection criteria to make the best choice. Some suggestions are listed below.

Aerobatic Training Aircraft

Think about what kind of aircraft you want to train in and find out what aircraft are flown by the flight school/instructor you are considering. Ask if you will need a tailwheel endorsement. If you have your own plane and want to use it, find out if it is certificated for the type of training you want.

If you would like to rent an aerobatic aircraft for solo flight or competition, be sure to ask the flight school/instructor about that possibility. Renter's insurance is usually required.

Before planning to train in an experimental aircraft, make sure the owner has a LODA (Letter of Deviation Authority) from the FAA which allows instruction in experimental aircraft.

Evaluating an Aerobatic Instructor

Interview each prospective instructor using a list of questions you develop. Following are some suggestions:

- Does the instructor offer the type of training you are looking for?
- How many hours of aerobatic flight time has the instructor logged?
- How many hours of aerobatic instruction has the instructor logged?
- Is the instructor a CFI? As a CFI the instructor will have experience teaching from the passenger seat and will know how to develop a syllabus.
- Does the instructor have a written syllabus for aerobatic training and is he/she willing to modify it to meet your needs?
- Are ground school, emergency parachute use and post flight debriefing included in the training program?
- In what aircraft is the instructor experienced and qualified to train?
- Will the instructor train in your aircraft?
- Will the instructor teach from the passenger seat?
- Ask the instructor for references, preferably a list of students you can contact.

If your goal is competition, the following questions are important:

- How much competition experience does the instructor have and in what aerobatic category?

- Does the instructor have experience critiquing, i.e., providing students with feedback on the correct execution of competition figures?

If air show flying is your goal:

- How many air shows does the instructor do a year?
- What is the instructor's ICAS floor?
- Did the instructor have competition experience prior to air show flying?
Competition experience creates a strong basis for disciplined, safe flying.

Compatibility between the instructor and student is important for a successful learning experience.

- Find out what the instructor's teaching style is. Try to get a sense of it in your interview and ask references. Is the instructor calm or excitable, supportive or critical? Are instructions given in a clear and concise way?
- Does the instructor seem to be sensitive to a student's personality and learning style?
- If possible, take a trial lesson before signing up for a block of time.

If you think you and an instructor are not a match, explore other options.

Here's wishing you great success in finding the best aerobatic flight instructor for you!

Following are FARs relevant to aerobatic flying/instructing:

FAR 23.3 Airplane Categories. Described maneuvers that can be performed by Utility and aerobatic aircraft.

FAR 23.221 Spinning.

FAR 61.31 (i) Additional training required for operating tailwheel airplanes. Provides requirements for a tailwheel endorsement.

FAR 91.303 Aerobatic Flight. Defines where aerobatic flight may be conducted. Gives definition of aerobatic flight.

FAR 91.307 Parachutes and Parachuting. Describes when parachutes must be used. Defines repacking requirements.

FAR 91.319 (a) (2) Describes operating limitations on aircraft having experimental certificates. 91.319 (h) Relief from paragraph a. Deviation authority.