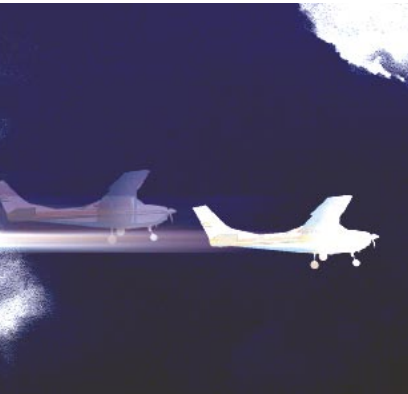


Ditch night VFR

IF ONE WAS ON THE prowl for latent failures in the article "Through the eye of the storm" (FSA January-February), surely the oxymoron "night VFR" would be top of the list. Whatever the reasons for the introduction of such a rating, there seems a good argument for doing away with it.



Steve Tizzard in his comment sums it up well – "it was intended that pilots would still fly predominately in daylight".

It would appear to be a rule that will always cause problems and furthermore is wide open to abuse. It is perhaps time to review its relevance.

Associate Professor John Faulkner,
Department of Aviation,
UNSW, Sydney

Past glories in rocket investigations

I READ WITH INTEREST the article, "Rocket science" (*Flight Safety Australia*, January-February), and the use of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau to investigate the rocket failure at Woomera.

Almost 50 years ago when the surface-to-air missiles were being tested at the Woomera Range, we had the unique ability to examine the result of every trial. This arose because all other firing ranges in the world were over water, and nothing was recoverable.

At that time, the Defence Science and Technology Organisation, then the Aeronautical Research Laboratories, Fishermans Bend, had an aircraft accident investigation panel consisting of a specialist from aerodynamics, engines, materials and two from structures, John Kepert and me.

This panel normally provided assistance to the RAAF and Civil Aviation Accident Branch for almost every aircraft accident in Australia.

Hence, it was no surprise when the panel was tasked with conducting the analysis of the



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trials at Woomera and determining the effectiveness of the engagement (if any).

Missiles such as the Bloodhound, Sea Slug and Thunderbird were fired. The investigations were always very interesting, with some unexpected findings regarding missile efficiency.

From the extensive amount of data available, John was able to refine and produce reliable trajectory predictions, which enabled the position of an in-flight structural failure to be calculated from ground wreckage layout.

Alan Patching
Balwyn, Vic

Another horse tale

I WAS CAPTAIN ON A 727 freighter from Melbourne to Perth, departing at 3am. One of our passengers was a race horse called What a Splash, and he was about to cause one big splash.

The vet asked me if I would help get the horse out of the float into the horse box for loading onto the aircraft.

As a former jackeroo, I felt quite comfortable holding onto the halter while the vet and a strapper pushed the horse from behind.

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Fired up

THE ARTICLE “When you can’t dial 000” (FSA, January-February) appears to contradict the “Fire procedures for cabin crew” box on page 37. The trunk story states that water should never be used on electrical equipment, yet the box says “embers should be soaked with water or a non-alcoholic beverage”.

Water on electrical equipment is only dangerous when the voltage exceeds approximately 50 V. My observations of GA aircraft indicate the battery is 12 V, and I suspect some may be 24 V. These voltages are far too low for water to be a problem. Although some equipment may generate higher voltages (particularly old valve equipment), this is now rare and the high voltages are unlikely to escape from the equipment, and will dissipate rapidly if the equipment is first switched off (stage one of fire fighting in GA?).

Even glass cockpits with the high voltages used in TV picture tubes should not be a problem as the relevant power supplies do not provide sufficient current to disable or kill a reasonably healthy person, and so will generally be the lesser of the evils (smoke inhalation and possible unconsciousness versus a minor electrical jolt).

Electrically-operated solenoids may give inductive kickback when they are de-

energised. However, this is not sufficient to disable or kill a reasonably healthy person. One solenoid that may cause a shock is the starter solenoid. However, assuming you are not trying to start the engine then, that should not be a problem.

I cannot comment on the larger aircraft as I have not seen any information about their systems. However, I believe water and (non-alcohol) water-based fluids must be considered a valid fire-fighting tool in any GA situation other than those involving fuel.

John Evans
ACT

Water is not recommended for use on electrical fires because the cabin crew are not normally in a position to determine the voltage involved, and, as it is the larger commercial aircraft that are required to carry cabin crew, much higher voltages may well be present. The BCF extinguisher (from the halon family of gases) has proved to be much more effective in any case, especially when the fire is in a confined space.

The reference to soaking embers with water is suggested when fabric or like material still contains sufficient heat for re-ignition. However, crew understand to shut off electrical power before applying water to the scene (i.e. galley or lavatory area).

For initial and immediate flame knock down, the BCF extinguisher is recommended. Crew must fight the fire aggressively and without hesitation, and then make decisions on what to do next. It is really this

“immediate action” requirement that drives the use of this more universal type of extinguisher, and this was the main thrust of the article.

Russell Higgins
Senior air safety auditor
(cabin safety) CASA

Tailscape saga

I WAS THE INVESTIGATOR in charge of the SIA B747 tail strike accident at Auckland reported in FSA (Jan-Feb)..

The statement, “The load sheet for the aircraft had its take-off and landing weights listed as being almost the same – 247.4 and 247.0 tonnes respectively”, is incorrect.

The Air NZ ground crew prepared the load sheet correctly, which recorded the correct take-off weight of 347.4 tonnes. This correct load sheet was then given to the captain.

Because of a transcription error, the first officer incorrectly wrote the TOW as 247 (tonnes) on the bug card, which he then used to calculate the V speeds and thrust setting.

The full report can be accessed on our website: www.taic.org.nz as report 03-003.

Ken Mathews
Transport Accident Investigation
Commission, New Zealand

Drop us a line

Ideal length for publication is 150 words. Letters may be edited to save space. Specify if your letter is not for publication, or if you wish to have your name withheld.

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TOM KEATING

The horse came out with a rush and he was not happy with what he saw. He reared and the halter broke. Away went the horse into the night at Tullamarine Airport. Air traffic control was told, and the airport was closed.

Freighter flights due to fly out had to be recalled. Five incoming international flights were now told that Melbourne required an alternate due to a runaway horse.

Meanwhile, a search for the horse was started and he was eventually found two kilometres away on the northern airport boundary. He was in good condition except for some scratches and being a bit spooked. He did not go to Perth that morning.

The airport was closed for about 40 minutes. I remember the take-off with horses on board. They did not like the high body angles and would start stamping the floor to keep their balance. We called it the “horse symphony”.

P. Ridley
Melbourne, Vic



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