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position Report

By the Book

Teaching students the value of aircraft logbooks

How can we tell if the aircraft we are going to use today is legal to fly?" It's a standard question on my checkrides. Almost every applicant can easily give me the list of documents on the AROW checklist, and most can even tell me the major inspections their aircraft needs. Many, however, have trouble actually identifying the entries in the logbooks that show what they tell me we're looking for.

For any pilot, being able to determine whether an aircraft is legal to fly is an important part of preflight preparation. Students, though, assume the company that's renting them the airplane has kept up with the details about inspections and maintenance, and while that's certainly a reasonable expectation—and the vast majority of aircraft rental operations do this responsibly—these assumptions create a disconnect between these future pilots in command and their experience with the aircraft they'll fly. That's an important point; I've noticed students who own their own aircraft, and who are therefore responsible for its main-

tenance, are many times better versed in using the logbooks for the aircraft they fly. Maybe it's just because they're the ones paying the bills. Still, a good knowledge of what is in an aircraft's logbooks can help a student understand what's required to keep an aircraft flying—legally and safely—and, of course, make sure it's all been done *before* he leaves the ground.

As instructors, we could probably all spend more time doing this with our students. In many cases, when a student presents logbooks to me during a checkride, he'll fumble around as he tries to show me the most recent annual or 100-hour inspection, or find the last emergency locator transmitter inspection, or figure out when the next transponder inspection is due. I hear comments like, "Well, I've only looked at these books once with my instructor; he showed me them yesterday so I could show the inspections to you during the checkride."

Showing a student the logbooks once—and then only the day before the checkride—isn't enough. And, for that matter, it's too late. It's his *checkride*, after all.

Yet, it's easy for us to take our students' book learning for granted and assume they've figured out the practical side. We may ask them repeatedly about "required inspections," and they may be able to tell us what they are, word for word, right out of the regulations. But if these students can't actually find evidence suggesting these rules have been kept—the practical application of the rote knowledge they've gained—then we haven't done our job. Instead, we can only wonder which other of their practical skills may fall short of our expectations, as well.

Furthermore, these documents tell the story of the aircraft. They tell us what maintenance has been necessary, what's happened to it that's outside the scope of regular maintenance—that is, squawks, damage, and other trouble—what upgrades have been made, and, generally, what condition the aircraft is in. As our own pilot logbooks tell us a story about our flying experiences, aircraft logbooks tell the story of the aircraft we fly. That's important for students to know, particularly if they'll rent an



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aircraft from a new fixed base operator sometime in the future, or even buy one of their own. They'll appreciate that you took the time to help them understand the entries written on those pages.

As an instructor, I can't say I've always spent as much time doing this as I should, but as an examiner, I have noticed the deficiency, and that's encouraged me to be more diligent and change how I teach. After all, a pilot in command is ultimately responsible for the safe operation of his aircraft. He can only do that when he's sure that the airplane itself is as safe, functional, and legal as it can be. ■