



Training: Bob Juncosa

"With or Without an Instructor"

One of my favorite sayings is, "Just because someone has a book and a knife, that doesn't make them a surgeon."

I usually use that saying in contexts other than RC but I do believe that it applies when it comes to being a self-taught RC pilot vs. learning with the aid of an instructor. So buckle up. I am going to make the argument *for* using an instructor instead of going it alone.

Before I start, don't misunderstand. There are a lot of fine pilots that are completely self-taught. One doesn't have to use an instructor if they prefer otherwise. My point here is to make the case that with an instructor, new pilots learn faster, have fewer (costly) accidents, avoid early bad habits, and have a smoother time advancing beyond the training stage. Here goes...

Out of the Box

Luckily we live in a day and age where books, videos, the Internet, and simulators provide a massive amount of information for the prospective pilot. Also, it is amazingly inexpensive to get into the hobby. All of that can be quite daunting though. It can be tough for the new pilot to wade through all of that information and figure out what applies to him or her and separate good advice from bad.

So right from the very beginning, an instructor (or at least someone with RC experience) can be beneficial. Such a person can prevent an enthusiastic newbie from plunking down too much money for far too advanced planes, radio gear, and other paraphernalia. In a lot of cases, clubs have plenty of training equipment to get the beginner started without them having to part with a single dollar, aside from AMA fees of course. The instructor can make sure that the student pilot will be learning on a safe, reliable, and appropriate plane.

Flight School

Without an instructor, the beginner may know little beyond how to move the control surfaces. At this point the new pilot is a blank canvas with no good or bad habits but with few if any skills. They would be truly winging it. Learning would start with moving the throttle forward and figuring it out from there. It would be through trial and error that turns would be made and the eventual landings. Light park flyers can survive plenty of bad landings but things would go much smoother and quicker if an instructor was there at the beginning to show and explain why the plane nose planted right after takeoff.

Viable and Safe Airplanes

Ready to Fly airplanes are generally viable right out of the box. However, it can be another story if the new pilot has acquired used plane. I have seen some horrific examples of what a student had expected to take to the air. Servos reversed, throws all wrong, poor linkages, trim way off, and balance not even close. Had a takeoff been attempted even by an experienced pilot, some of these planes would never have reached the end of the runway in one piece.

An instructor can go through the plane from spinner to tail and make sure that it is a viable flying machine. More importantly, that it is safe to operate. Not only can the instructor check out the plane but also teach the new pilot what to look for and what to do in the future.

Why, Not Just How

Without an instructor, the new pilot continually works out how to do things by trial and error. How to take off, how to turn, how to climb, etc. With an instructor, they learn why the plane reacts when inputs are made with the sticks. Now the maneuvers of the plane can be predicted, i.e. if the pilot wants to make the plane do X, he or she will have a better idea of what inputs to provide ahead of time because they have a better understanding of why a plane does what it does.

Good and Bad Habits

A whole article can be done on the bad habits that a new pilot can get into when they go it alone. Here are just a few:

- Not understanding the need for a preflight checklist
- Restraining the plane when starting
- Staying behind the aircraft
- Using the throttle as an on/off switch
- Throttle management (not flying full throttle for the entire flight)
- Rudder control is not just for steering on the ground
- A coordinated turn
- Why the tail dragger wants to head sideways on takeoff
- Safety in the pits and in the air
- Pilot etiquette
- Pinch the sticks, not thumbs!! (nah, just kidding. Whatever works for you.)

Best Practices

Flying is much more than getting your airplane into the air and back down in one piece. Like most things, proficiency comes with the practicing of exercises or drills. An instructor can provide those exercises that teach proficiency in things like:

- Maintaining altitude throughout the circuit around the field
- Dealing with cross winds
- Basic aerobatic maneuvers
- Techniques for lining up for landing on the centerline of the field

When Things Go Wrong

Without an instructor, the new pilot must deal with unanticipated events as they come. No one initiates a dead stick on purpose. If one happens during training with a buddy box, the student is not left to handle it on their own. The instructor takes over, recovers the plane, and then explains the process.

The most valuable part of flying on the buddy box is having the instructor take over the plane when the plane has gotten away from the student. The instructor can explain what the student did to get the plane in that

situation and what it took to get the plane back under control. Otherwise, the student will most likely have some repairs to make and not fully understand what caused the mishap in the first place.

In closing, with all the aids that we have today, uninstructed learning to fly is easier and has a better chance of being successful than ever before but that doesn't mean that the eventual outcome will be the same with or without the instructor. I believe that beginners that are trained through instructors end up being better pilots.

Now of course, all of what I have said depends on the quality of the instructor. Bad teachers make for bad new pilots so choose your instructor wisely.

Happy Landings

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