



# 2009 SWEEPSTAKES

LAUNCH OF AN ALL-NEW SWEEPSTAKES

# The Unteacha



## Flying colors

Don't recognize the Let's Go Flying Cirrus SR22? The 2009 Sweepstakes airplane is sporting a new look. See its transformation, and get a glimpse of what sorts of future makeovers may be in store, on the Web site ([www.aopa.org/sweeps2009](http://www.aopa.org/sweeps2009))



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Two old guys,  
a young instructor,  
and a complex  
airplane

**By Dave Hirschman**

Cirrus factory instructor pilot Jesse Shookman had drawn an unenviable assignment.

The youthful University of Wisconsin engineering graduate was told to come to AOPA headquarters in Frederick, Maryland, on short notice and spend a week training two staff members to become Cirrus Standardized Instructor Program (CSIP) pilots.

Worse yet, one of them—J.J. Greenway, the AOPA Air Safety Foundation's chief instructor—is a former airline pilot (a flying fraternity not known for openness to new ideas). The other, me, is a writer (strike one) with most of his flying experience in mechanically simple aerobatic and tailwheel airplanes (strikes two and three). If Shookman was looking for a pair of futuristic, techno-savvy gadget

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROSE



The author (left) and instructor Jesse Shookman prepare for flight in the Cirrus SR22.

lovers—the Cirrus-owner stereotype—he couldn't have done much worse than us: a couple of crusty, set-in-their-ways, bald guys with full sets of deep-seated (and sometimes contradictory) aviation prejudices.

And frankly, Shookman raised my suspicions right away when he started thumb typing on his BlackBerry faster than I can pound away on a regular keyboard with all 10 digits. If his button-pushing prowess extended to the SR22's dual Garmin GNS 430Ws and Avidyne Entegra glass panel, we were in for some real trouble.

Shookman sat us down and began ground school with a PowerPoint presentation—another overused technology I've come to loathe. It was shaping up to be a trying week.

I was feeling pressure for the training to go well because of the key role the AOPA's 2009 Let's Go Flying Sweepstakes Cirrus SR22 is set to play in general aviation. Its timely and critical assignment is to highlight GA's excitement and utility by leading a broad outreach program that will both expand and reenergize the U.S. pilot population. Early in 2010, it will go to its lucky new owner.

AOPA will expose many opinion leaders and key decision makers to GA this year by putting them in the left seat of this modern, extraordinarily capable aircraft and letting them see and feel why we're so passionate about flying and the freedoms and possibilities it provides. That means AOPA staff members who get to display the airplane should be thoroughly prepared to teach from the right seat—and, for that, the CSIP program is the gold standard.

Greenway and I had dutifully done our homework before the CSIP course began, and it involved an extensive computerized home-study course and reading the

aircraft, GPS, primary flight display, multi-function display, and autopilot manuals.

Now, it was finally time to begin the 10-plus flight hour, 20-plus landing, aerial portion of the course. Each scenario-based lesson begins with a detailed flight plan and briefing. And each flight gets progressively more complex as the course moves from VFR to IFR trips that, like other aviation training, also include single and sometimes multiple-system failures.

The SR22 is similar in size, weight, engine, propeller, and flying characteristics to other GA aircraft Greenway and I had flown. But its electrical system, avionics,

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airframe parachute, single power lever, and side-stick controls were new to us.

The bright Avidyne MFD and PFD screens provide a dazzling, almost intoxicating, array of information to Cirrus pilots. Mastering the boxes can be challenging. And doing without them, if and when they go dark, can be bewildering—especially from the right seat where the viewing angle can make the screens (and standby gauges) hard to read, and the unseen circuit-breaker panel has to be felt as if by Braille.

### **Duluth in February?**

We had initially planned to complete our flight training at the Cirrus factory in Duluth, Minnesota, where we would

have access to a simulator and multiple staff instructors. But, not surprisingly for winter, the weather forecast for Lake Superior included days of snow, high winds, and ice. Cirrus kindly sent Shookman to us instead.

Greenway flew first, and we took advantage of clear and relatively warm weather in the Mid-Atlantic by flying three training missions a day for the first two days.

My first cockpit conflict with Shookman took place on our first cross-country leg. As I opened a book of approach plates to find the proper one for our destination, he told me to put the book away. “It's fine to have paper approach plates and charts with you,” he said. “But you've got to show



There's lots to learn about the Let's Go Flying Cirrus SR22 both outside and in. From the TKS anti-ice system, airframe parachute, electrical system, and avionics, the technologically advanced aircraft offers many new capabilities—including the option of leaving the approach plates on the ground and going paperless.

me you can access the information—and teach your students to access that information—electronically, first.”

