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Seen Anything New Lately?

What's Really Out There in Airport-land

I almost failed my driving test at the tender age of seventeen. It wasn't because of parallel parking. I demonstrated my three-point turn at a rather brisk speed and used only one finger on the steering wheel.

It seems I scared the examiner.

On the other hand, my first ten hours of flight lessons were filled with terror. Although I had taken a formal ground school at our local college, I didn't believe any of the theory about lift holding me up. I truly expected to fall from the sky like a ripe pumpkin at any moment.

Consequently, my pre flight planning was more about getting my emotions under control than about preparation. I did the taxiing and my instructor directed me, navigating safely from tie down to takeoff.

The written test was passed and there were usually no difficulties when taxiing. I assumed I knew airport signs and markings.

In truth, my knowledge vague and incomplete

As a beginning student, taxiways looked and felt familiar and benign.

The sensations of automobile riding or driving permeate our everyday experience. When first learning to fly, there is bleed-over from our car experiences. This transfer of attitudes and skills developed around driving an auto can help us. It can also put us in harm's way.

As with airports, highway systems are organized with standard signs and markings. For instance, red signs mean stop. Roadways and airports use white or yellow lines. Both systems take advantage of communicating information with solid, broken, double or single lines

Here's the rub, airport and highway marking are close, but they are not the same.

Maybe like me, during those first few lessons, you didn't focus on such details as runway markings and airport signage. I learned to get around on the ground passively, without really paying specific attention to signs. It just worked out for me so I felt safe

Unfortunately, embedded in my flying experiences was the incorrect notion that I really knew airport markings.

Are you certain that all taxiway centerlines are painted yellow and all runway centerlines are always white? Remember when runway hold lines used to be at the runway edge? Now they are farther from the runway centerline. They come sooner that you might expect when approaching a runway from a taxiway and they are more distant that would seem logical when exiting an runway.

It seems I scared the examiner.

I did pass my driving test that day a long time ago and I have been lucky enough to be free of runway incursions in my flying...so far.

Airport markings are not the same those we see daily on our highways. So, why not do something to maintain your good luck as well?

Consider refreshing your knowledge of airport signs. Open a current edition of the Aeronautical Information Manual. Turn to the pages with the bright colors and study the signs and markings. Then, when you fly in your own aircraft or commercially, find examples of each of the signs you reviewed.

You may be surprised at all you will see. 

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