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**A**S CAREFULLY AS YOU MIGHT MANAGE your plane's manifest, unwanted passengers can still make their way onboard, and they could wind up posing a risk you hadn't considered before departure.

Okay, so unless you are getting hijacked, which we certainly hope no one reading this ever experiences, a person stowing away on your personal or corporate aircraft is pretty unlikely. However, as sure as there were way too many snakes on that one plane, there are often smaller living things, creatures, if you will, that might go unnoticed without a good, thorough check.

I have had a couple of these over the years pose a heck of a surprise on takeoff or during flight, and in a couple of cases, they could have posed a risk that could have been worse.

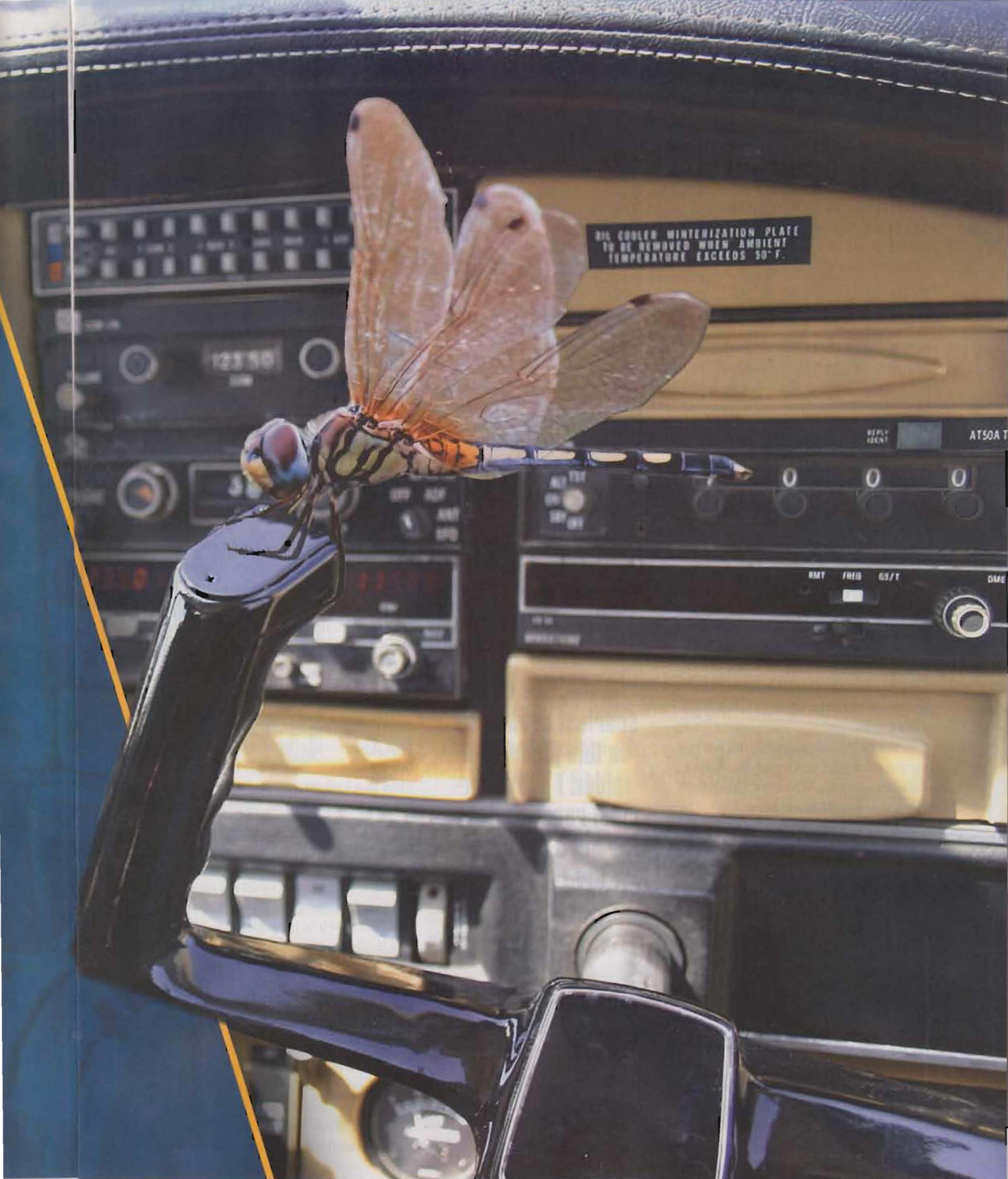
# MANAGING THE RISK OF UNAUTHORIZED PASSENGERS