My carefully marked book of approach plates got dumped in the backseat. I hunted and pecked on the MFD to find the proper electronic chart and started copying the frequencies, elevation, and other pertinent information onto a blank page on my kneeboard. “OK, your MFD just failed,” Shookman said, pushing the dimmer switch until the usually colorful screen went black. “Where else can you get that information?”

“From the book of approach plates you just tossed in the backseat,” I muttered.

Shookman sighed and, with a few lightning-fast twists and turns on the GNS

430, displayed the frequencies, runway information, and airport diagram on one of the boxes. Then, with a few more twists and pushes, he had loaded and activated the proper frequencies. I’m pretty adept at loading and editing flight plans on the 430—but teaching to the full capabilities of the Cirrus would require a much deeper understanding on my part.

“The 430s are the heart of the avionics system,” Shookman said. “Take the manual home tonight and reread it. You’ve got to know it cold.”

#### **Lands like an airplane**

There’s a Cirrus Service Center at Frederick, and it’s not uncommon to see aircraft parked there, and elsewhere, sans nose-

wheel fairings. SR22s suffer prop and tail strikes with disturbing regularity—and I was concerned to the point of paranoia about smacking the nose or tail during training.

I’d read everything I could find about the phenomenon, and there’s no shortage of theories about how to properly land a Cirrus. Some pilots advocate a flat approach designed to touch down on all three wheels. Others advise higher or lower approach speeds or different flap settings than the full-flap landings Cirrus recommends for all conditions.

Flying the SR22, however, it quickly becomes obvious that the Cirrus lands just like an airplane. There are no tricks,



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unless airspeed control, pitch stability, or directional control can be considered gimmicks. The side-stick control feels natural (although the G2's aileron/rudder linkage does not), visibility over the nose is outstanding, and the free-castering nosewheel is easy to control with rudder at touchdown.

I was surprised at how pleasant hand-flying the SR22 is—and how little hand-flying we actually did. Since technology is my most glaring weakness, Shookman wisely forced me to use the automation heavily. That often meant clicking the autopilot on as soon as we climbed to pattern altitude, and clicking it off at decision height on precision approaches. Charts, checklists, navigation, and emergency procedures also relied almost exclusively on the electronics. I never got terribly fast with the button pushing, but I made fewer mistakes as the week went along.

### Wind warning

We were ahead of schedule by midweek when the weather threatened to disrupt our plans. Skies were clear throughout the Mid-Atlantic, but a cold front brought a whipping west wind with gusts reaching 50 knots.

It was my turn to fly on the morning the windsock stood straight out at 8

o'clock, and the flags at AOPA snapped in the freshening breeze. I gave Shookman the option of staying on the ground, but he said he was still game. By the end of the day, he'd flown five hours in the sharp, jolting turbulence that made us believers in the strength of the SR22's composite spars.

Greenway successfully concluded his CSIP training on Thursday. I'd get my chance the following day when a 25-knot wind with gusts above 30 seemed calm compared to the previous rodeo ride. The final exam included a hand-flown, non-precision approach, under the hood, with a failed PFD.

The SR22's standby instruments are located at the bottom of the panel directly in front of the left seat. Reading them isn't easy from the right seat—but it's not impossible, either.

Wrist-wrestling the side-stick control as we plowed through the turbulence, I couldn't help but think how much better the standby instruments in the Cirrus are than even a full-up IFR panel a decade ago. Sure, it was inconvenient having to crane my neck to read the steam-gauge attitude indicator, altimeter, and airspeed indicator. But one 430 showed my lineup throughout the procedure and counted down the seconds until each waypoint; the other provided a com-

forting magenta line to follow; and the MFD showed a geo-referenced approach plate, with our airplane on it, as we progressed toward our home field.

I'd been pestering Shookman to let me hand-fly the SR22 for days. Now, with the final set of simulated instrument approaches, I had my chance. One more landing and the course was complete. Shookman's hard work and excellent flying skills paid off for two guys some would have given up as uneducable.

Comparing notes with Greenway, he said the CSIP program was "every bit as demanding, and every bit as professional" as the airline training he'd received while obtaining three turbine type ratings. "I feel like I now know this airplane's systems and operation more thoroughly than any other airplane in its category."

We look forward to getting out on the airways and introducing veteran pilots and nonpilots alike to the Let's Go Flying SR22. The airplane was an incredibly generous gift from J. Lloyd Huck, its original owner (see "The Gift of Flight," February 2009 *AOPA Pilot*). And we're confident it will help strengthen and expand our aviation community in the future. **ACPA**

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