

by Karl Storjohann  
CFA Member



# Some Flying is Different

*(Editor's Note: While Flyer does not condone some of the actions recounted in this article, they do acknowledge that virtually every pilot will end up in a situation which may require extraordinary actions, and these actions may not adhere strictly to the letter of the FARs. These anecdotes stress the importance of knowing one's own—and one's airplane's—capabilities and limits.)*

Approaching the ranch, I start looking for a likely landing spot. On the second circle, I spot what looks to be a fairly smooth and long enough patch, free of power lines. I bring around the 180 hp Cessna 175 into the wind and drop to about 10 feet above the surface to drag the likely spot. I look closely for any serious unevenness, holes and deep cow trails. I note the identifying features so I can remember the same path on the next round.

I've done this many times to find the smoothest possible landing site. I can always find a good enough landing site to put down on, using power to fly over unsatisfactory ground, chopping power when I arrive at the smooth ground, then applying full brakes to lessen the chance of rolling into rough terrain. Part of my preflight is to check the brakes.

You, too, should be capable of controlling your plane in slow flight and spot landings before trying any of these methods I'm about to describe. You will probably be hard-pressed to find an instructor who can teach you any of these methods, though. This article explains the ways I've flown conventional gear most days for the past 40 years. I have made more than 2,000 off-airport landings.

I am not an instructor, just an everyday pilot who has not had

a fatal accident. (Never had a ground loop in some 6,000 hours on conventional gear, either.) However, do not try these maneuvers just because I have been successful when using them. This information is for entertainment only.

Ranchers regularly land on terrain that has never been a landing strip. They often do so to check windmills, livestock, fences or whatever, and I did so to make calls on my rancher clients. What I discovered is that there are "wind socks" everywhere. Windmills are the best wind socks, since they show wind direction even when they're shut off. Ponds will show wind direction by their ripples, or waves—the smooth water next to the bank is on the upwind side. This awareness of wind direction is with you all the time as you fly along. Clothes hanging on a line and dust from a tractor working are two other ways to determine wind direction. The direction that cattle face means absolutely nothing unless it's a full-scale blizzard—and then you wouldn't be able to see them. Those of you who may be concerned that someday you might have to make an emergency landing, take note of the items that you fly over that tell wind direction.

We sometimes land on private roads. Just remember, the power poles need to be on the other side of the fence. Look for the poles, since you will not see the wires. Remember, from the air you can look both ways, and in ranch country, most private roads are not well-traveled. They are usually the ranchers' drive-ways. Landing on a private road is a test of how good your directional control is, since these roads are typically only 12 feet wide. Do not land on state or federal highways unless it is an emergency, or you might have to stay after school.



Pg 24: AOA still high on approach. AOA starting to flare. AOA only a few feet above. Below: Karl with rancher Reuben Quinn in South Dakota.



From 1972 to 2003, a normal day for me went like this: take off from my strip in the morning, land at five or six different ranches in western South Dakota, western Nebraska, or eastern Wyoming, check the cattle, visit with the ranchers, and return home in the evening.

I learned early on that just before noon, it was a good idea to pick the best cookhouse and stop there. (The cattle on ranches with good cooks get looked at more often.) Just make sure to show up before dinnertime so the cook can set an extra place at the table. "We eat at six, twelve and six," the cook at Fawn Lake Ranch told me. "You be 15 minutes early."

One particularly good cook (and the wife of the ranch manager) said every time she heard an airplane low and close around 11:00 a.m., she figured it was me coming to eat. I couldn't fool her by being an hour early and just happen to stay around 'til noon.

First thing after landing, stick your head in the kitchen to say howdy. The best cookhouse in all the Nebraska Sand Hills was at the Muleshoe Bar Ranch when Leonard Petersen was still alive. Every noon meal was like Thanksgiving. These big ranches with



Landing at the Quinn Ranch in South Dakota.

cookhouses are getting rare, as the larger ranches that maintained cookhouses for the single cowboys are being bought up by bigger commercial concerns.

Every one of my takeoffs is max performance. Simply because this is required a lot of the time, I practice even when it is not required. You need to know how much room you need for every trip and every temperature. In a Cessna 170 or taildragging 175, when the horizontal stabilizer will fly, the whole plane will fly. With 180 horses, just pop full flaps, level in ground effect, and milk the flaps up—and away you go.

Every landing pattern is close in, power off when opposite the landing spot. This is so that you will always know where you will touch down in an engine failure situation. In the Idaho backcountry you can't do this because you can't see the strip, so fly at, or slightly above, minimum controllable airspeed with some power.

Nowadays, I fly with the AOA with power to the ground. I use full brakes immediately after landing, since I never know what hazards are hidden in the grass in an off-airport landing.

(This habit gets me in trouble in Idaho, because the runways are uphill.) Of course, you drag the strip. This is done at 10 feet or so to get a look at the lay of the land. Too rough? Go around and find another likely spot. When you have picked out the best site, make a mental note of it: *touch down just past the bend in the cow trail on the right side*. This way you can find the spot again. Minor corrections can be made before touching down.

Can you do this in a trike? NO, YOU CANNOT. Don't even try it. Dips that a tailwheel does not even notice will get the prop on a trike. The nose gear on a trike is not strong enough to survive holes in the ground. Also, getting on the brakes shoves the nose to the ground, taking weight off the main gear, thus, you'll have no effective brakes. If you go through a dip, there she goes.

