

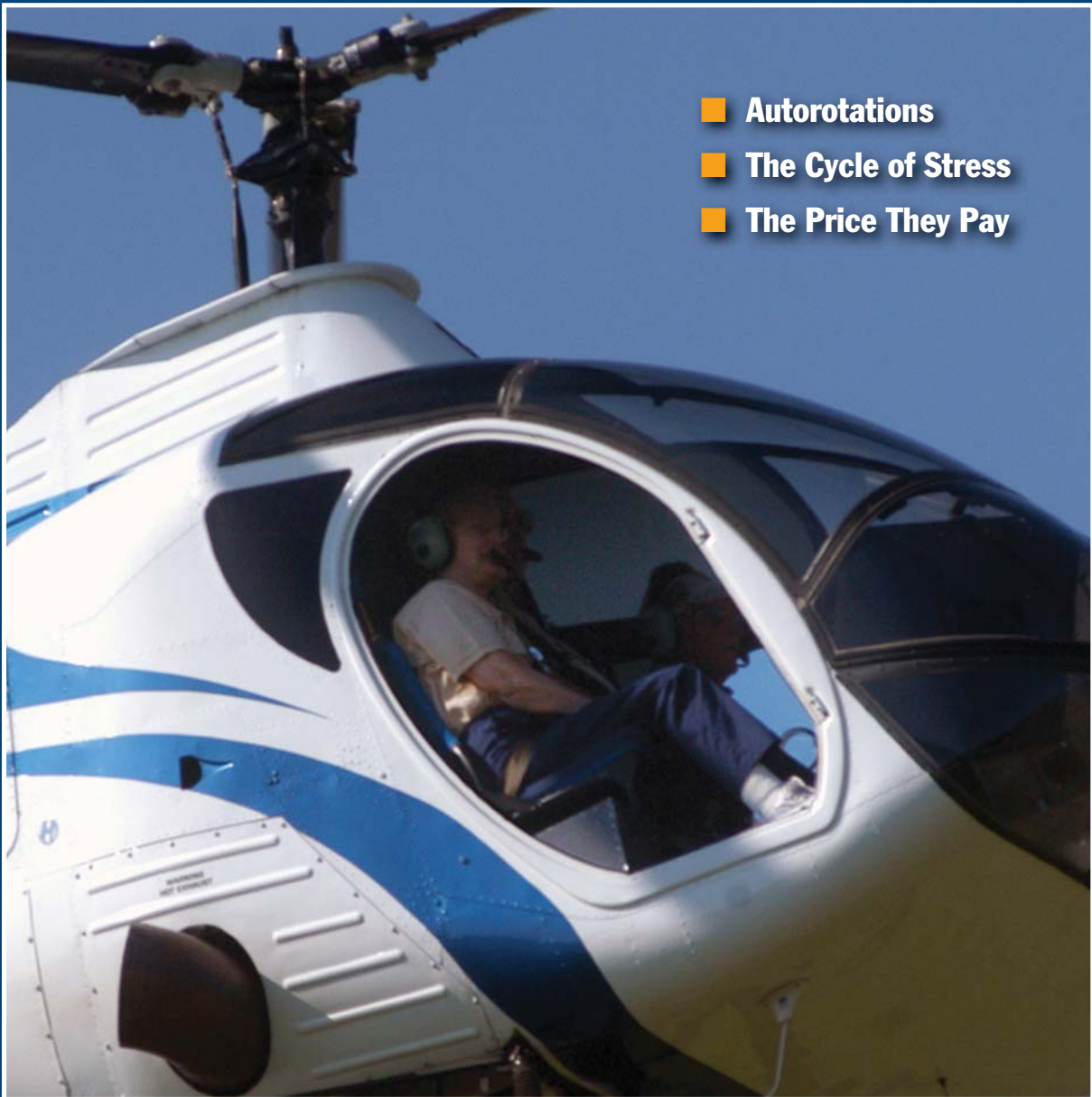
THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

MENTOR

SEPTEMBER 2008



VOLUME 10 NUMBER 9



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The Price They Pay

Why checkrides cost so much

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After months of expensive training, your student will find he finally is ready to take his checkride. Yet, it may come as a surprise to learn that he will have to pay an examiner a considerable fee for that honor.

Why is it so expensive? After all, all the examiner is doing is asking the pilot applicant a bunch of questions for a couple of hours on the ground and then flying with him for an hour or so, right? How can that possibly justify the cost?

There are several variables that add up to the rate the instructor asks—not the least of which is the total time the practical test process takes, much of which occurs out of the view of the applicant being tested. But that rate also reflects the amount of responsibility and liability the examiner incurs during, and after, the testing process, as well as the investment she must make in order to hang out her shingle.

