



# Becoming a High Time Pilot

by Harry Kraemer

**E**d Long is recognized as the world's highest time pilot (65,000 hours). Ed started flying in 1933 at the age of 17 and spent most of his flying career as a powerline patrol pilot. Ed passed Max Conrad's record (nearly 53,000 hours) in 1989 and continued flying his *Super Cub* up to his final hospitalization. Ed passed away in July 1999. Max Conrad is considered as one of the greatest pilots who had ever lived. Max spent most of his career flying light general aviation airplanes. Max has been described as the foremost pilot of light planes in the world. Max's resume looks like a page from the Guinness Book of World Records (with many firsts and records on it). Evelyn Bryan Johnson was featured in *Aviation for Women* stating that she has 56,600 hours logged. All of these pilots have something in common, they have all enjoyed a long and rewarding aviation career, and all three have logged over 50,000 flight hours.

What does it take to become a 50,000-hour pilot? Remember the old aviation saying, "There are old pilots

and bold pilots, but there are no old bold pilots". This is very true! Develop personal weather minimums and stick with them. Do not let others influence your decision (if you are not comfortable with the weather or aircraft). Know your own limitations.

Every career minded pilot wants to step up to bigger, faster, and more complex planes. This is fine, however taking giant leaps early on in your career has proven to be disastrous for some unwary pilots. Stepping up is okay if you take your own size steps. The trouble starts when you take steps that are too big for you or that were meant for someone else. Flying careers, like everything else we build, need a good foundation. Start with a good foundation! Just like Ed, Max, and Evelyn you will be rewarded with thousands of hours of enjoyable flying. Maybe you will even pass the 50K total!

Moving from a single engine land complex airplane to a light twin (especially of the same make), is a nice and logical progression. This is a good move because manufacturers tend to

carry over many of the same systems and the cockpit layout is very similar. The next move I would consider would be moving up to a cabin class pressurized single or twin. If any of the manufacturers offer factory training, it would be a wise choice to attend. This is a plus with insurance companies (it also looks good on the resume). Earning a flight instructor certificate is a good way to build a good foundation. There is no better way to learn something (inside and out), than by teaching it. The local flight schools usually have single engine complex planes, as well as light twins, which an instructor can teach in. Your next step, after sharpening your skills, could be with a small charter operator or corporation with a cabin class and/or pressurized single or light twin.

I highly recommend (for you career minded pilots) to stay proficient on your instrument skills. You can do this in a single engine. The key is to stay sharp on procedures and your basic attitude instrument flying. You can be current and not proficient. Remember the FAR just dictate the minimum to be current. If an airline flying position is







your goal, one way to get on the inside with a low amount of flight time is through a flight attendant position. This is also a good way to adjust to the hours and life style of airline flying without the responsibility of a pilot position.

Let us take a look at two pilots and their career progression. One pilot's careers came to an abrupt stop, while the second went on to have logged tens of thousands of accident free hours. The pilot that logged the tens of thousands of hours climbed the ladder one step at a time, while the one who's career ended short, tried to skip a few steps here and there.

Our first pilot who's flying career ended early, started with an aircraft sales and service company. His duties consisted of office work and flying (a Cessna 172). The flying was taking pilots home after they have dropped their aircraft off for maintenance (he also picked them up when their plane was finished). However, he was eager to fly some heavy metal, now! For the most part, his flying was nine to five and VFR. An opportunity came for him to skip a few steps and start flying a *Baron* (single pilot) for a Part 135-charter company. He soon found himself flying in all weather at all hours of the day and night. It was late one night (or early one morning) when his flying career came to a crashing halt. It was shortly after departure from a relatively small airport. The airplane performance wasn't what he had expected. This caught him by surprise and due to his lack of experience (he had more plane and problems

than he could handle), and he soon found himself in a field (exact circumstances unknown). There was no mechanical problems found with the aircraft. With only minor injuries, this shook him up enough that he gave up flying as a career. Be aware when climbing your career ladder, opportunities for quick advance may not always be worth going after.

XYZ Charter Company has a set progression for their charter pilots. The minimum for hire is 1,000 hours for a co-pilot on a *Baron*. After accumulating several hundred hours of second in command (SIC) time in the *Baron* and getting your ATP, you are then prepped for your PIC check ride. Your next step is to the right seat of the *King Air* and on to the left seat. And so on. You can see the logical progression.

Let us examine the steps that a retired airline captain took. This captain

retired with 23,000 flight hours and eight type ratings. He started his airline career as a flight attendant. He soon progressed to the right seat of a DC-3 after earning his ratings and accumulating just over six hundred flight hours. A flight engineer position on a *Constellation* was his next step. Next he was in the left seat of a DC-3 as a captain and then in the right seat of a DC-4. Our captain's next three steps up the ladder were all captain positions, the DC-6, DC-7, and the Viscount in that order. Two Boeing aircraft were the next steps up the ladder again as captain positions in the 737 and he retired as a captain in the 727.

As you climb the aviation career ladder, put the ladder on a good foundation and touch every step on your way to the top. Flying is a very rewarding career, whether you choose corporate, airline, or flight instructing.

