

Cirrus Transition Training: A New Owner's Preparation Guide

by John Fiscus

Congratulations! You are about to take possession of the most capable and safe aircraft general aviation has to offer. With an investment like this, you'll definitely want to make the most of the time you're going to spend learning how to fly it. You'll further want to make sure to set yourself up for success with a continuing education program.

Pre-Delivery

The acceptance process is incredibly exciting, particularly for first-time owners. Logistics range from setting up the wire transfer, to which rental car you should use ... so many little factors can work together to create stress. Factor into the equation that you'll be drinking from the fire hose during your training and it's easy to see why learning all you can in the months prior to delivery is critical.

At right are a few tips to managing your study time and making your delivery process more relaxing.

You should also secure a safe place for your new airplane. Many airports have a waiting list on hangar space, so it's a good idea to get your name in early (to the tune of six months or even a year).

The next step will be to acquire all the necessary equipment for routine aircraft care. Check the COPA forum archives for an expanded list of good ideas, but remember the basics: clean your airplane after each flight (so be sure to stock your hangar with supplies), get a creeper for washing the bottom, have a tool kit handy (but remember to have maintenance done by an A&P), get an electric or gas-powered tow, a step stool, a few lawn chairs ... the list goes on.

TIPS TO MANAGING STUDY

► Every Cirrus owner should receive training manuals and software from the factory prior to the start of training. Aircraft coming from the factory will have these books sent out automatically but owners purchasing an after-market aircraft may need to ensure they get their materials. If the seller doesn't know much about them, contact a CSIP, Cirrus Training Center or Cirrus itself. Set yourself up for success by having the right tools.

► Study! Your manuals will look a little intimidating when you first receive them, but don't worry. The training manuals presently contain a series of questions that are written specifically to guide your study.* If you can answer those questions correctly, you're well on your way to knowing the important things about your aircraft. The Cirrus Aircraft Training Software (CATS) is also included in your training packet. This interactive software will allow you to manipulate various aspects of the Cirrus' systems and see for yourself what's going on behind the scenes.

► Fly! Spend a little time in a Cirrus either with another owner (who must be PIC at ALL times) or, preferably, in a rental with an instructor. This way you can familiarize yourself with the cockpit and normal procedures in a more laid-back environment. A little bit of comfort will go a long way towards making your intensive transition training more fruitful. Cirrus itself offers an incentive to doing pre-delivery flight training with their 10-Hour Test Drive program. Talk to a Cirrus Standardized Training Center or your Cirrus sales rep to learn more about the program.

* Cirrus is moving to an all-online training base (to be completed by April '08). Owners will log in to a web-based training center that contains interactive guides and questions. Progress is logged and can be reviewed by your designated instructor.

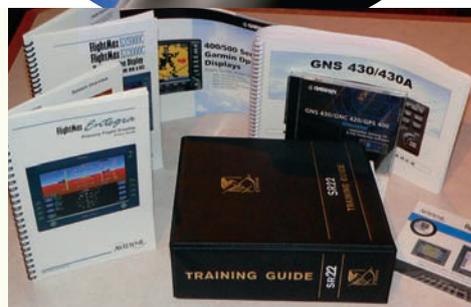
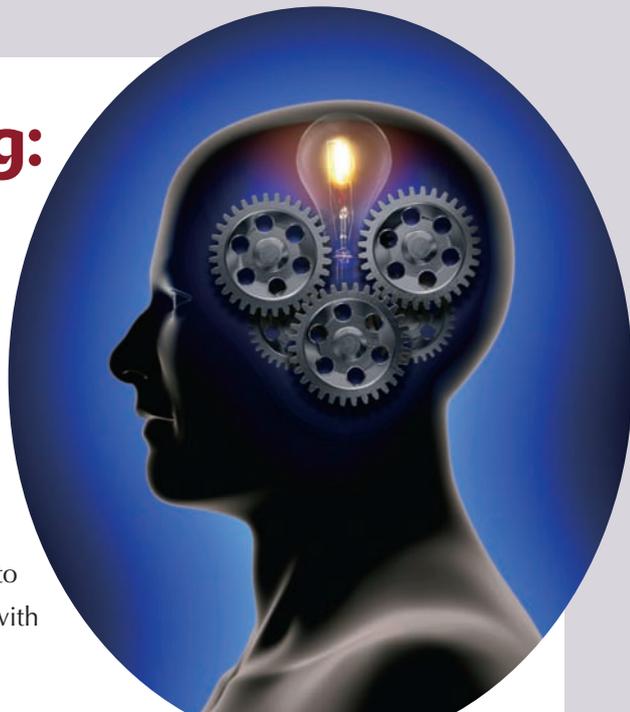


Photo Courtesy of Cirrus Design

Delivery

When you arrive to take possession of your new aircraft at the Cirrus factory, you'll be walked through the process by your customer relations manager as well as your factory flight instructor. If you have any questions, ask one of these knowledgeable people and they'll be able to provide the answers you need. If you're taking delivery of a used aircraft, ask your CSIP for help if you have questions about the process.

