

Earning the Instrument Rating



AFIT: Perfect World Training

By Karen Workman
Photos Provided by A.F.I.T.

In a perfect world, your instrument rating would be earned like this: You would walk into your FBO to announce that you have successfully passed your written test and are ready to begin the practical part of your instrument training. Twelve certified instrument flight instructors (CFIIs) would be lined up, each of them with thousands of hours of experience. You would be matched up with one that best suits your style. That instructor would dedicate an entire week to you alone and at the end of that week, you would be qualified to fly through the clouds with the FAA's blessing.

Typically, though, when you walk into the FBO, it's hit or miss to find a CFI, an instructor who is licensed to teach instruments. If you find one, chances are pretty good your instructor is a young person recently graduated from a fine aviation program, on his or her way to flying for the airlines. That CFI would fit you into a schedule to fly every Wednesday evening for the next six months. Of course, there are no guarantees that you'd actually be able to fly all of those Wednesdays but that's alright, you can extend the training and continue weekly until you are ready for

your check ride. And if your instructor reaches his/her minimum required hours for a job with a commuter airline, you'll wish her/him the best and meet another CFI who will take over your training.

Accelerated Flight Instrument Training

Here's a secret from me to you. You can step across "typical" and reach for "perfect." There is an organization that was started in California sixteen years ago that comes pretty darned close to everything a pilot could want. Accelerated Flight Instrument Training, AFIT, is one of the best kept secrets in the industry, but that is rapidly changing. They offer a ten-day instrument training course with highly experienced instructors based at your airport for one fixed fee, guaranteed. It sounds almost too good to be true so I'll repeat it: Ten days. Your airport. Highly experienced instructors. Fixed cost. Guaranteed.

Ten Days

Tony Montalte, president of AFIT, points out distinct advantages to completing the course in ten days. Most of his clients cannot afford to string out their training over the course of months. His clients

are, for the most part, successful professionals who cannot predict what their availability will be from month to month. They are decisive people who want to commit then get it done. A ten day package is ideal for them.

Also, as traditionally trained private pilots know, only the very first lesson is complete progress. The following lessons need to begin with a refresh of where the last training session left off. Instrument flight is complex and rust can quickly grow on newly-acquired skills. If the last lesson was two weeks ago, much more review is needed than if the last lesson was only a week ago. If the lesson was just yesterday, though, very little refreshing needs to be done. As one AFIT instructor said, "With us, clients don't regress, they PRO-gress. The training is always moving forward and building on what was just learned."

Your Airport

There are other flight schools offering accelerated courses but training is done at their location, in their aircraft. With AFIT, an instructor comes to you. You can fly right out of your own airport no matter

where you live. You are trained in your home environment and most importantly, in your own aircraft. That is powerful since, in most cases, your flights will start or end at home.

Since many of AFIT's students are working professionals, the eight to ten hour training day can begin at whatever time the client chooses. If a he is a morning talk show host, for example, training can begin after noon and run until early evening.

Alternatively, a client may choose to have the training done away from home for a myriad of reasons. AFIT can accommodate that as well. One client of theirs needed a check out in a Saratoga he just bought and also wanted his instrument rating. The instructor met the client in Virginia to pick up the plane. The two of them flew the Saratoga from Virginia to the client's home in California, accomplishing the check out and the training enroute. It was a satisfying, memorable experience for both of them.

Experienced Instructors

The exceptional instructors are the key to success at Accelerated Flight Instrument Training. Each of the forty six CFII's are hand selected by Tony Montalte, the president of the company. He boasts, "You won't find better instructors anywhere. We have the best of the best."

Every instructor has a minimum of 8,000 hours in their logbooks, along with decades of flying experience. Interestingly, none of these instructors are retired airline pilots. They gained their experience hour by hour in small planes. A general aviation pilot can find him- or herself in some wonderfully interesting situations that airline pilots never see. I doubt you can argue the wisdom gained with more than 8,000 hours under a pilot's belt.

All AFIT instructors are over age 55. They are stable and mature. They are teaching because they love to, not to build hours for a better job.

The instructors are scattered all over the country and have rich, diverse backgrounds. One of them, John, taught author Stephen Coonts to fly a Stearman. He cautioned his student that if he didn't pay close attention every moment the engine was running, the plane would bite him in the rear end. Sure enough, before training was finished, Mr. Coonts got "bit" when he let up during a crosswind landing. Mr. Coonts loved that plane and went on to write a best selling book about it titled, "Cannibal Queen." When John isn't teaching, he's flying a Cessna Turbo 210 at flight level 260 doing atmospheric research for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Course/Cost

Instrument training is the core business of Accelerated Flight Instrument Training but they also work with students for their private pilot license, and commercial and multi-engine ratings also. They frequently fly with men and women who just bought an airplane and need a check out to meet insurance requirements. Recurrent, transition and glass cockpit training is done as well.

The instrument course has a flat fee of \$595 a day and is completed in ten concurrent days. It begins with four or five days of cross country flying to establish the primary concepts of instrument flight as well as allow the instructor and student to become acquainted while accomplishing the required cross country training component. The rest of the time is spent on approaches and prepping for the oral. If training is completed in less than ten days, the client pays only for the days used.

If the fees seem steep to you, consider the way instructor John looks at it. What is the hourly cost of your single engine plane? What is the hourly price of your instructor? Instruction costs a fraction of the plane's hourly expense but it is much more valuable and enduring. Still, we pay more for an airplane each hour than we pay for instruction that will last a lifetime. Think about it. Invest wisely in both.

Success

The men and women at Accelerated Flight Instrument Training are dedicated to their client's success. Their goal is to leave the student confident and competent to fly in instrument conditions. They will fly in actual instrument conditions whenever it is possible during their training. Bill, another instructor, had Mike Corcoran, doctor for the Chicago Bears, as a student who presented a double challenge. Mr. Corcoran had a Garmin 1000 glass cockpit panel installed on his plane. He had absolutely no experience with it but wanted to use it get his instrument rating. Bill said, "He worked really, really hard. He really wanted it." In

ten days, the doctor made a successful transition to the glass cockpit and passed his instrument check ride.

While the course is guaranteed, it does not mean an instrument rating is assured. "I'm just the instructor," said Bill. "The student is the one who gets the rating." AFIT will stick with a client until he/she is qualified. The company pass rate is 98%. But, sadly, there have been one or two clients who believed they could "buy" their ticket without investing themselves in learning. "It doesn't work that way," Tony said. Those relationships never got off the ground. "Safety is the foundation of what we do."

The vast majority of clients are motivated and hard working. They are focused on completing the course so they can have more freedom in their flying, whether it is for business or pleasure. People come from around the world for the AFIT experience and are enthusiastic about the results. They send gushing letters, expressing their appreciation for patient instructors, the tremendous knowledge and skills they gained, and the real-world experiences they had. As one student wrote, "I learned more in the last ten days than I did in ten years!" AFIT's website is chock full of testimonial letters from business owners, surgeons, attorneys, executives, professional sports players, all who have taken the time to say "Thank you!" in no uncertain terms.

For more information about Accelerated Flight Instrument Training, explore their website at www.afil-info.com. You can contact the good people there by calling (866) 270-8224 or sending an e-mail to afil@cox.net.

There are several ways to get your instrument ticket. In a perfect world, how would you do it? →

Karen Workman is an instrument rated private pilot living in Minnesota with her husband who is also a pilot.



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