

SAFETY CORNER

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When we think of safety training, we think of techniques and procedures and the like. But there is an element of safe flying that can best be summed up as a combination of good manners and common sense. Derek Johnson gives a quick course in some soaring "etiquette" that could just save your sailplane, and you.

—RG

GOOD MANNERS AND SOARING SAFETY

Some pilots learn to fly gliders, or convert from power flying, but teach themselves to soar. The result can be that they don't learn how to behave around other soaring sailplanes.

Rules for Ridge Soaring

•Rule one: "Keep a good look out at all times," but looking out is not enough. We must not only see the other aircraft, but we must also avoid endangering ourselves, other aircraft, and their crews.

When soaring on a ridge we will often get close to others, but if we obey the rules, this is quite safe.

•Rule two: "Don't fly *under, over, or across the front* of another aircraft."

•Rule three: "Aircraft meeting head-on while flying on the ridge, the aircraft with the valley on his right should turn right, and the aircraft with the ridge on its right should hold

heading." Think for a moment why this is. Someone must give way and the normal rules of the air say that aircraft meeting head-on "both aircraft should turn right," but if the aircraft with the ridge on his right turns right he can either fly into the ridge, if below the ridge top, or fly into the curl-over downwind of the escarpment. Neither is good.

I have been soaring a ridge, and have had head-on traffic that had the ridge on its left reverse the beat to stay away from me. This is very dangerous as the other aircraft then turned left into my flight path, and we were closing fast.

•Rule four: "All turns on the ridge must be made away from the ridge." This is to prevent turning into the ridge or drifting into the downdraft behind the ridge.

•Rule five: "Never overtake on the valley side." If you think about it, the pilot of the aircraft ahead probably can't see you, and may be just about to reverse the beat (see rule four). The result could be disastrous. So don't overtake on the valley side or reverse the beat by turning towards the ridge. The normal rule of overtaking by altering course to the right is suspended when flying on the ridge. If you must overtake *don't go under, or over, or on the valley side* of the aircraft you are planning on overtaking.

Rules for Thermal Soaring

•Rule one: "Keep a good look out at all times.

•Rule two: When thermal soaring, and "joining other soaring aircraft in a thermal, you must fly with caution, but for goodness sake *do* join the circle,

and not start one of your own somewhere nearby."

•Rule three: "Never change the direction of the turn in a thermal," even if you "think" you are the only aircraft in that thermal.

•Rule four: "Always turn the same way as other aircraft already in the thermal regardless of height difference." You may be two thousand feet apart, but which way will aircraft three, four and five turn if they join the thermal between you?

When joining other aircraft in the lift, don't try to beat them out at all costs. If you can't safely join them at the same height, lose some altitude and come in at a lower level.

When in the thermal don't cut across the front of other aircraft. You might want to turn tighter than "the other fool," but don't do it. If you don't like the rate of turn he is using go and find another thermal, and then talk to the pilot later on the ground about perhaps turning tighter in the lift.

When established in the lift with other aircraft the 'vario' becomes less important than it was when you were alone. You must watch the other aircraft, and when you do you will see which area is going up best by the relative climb and sink of the other sailplanes. Don't make harsh changes, but try to gently persuade the other pilots to alter the circle. If you are closing with other aircraft in the circle, slightly widen the turn, to keep the other ships where you can see them. Remember, if it develops into a dogfight, leave. Don't become a statistic.

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JUNE 17-21, 1986
LAWRENCEVILLE, ILLINOIS

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