



The Gift of the Go-Around

A second try can salvage an out-of-shape approach

I WAS HIGH ON the approach, and hot. Trees were encroaching on the near end of the runway. They had grown a lot since the last time I'd dropped in here, maybe three years before, and now they had much more potential for grabbing a wingtip. And the private grass strip that called itself a runway beyond the trees seemed smaller, too. (Not that I'm complaining. Bless all those who have grass strips.)

With the airspeed at about 55 mph, well above the normal of 40 or a little more for final approach in the Quicksilver GT-400, I knew I could lose the altitude without gaining any airspeed by cranking in a serious amount of cross-controlled aileron and rudder and by lowering an unusual three notches of flaps, and so manage to get the airplane on the runway somewhat before the far end. Given that the brakes were working fine just a little while ago, the airplane would probably get stopped before the far end. Or maybe not.

In almost three decades of flying I've had way more than my share of go-arounds, but this one has stood out in my memory for some reason. Maybe it's because it was right on the cusp, so to speak, between "It can be done" and "But only by an idiot." The landing could have been made, but a go-around made vastly more sense.

Nothing in life is absolutely free (well, maybe gravity), but the go-around comes close. It's a kind of get-out-of-jail-free card for any approach that cannot or should not be continued. And all it costs, in most circumstances, is a little extra time. Admittedly, that could amount to a few dollars in a rental aircraft, but cheaping out is always a bad idea in the air.

The go-around is a gift, and one that should be graciously accepted most of the time. We should not be reluctant to use it when it's called for. In fact, I'm guessing that

any hesitation we feel is composed of either a reluctance to admit we've fumbled the ball so badly that we have to go back and start over or that we can't fix any situation with our masterful, Bob Hoover-like piloting skills.

THE WHEN-TO OF IT ALL

This article is not intended for instrument pilots, who have certain rules, practices, and missed-approach procedures. It is aimed at light-flier types, day VFR pilots in basic aircraft. Let's name three broad reasons for a go-around:

Being too far out of shape on the approach. That often means excessive altitude, since being too low merely calls for adding enough power to get back up to the proper glide slope. Being above the glide slope by a moderate amount can usually be cured just by reducing power and raising the nose, in most designs, and rarely calls for a go-around, unless you're also too fast. The combination of high and hot can mean that a go-around would be better than trying to shoehorn it onto the runway, especially if the runway is short.

On occasion, a pilot might somehow be forced to choose between flying so slowly on an approach that there's a risk of stalling, or flying at a greater airspeed with a consequent risk of landing long and rolling off the far end of the runway. I would always choose the second option, if those were the only choices, but why choose either if a go-around is available?

Sometimes a pilot may not be lined up very well with the extended runway centerline, which happens after a too-late turn from base to final. If you're far enough out of line, a go-around might be just the thing.

Something on the runway. Typically that "something" is another aircraft, but it also could be a deer or other animal, objects, and even people. On one occasion, a friend had snow-plowed a 3,000-foot runway on a frozen lake near his home. As I approached for a landing, I realized the runway was being used by occasional snowmobilers as a racetrack. It took three low passes to communicate to them that an airplane wanted to land there. They finally understood and vacated the strip. (The first pass technically qualified as a go-around; the next two were just low passes.)

The just-before-touchdown event. This is a catchall category, but stuff happens during landings: a sudden wind gust from the side that pushes you over the weeds; an airplane taxiing onto the runway in front of you; a pothole you hadn't seen before; a bounced landing with the bounce so high and so far down the runway that a go-around is the best way to save the landing—anything, in other words, that interferes with the landing at the last minute.

THE HOW-TO OF IT ALL

Different aircraft have different go-around procedures, and in every case the pilot's operating handbook (POH) is the ultimate authority, if your aircraft has one. But a few generalizations can be safely made:

- A go-around that's initiated high, as in the example that started this article, is different from one initiated just short of touchdown. A high go-around is usually a piece of cake, because you're already in something like a cruise configuration rather than a landing configuration. Add power, retract flaps to whatever setting gives more lift than drag, anticipate whatever nose-up or nose-down trim change comes with retracting flaps, raise the nose, and announce what you're doing if you have a radio.
- The go-around that begins during short final, or just above the runway, demands more skill and knowledge,

POH. For example, some airplanes will lose lift abruptly when flaps are retracted. I once unintentionally put an instructor in a tight corner when he told me, just before touchdown, to turn the landing into a go-around. It was during my early flight training, and we were in a Cessna I wasn't accustomed to. The flap handle was different, and raising it caused the flaps to retract all the way, rather than the step-by-step progression with which I was familiar. I advanced the throttle to full power and snapped the flap handle up. The flaps began to retract fully. "I've got it!" he said, and finessed the airplane into staying airborne while we recovered sufficient airspeed just above the runway to enter a climb.

The rule of thumb for go-arounds is that a decent airspeed and a positive rate of climb must be established before doing anything else, such as dealing with flaps, gear, trim, mixture, carb heat, prop pitch, or announcing

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although it can be viewed as a form of takeoff. Going to full or takeoff power is almost always called for and, obviously, so is raising the nose to whatever deck angle is best for climbing while maintaining flying speed. A possible pitfall occurs when an airplane has been trimmed in pitch to maintain neutral stick pressure during final approach. In this condition, there might be excessive nose-up pitch when applying power for the go-around. Follow the book.

Other aircraft may be in the vicinity. It makes sense to look for traffic when making a go-around, as well as announcing what you're doing, if you have a radio.

Aircraft differ from each other in many ways—flaps or no flaps, retractable landing gear or fixed, carburetor heat, propeller pitch control, and so on. It's vital to know the particular airplane you're flying and to follow the

your intentions on the radio. However, follow your airplane's POH.

I strongly advocate practicing go-arounds. It's like exercising a muscle: The more it's used, the stronger it will be when called into play. In the example that began this article, I went around and, on a second try, brought my GT-400 in just over the trees and at a fairly steep angle got it on the runway with a fair amount of room left, and had no need to use brakes.

If getting an aircraft on the ground from any given approach means using heroic measures, then a go-around may be the most prudent action. **EAM**

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