When you break it down, the cost of a checkride shouldn't be much of a surprise after all.

Breaking It Down

Let's go through what an examiner typically does to administer a run-of-the-mill checkride. The applicant calls the examiner and schedules the checkride, and sometime before the big day, the examiner will typically spend half an hour or so planning out the event.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires the examiner to use a "Plan of Action," which is, in essence, a checklist for administering the practical test. This helps the examiner organize the checkride and ensures that the applicant will be appropriately tested according to the practical test standards (PTS) set forth for the rating or certificate the student is pursuing.

On the day of the checkride, we can assume that in most cases an examiner will have, conservatively, a half-hour drive to the airport where the test will be administered. Upon arrival, the examiner will take the time to go

through the applicant's application package. That normally takes around an hour for the examiner to go through the 8710 form, check the applicant's identification, view and verify logbook endorsements and aeronautical experience, and check the logbooks of the aircraft to be used for the checkride for airworthiness.

Then the actual test begins. My practical tests take roughly four hours. That time is broken into the ground portion of the test, the flight portion of the test, and a post-flight debrief. This is then followed by the final act of issuing the appropriate pass or fail documentation to the applicant. Afterward, the applicant typically goes home with his new certificate or rating in the form of a temporary airman's certificate, and the examiner drives that 30 minutes back home.

While the applicant waits for the permanent certificate to arrive in the mail, it's the duty of the examiner to ensure that it will

soon be on its way. To do this, an examiner must go through the application documentation and prepare a report for submission to the FAA. This typically takes approximately an hour of time.

The total time spent per checkride is roughly seven and a half hours, for, let's say, a \$300 charge. This equates to \$40 an hour for the examiner.

When we break down the hourly charge the examiner is receiving, we find that it is not nearly as exorbitant as it originally seems. Frequently, this is comparable with hourly costs for the flight instructor who has conducted the student's training. Unless you've found a fantastic bargain, that rate is most certainly considerably less per hour than you pay for your aviation or even automotive mechanic.

Value Priced

But these questions can still be raised: *Is it worth it? What am I really paying the examiner for?*

First, the examiner is trusting that the applicant and his instructor have spent the time needed to make him a safe pilot—safe enough that I should be willing to get into the airplane with him and allow him sole control of the aircraft. Second, I assume some degree of liability for the performance and ability of the pilot if I pass that individual on the practical test. When I issue the applicant a temporary airman's certificate, I have effectively given him a stamp of approval that he meets or exceeds minimum FAA standards for performance and knowledge for the respective practical test. Should the applicant go out and prove otherwise in some sort of infraction, incident, or accident, a possibility exists that I—as the examiner who

Typical Time an FAA-Designated Pilot Examiner Spends on the Administration of a Practical Test (Checkride)

Plan-of-Action Preparation:	½ hour
Drive to Checkride:	½ hour
Application Verification:	1 hour
Test Administration:	4 hours
Drive Home:	½ hour
Document Submission Preparation:	1 hour
Total Time Spent:	7 ½ hours
Checkride Cost:	\$300
Hourly Equivalent:	\$40 per hour

conducted that pilot's last test—will be contacted regarding my decision to allow him to pass his most recent checkride. In that role, I am the last check for a pilot who is going to go out and use the skills he has gained through his study and training.

Along with the direct hourly time I spend on each checkride, I must also keep myself "approved" to conduct practical tests under FAA authorization. This requires yearly training, annual review by a local FAA flight standards district office employee, and various flight currencies depending on my area and level of test authorization. These continuing time-and-cost expenditures are at my cost, just to maintain my ability and privilege to conduct a practical test under FAA authorization.

Examiners are highly experienced individuals who have met stringent FAA minimums to become FAA designees. They have submitted themselves to a long FAA approval process at both the local and national levels. They have attended training conducted by the FAA and must have

a good reputation within the area where they will operate. They are approved to conduct tests only within the limited areas in which they have demonstrated experience and proficiency, and they must maintain this proficiency to keep the testing authorization. They are individuals who have dedicated themselves to helping to maintain minimum standards of safety and competency to provide a safe and competent pilot community. It is a privilege bestowed upon only a select group of pilots whose experience and training have made them qualified to administer practical tests to FAA standards.

So is it worth the price your students pay for an examiner to administer a checkride? That's for both you and your student to decide. But there is no doubt that examiners have put in the time and training to try to make themselves—and the service they provide—worth the cost for a student to receive a pilot certificate or advanced rating.

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