“What does it take to be a “Professional”?

By John Morris

A few months ago I had a discussion with some individuals regarding purchasing one or more PC12’s for a Part 135 endeavor. The principle investor is not a pilot but had done extensive study regarding the type of aircraft to use for this possible enterprise. He had narrowed his choices down to the PC12 and the Hawker Beechcraft B-300 (350). His choice of the B-300 was, in no small part, due to its safety record. He felt that the reason the B-300 had a near perfect safety record was due to manufacturing design that did not fail, etc. To be fair (and not the least bit partial) my first response was that the comparisons between the PC12 and the B-300 are quite different, and that the B-200 would be the “better” comparison, since others and myself generally equate the PC12 as the single-engine B-200. So with just basic information regarding the B-300, I informed him that it is not only the design, per se, that contributes to its safety record, but the required two pilots, due to the higher (than the B-200 family) gross weight/seating and the usual type of operation with this larger twin turboprop.

What I should have additionally said was that since the B-300/350 weighs more than 12,500 lbs, the pilot will be required to have a type rating for the aircraft (the B-300 family is for the most part approved for single-pilot operations). Getting a type rating in any aircraft increases the amount of training, with the inclusion of actually having a checkride in the aircraft or approved simulator to FAA completion standards versus non-type rated aircraft completion standards set by the insurance-approved training source. This requirement alone generally tends to increase the overall flying competency for the remainder of the pilot’s time in this type of aircraft. I do not know for certain but I believe that the vast majority of B-300 aircraft flying in the US are flown with two pilots (insurance requirement-not FAA). Two-pilot “professional” crews in a Part 135 or equivalent operation usually equate to a safer flight environment, but from a business point-of-view, can be an obstacle to a profitable Part 135 operation. Of course, this is not to say that two pilots are the only way to operate complex turbine aircraft since the B-300, PC12 and many other turbines do not require two pilots. But when in doubt two is better!

As I was preparing to write the Summer 2012 article for POPA, I read an article on-line from NBAA Update titled “Key Jet and Turboprop Segments Report Zero Fatalities in First Half of 2012”. Quoting one of the paragraphs from the article, "It is important to note that turboprops operated by U.S. companies with paid flight crews experienced no accidents during

the recent period, a truly commendable achievement,"[1]. I found it interesting that the phraseology “paid flight crews” was used in this article twice, instead of “professional”. Is this because the term “professional” is too strong? Political correctness? What does it take to be a “professional”? Webster’s dictionary defines Professional as: “have engaged in a profession or specified occupation for pay: Profession - an occupation requiring advanced academic training, as medicine, law, etc”.

I have to admit that many times I have felt that calling myself a “professional” might be a stretch, as it pertains to flight competency only, since I am not flying 70 – 90 hours a month, as most full-time Part 121 and scheduled Part 135 pilots are. I am, however, flying monthly as an instructor-pilot and contractor, to a better than satisfactory level (FAA speak but to me the “stretch). Otherwise, I *am* a professional since this is my full-time profession and I continually teach/seek academic training to maintain my status as a professional.

Does this mean that the only way to obtain professional status is to continue advanced academic training and be paid for it? No. For the aviation world anyway “professional” should be at a minimum, a state of mind. Besides, isn’t every owner/operator of the PC12 “paid”? Isn’t maintaining the aircraft a form of payment with the payoff being the availability and performance of the aircraft when needed? After your Initial training, aren’t you then required to receive annual recurrent (academic/flight) training? So the only motivational difference between a “paid” flight crewmember and a professionally minded pilot is actually receiving [monetary] compensation? It shouldn’t be! Where I do see the greatest difference between the “pros” and the average owner/operator is what I have written about regarding flight competency, currency and myself. Since the FAA only requires (Part 91) the minimum 3 takeoffs/landings every 90 days and instrument competency at 6/12 months, the owner/operator can easily be legal but how “professional” are he/she?

A chart has been included for this article showing the average hours flown annually for the aircraft in this discussion, and whether 1 or 2 pilots were crewing the aircraft involved in fatal accidents. The majority of the owner/operators that I have worked with over the years average less that half of the average hours shown for the PC12. That does not equate to many flight segments or takeoffs/landings per month but it is what it is-normal (Part 91) operations.

[1] NBAA Update-July 23, 2012(www.nbaa.org /news/update/2012/) article

What does it take to be “professional” when not flying for a Part 135 or equivalent operation? To maintain “professional” competency the owner/operator can seek academic materials such as publications from the FAA, AOPA Air Safety Foundation and others to help sustain an advanced level. The flight segment portion is always the larger problem due to cost/time. The first recommendation I have given for nearly all my instructional career to ALL owner/operators, singles or twins, is that if they are only flying 100-125 hours a year they should seek recurrent training twice a year. If you look at the cost of attempting to actually fly/schedule on your own versus setting up the training, either in-aircraft or via FTD, there is no comparison/compromise for safety. Plus, if this path is chosen, you should reap a benefit from your insurer due to the extra diligence, which can offset the additional expense. If that is not an option, then seek out a CFI, preferably one familiar with the PC12, to occasionally fly with you to evaluate and/or educate. Also, be professional by using the Part 135 standards for flight operations with one large caveat – YOU DO NOT HAVE TO GO. If conditions - whether personal, weather-related or whatever - do not seem right, change your plans.

Whichever method you choose, being a “professional” can be as simple as electing not to go when the weather is not good, to additional continuing education/training. Be smart, be safe - then you are a professional.

“A safe pilot is always learning”

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ACFT Services provides training ONLY for all PC12’s, no other aircraft.

Aircraft type	Total Built: Approx to date / production end	Currently Registered In USA	Annual hours Flown (1)	Fatal (USA) Accidents - 1 Pilot -since 1995 (2)	Fatal (USA) Accidents - 2 Pilots -since 1995 (2)
B-350 (300)	**850 +**	**481**	**314**	1	0
B-300 / LW	**231 + / 1994**		**300**		
B-250	**20 +**	**684**	**370**	1	2
B-200/GT	**637 +**		**370**		
B-200	**1501 / 1994**		**380**		
PC12 (all)	**1140 +**	**701**	**410**	6	1

(1) Aircraft Bluebook Summer 2012
(2) NTSB Database – final reports / airborne related