

Engine Failure and the Emergency Landing

When I started training to fly trikes back in 1999 I had determined that I wanted to be the best possible pilot I could be. I wanted to understand everything about my aircraft, the engine, the weather etc. etc. With this determination in mind the first question I asked my flight instructor was “what makes a good pilot?” Without hesitation, he responded “good judgment.” That makes sense. Ok! So where does good judgment come from? Well, for the most part from experience. That makes sense, too. However, as a flight instructor myself now, it is obvious that good judgment can also be developed through bad judgment, whether our own or someone else’s. One of the first things we tell our students is that beyond your flight training the best tool you have for your continuing education which is critical to your safety is “hangar talk,” a few pilots get-



ting together now and then and picking apart incidents they might have been involved in or read about. We question, what did they do wrong that they would do different the next time? What did they do right that saved their backside and perhaps the aircraft? We then file this information in the gray matter so it’s readily available to help us make good judgments in similar situations.

Almost from the beginning of our flight training, engine failure is prophesied by our instructors as a “when” situation, not as an “if” situation. This is at least true of the Weight-Shift Trike Instructors that I know. However, I cannot speak for the rest of the instructor population. With the assurance that it will happen sooner or later, the chief trike instructor at our flight school, Bob Keech, is often heard saying to our students

“an engine failure should never be a panic situation.” In light of this our flight instructors diligently prepare us for the inevitable. They train us not to fly anywhere we don’t want to land and to always be aware of wind direction. We are trained to observe obstacles in the fields we are eyeing up as potential bailout. We are taught the proper way to bleed off excess altitude or squeeze out the best glide for our aircraft and other skills to keep us safe when an emergency does occur.

I suppose that if we have heeded our training, Bob would be right; it should never be a panic situation. However, I also see that as an easy thing for him to say considering he had twenty-