Passengers are great. That is, the ones you want onboard with you. **BY JASON BLAIR**

On a recent practical test, much to the surprise not only of the private pilot applicant but to me as the DPE also, a rather large bug landed on the poor applicant's shoulder shortly after rotation during his climb out in the Piper Archer we were flying. We had the door open to the cabin during preflight to keep the cabin cooler before our departure, and a large dragonfly decided to hitch a ride.

Fortunately for the applicant, he just felt a bug on his shoulder. But he did notice the surprise on my face when I looked after he asked what had hit his shoulder! He kept calm, fortunately not looking at how large it was as I scrambled quickly to grab the POH from the back seat to shuffle it off his shoulder and then give it at least a stunning whack on the floor in the back seat. Good thing it hadn't landed on his head or flown into his face.







In another case, I found myself fighting a handful of wasps buzzing around the cockpit that must have flown into the aircraft after it had been parked in a grass tie-down spot. Fortunately, the mini-swarm appeared during the taxi, and I was able to stop on the taxiway, open the door, and clear out the cockpit without getting stung. Had that happened during a more critical phase of flight, it might have left me with fewer options and in a position where getting stung was less avoidable.

To me, one of the scariest creatures on this planet is a spider. I know, for most readers, they aren't a problem. But they are my kryptonite. Thankfully, and in a moment my mother-in-law loves to remember as a fun story, we were flying in a Cessna 172 when a spider at least the size of a quarter (although she will contradict my exaggeration with a more realistic estimation of size being closer to the head of a pencil eraser) decided to descend from the top of the glare shield right in front of me as we flew. Thankfully, my mother-in-law is a pilot also and braver than me when it comes to spiders. She took care of it for me, but I still felt creeped out for the rest of the flight that a spider could appear from nowhere on any given flight with the obvious purpose of killing everyone on board. Okay, that might be an exaggeration also, but in some places, those spiders can be bigger and more poisonous than the ones we usually get in Michigan.

In the cutest of cases, I found myself stopping for fuel in Grand, Nebraska, while bringing an Aeronca Champ that I had purchased back from Idaho to Michigan. It was the first stop in the morning after leaving Colorado, and I'd parked the aircraft at the fuel pumps and gone into the FBO to use the restroom. I'd left the door open to the aircraft, and I'd gone into the terminal, so I wasn't keeping a close eye on potential interlopers.

So, the first time I noticed anything amiss wasn't until I was airborne, about 10 miles to the east of the airport, in fact, cruising on toward my next destination, when out of the corner of my eye, I noticed something move behind me.

Focusing on flying the plane but now concerned that something was moving behind me, my mind ran through many potential critters. A bird? A squirrel? Fortunately, it was just a cute little kitten from the airport. I dutifully turned around and brought the kitten back to the airport



and was informed how happy they were he got returned since he was developing into a good "mouse catcher" in their hangar. It could easily have been a creature that was more problematic and less likely to sit on my lap for the return flight to the airport like the kitten did.

There are, in fact, stories of stowaway cats freaking out and nearly causing the plane they'd commandeered to crash.

Lots of things could get into your cabin when you are not paying attention. If you leave your doors or windows open on an aircraft while it is parked, even in a hangar, things can find their way in. Depending on where you are, the diversity of critters that could try to make your aircraft interior home while you are away only to find them during flight includes a wide variety. It can even happen in short periods of time while you fuel or while the aircraft is parked in a tie-down during breakfast or while

you are away at a meeting. Pilots the world around share stories of snakes, spiders, mice and many more kinds of critters sneaking into the cabins of aircraft.

So, with these stories in hand, I think the gist is you should make sure you have checked your cabins for potential passengers that might pose a risk of, at a minimum, distraction or worse potential dangers. Keep those doors and windows closed. And take the time to thoroughly check your cabin before departing to avoid company from those unwanted passengers who may have snuck aboard! **PP**

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