In 1985, I purchased a Cessna 175 with 180 hp that was still a trike. My first trip was to call on the Pitchfork Ranch, north of Hyannis, Neb.—and site of the great cook mentioned above. I thought it was a smooth place to land after many landings in my 170B. Wrong! There were dips I never noticed on the conventional gear, and the brakes were worthless as they put the weight



Sulphur Creek Ranch Idaho.

on the nose gear. My next flight was to Jerry Burnham, A&P IA in Sturgis, S. D, to get the 175 converted to tailwheel.

I learned most of what has kept me alive from Russ Zanger in Larchwood, Iowa. In 1966 Russ prepared me for me my commercial. He had just two lights on his runway—one on each end. Worked great; but then again, he had an oil strip, which was easier to see and align with. It was from Russ that I learned how to safely land in a very strong crosswind and not lose it. His approach was this: "How fast are you going when you wheel it on, no flaps, in a cross control situation?" (About 65 or more.) Then, "how fast are you going with full flaps, and full stall landing, kicking it straight at the moment of landing?" (About 50.) Finally, he asked, "would you rather have a wreck at 65 or 50?" (Point taken!)

I do not make wheel landings. I just never found it to be necessary. If you think about it, a wheel landing in wind exposes the airplane to danger at a higher speed. It's the transition to three-point and slower speed that puts you too long in harm's way. (But you sure have rudder control all the way to



Just finished dragging the pasture looking for bad spots.

the location of the wreck.)

I don't need rudder control after I'm on the ground. The brakes take care of directional control for the few seconds after touchdown. I lay a lot of rubber sometimes. Always, full flaps in a crab, rudder it straight in the flair, aileron to cancel the wind, three point, keep full aileron into the wind, dump the flaps and then brake hard to very slow speed.. This way, you're exposed to danger for a very limited time. Or better yet, land more nearly into the wind by flying parallel to the runway, on the downwind side, then bank into the wind at the moment of touchdown and

land across the runway, thus cutting down the wind angle (You may say to yourself, "Man this is the shortest runway I have ever seen, but boy, is it wide!") Plan this landing at a taxiway entrance, and then taxi very slow, with control surfaces positioned to prevent the wind from getting under the tail (elevator down, with wind from the rear) or under the wings. Always think "I want the wind to apply down pressure on the wing," then position the aileron accordingly.

These words should generate a lot of discussion—but you can't argue with my success with these methods and I've flown

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Approach for landing at Quinn Ranch.

a lot, wind or no wind, over a long period of time. However, my gross weight is 1,800 pounds. Flying is very different at full gross in a larger plane.

In 40 to 50 mph or higher winds, do whatever is necessary to stop over tie downs without turning. Your explanation to whoever jumps you is, "the safety of my plane and passengers required that action."

Many years ago, I had to do just that landing at Chamberlain, S. D., in a modified 170B with no one around. I lit over the tie downs, (but went slightly beyond), let the wind blow me back over them, and steered with the brakes. Let's see, I said to myself, how much power does it take to keep this thing setting here in 50 mph wind? I set the brakes, jumped out, tied one wing, jumped back in and reorganized; jumped back out and got the other wing secured (remember the prop is turning!), cut the power—then went home and changed pants.

It takes a lot of power to keep the plane from being pushed back, even with the brakes set. I learned a lot of this while still a student and while flying back from Montana in a Piper Tri-Pacer, trying to land at Mitchell, S. D., in really strong winds. I made the decision to land into the wind on a runway really far from the FBO. They had to walk me in, holding on to the struts to keep me from blowing away. Many times my helpers were lifted off the ground, but they continued to hold on. They asked me, "Why didn't you just land on the ramp into the wind? There is at least 600 feet. You'll only need 50!"

In 40 to 50 mph winds, you cannot turn around on the runway to taxi back. Once in winds over 50 mph, I had to land into the lee of a haystack simply to stay on the ground. Spoilers would've been nice. I just sat there and waited for the

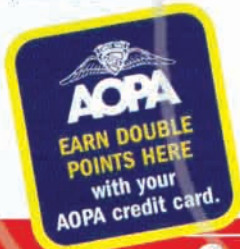
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wind to go down. (Always carry reading material.)

Here's another little story from back when. Coming home from Oklahoma City in my 170 after attending the National Finals Rodeo, the throttle linkage came off the carburetor on takeoff from a late-night fuel stop at North Platte, Neb. Taking off north, I headed over



Lower in approach for landing at Quinn Ranch.

the Sand Hills where there are very few lights on the ground. This does things to your head, so I had to circle the town to get my head straight, then head on north.

Flying high and dumb, I didn't realize I had a problem until I got to Sturgis. When I pulled back on the black knob, it did absolutely nothing—so I pulled the red knob (mixture) and got the reduction of sound I desired. As a matter of fact, the sound went away completely. Here is where practicing power-off landings really pays off. The throttle goes to wide open if it becomes unattached.

Now that I've gotten you all killed, it's time for me to sign off. Let the arguments begin. Aren't you glad you stayed in school so you could read this?

*(Ed. note: Next month we'll show you just what modifications Karl made to his plane to get this kind of performance out of it.)*

*Karl Storjohann is a livestock nutritionist now retired, who lives in the pines South of Chadron, NE. He peddled feed to gullible ranchers and used his plane to get their attention, and so he could get back to town in time for happy hour. He called on large ranches in Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. He holds a Commercial License with over 6,000 hours.*

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