Expect the first half of day one to be spent performing the acceptance process. During this time you'll inspect your new aircraft, go on an acceptance flight with a factory pilot to verify that everything's working the way it should (they've flown it plenty already to verify that), and sign the paperwork. A quick break for lunch and you'll be ready to start training.

Your instructor will explain the specifics of training, but basically it consists of some ground discussion (spent one-on-one and with a slideshow) and numerous short cross-country flights. The training method, called Scenario Based Training (SBT), is specifically designed to put you into common real-world situations that progress from normal flight to abnormal and emergency situations. This kind of flight training will familiarize you with the airplane's systems and allow you to implement them in real-world ways. Expect your training to take at least three full days, starting at about 8:00 a.m. and going until about 5:00 p.m.

During this training period you will finalize a continuing education plan with a Cirrus representative. Since the key to being a good pilot is a good currency training program, setting this schedule up right away will help you plan your life appropriately. As a veteran Cirrus flight instructor, I can vouch for this kind of plan. Leaving things to be determined later is a sure way to have them not happen, and this training is vitally important. Some of the safest Cirrus pilots I've flown with spend time working with an instructor every few months. Your Cirrus liaison will tailor a custom program for you and help you schedule the currency training with a CSIP in your area.

Many customers bring along a CSIP or hire a factory instructor for the ride home. This is helpful particularly for long flights that may involve mountainous terrain (of which they have none in or anywhere near Duluth). Unless you've had experience on a long cross-country flight that involves the crossing of numerous weather systems, ATC boundaries, and various geographical differences, it's a good idea to bring along an instructor for a little insurance. Many Training Centers and some CSIPs will meet you wherever you'd like and escort you home. Be sure to ask questions of your instructor to see that they've done something like his before.

If you'd like to add some value to the trip home with your instructor, take the long way back. Many instructors will be happy to take you to places you might like to visit in the future as part of your flight home. International trips require a permanent registration to cross borders, so put those off until later. If you live in Nashville, Aspen and Vail are only a short hop away, so trying them first with an experienced instructor will improve your comfort for future trips with family or friends.

Post Delivery

Congratulations again! You've now completed the exciting process of acquiring a new airplane. Prepare to have a lot of visitors to your hangar or tie-down space, a Cirrus gets a lot of attention. I typically plan about ten extra minutes on a pre-flight for walk ups. Your next task is one of the best "problems" to have: you need to get out there and fly! Here are a few things to remember as you grow your proficiency:

- Immediately following initial training, your proficiency is at its highest, and the best way to keep it up is to practice. Every pilot has seen how fast his or her skills can atrophy, so it's best to get up in the air no less than a week after you get home, although most of us can't wait that long. Find a nearby destination and go grab the 100-dollar hamburger or take a longer trip if you feel ready for that kind of mission. Don't try anything you're not comfortable with, particularly approaches, until you've had the opportunity to get some practice with an experienced CSIP. Ask your CFI to challenge you with system failures and avionics oddities to ensure you're completely ready for the more advanced kinds of flying (i.e., anything involving IFR).
- Remember to talk to your passengers about miscellaneous discussion while you're taking off, approaching, or landing. All they need from you is a reminder that they should hold off on talking until you say it's okay. Trust me, they won't be offended and will appreciate the guidance. Give them a job by asking them to point out any aircraft heading your way.
- If you don't have your instrument rating, get it in your Cirrus! You'll become aware of systems and capabilities built into your airplane that you never knew existed and the experience will make you a much better pilot. Train with a

CFI who knows your aircraft's systems really well so you can learn to utilize them all.

- Aircraft engines actually need to be run regularly to keep wear and tear to a minimum. It's best to run the engine at least once a week but it can be stretched to one month before serious problems begin. If you anticipate letting your airplane sit without being run for any lengthy amount of time (more than one month) ask a mechanic to prepare your airplane for the inactivity. One other option is to find a pilot you can trust (and who is on your insurance) and charge them with the duty of flying your airplane for at least a half-hour every few weeks.
- Finally, continuously seek knowledge about piloting and ownership. The Cirrus Owners and Pilots Association (COPA) website (www.cirruspilots.org) is full of discussion about current events in maintenance, flying, and new products. It also contains links and downloads for various flight planning tools, weather sources, and currency reminders. The COPApedia website (www.copapedia.org) is also an excellent source of information about a plethora of topics. Attend a Cirrus Pilot Proficiency Program (CPPP) each year, they are held all over the United States as well as Europe and will help remove the rust that builds so easily.

Fly safely! 

About the Author: *John Fiscus is co-owner of The Flight Academy and has over 5,700 total hours, about 5,000 of those teaching in Cirrus aircraft. Before opening the Academy, John worked at Cirrus Design as a factory instructor and corporate pilot. He holds Commercial, CFI and CSIP ratings.*

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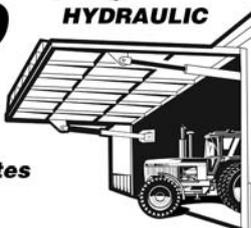
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