Dear Mr. Haines,

Thank you for your article, Proficiency on Every Flight. I would like your thoughts on the difference between proficiency and performance. More to the point, does proficiency at the procedures involved in an ILS approach really translate to safer, more resilient performance?

I am considering exploring this contrast as my final project for my Human Factors Master’s degree and I want to consider your thoughtful perspective. Are we misrepresenting the tool and the task? For example, in your article you describe keeping the “…flight path marker locked…”. I argue that the flight path marker is a tool for flying a more precise approach. The task remains what it always was, fly a path to the runway that avoids obstacles. The mindset of flying the flight path marker will certainly result in more precise course and path control; where is the pilot’s mindset when the unexpected occurs? With a mindset carefully held in the fundamentals of aircraft control (ie. Pitch and power), the flight path marker becomes a tool for verification and fine adjustment of pitch, power, and course – the tool, not the task. The go-around (at minimums or with an unexpected equipment failure) remains a pitch and power solution and there is no transition (in the pilots mindset) from “approach mode” to “go-around mode”.

I would be interested in your comments on this point of view. I am struggling to develop a testable hypothesis. But after many years of observation as a check airman at a major airline, I’ve watched the proficiency of professional pilots decline dramatically when the automation performs unexpectedly. I would like to study this idea and would greatly value your perspective.

David Yachabach

Retired 737 Check Airman