Manual flying skills

Two articles from 11th January's AVweb flash

FAA Rapped On Pilot Skills
By Russ Niles

The FAA isn't doing enough to ensure pilots can actually fly well enough to take over if aircraft flight management systems fail according to a report obtained by the Associated Press, AP says the unreleased report from the Transportation Department's Office of Inspector General is critical of the FAA's lack of oversight on pilot flying skills. "Because FAA hasn't determined how carriers should implement the new requirements or evaluated whether pilots' manual flying time has increased, the agency is missing important opportunities to ensure that pilots maintain skills needed to safely fly and recover in the event of a failure with flight deck automation or an unexpected event," AP quoted the report as saying.

The FAA is working on the issue. In 2013 it issued a safety alert to airlines urging them to get pilots to brush up on their manual flying skills but as sometimes happens the bureaucratic baggage that goes with that kind of recommendation is bogging down implementation. The OIG says the FAA hasn't yet come up with the rules on manual flying and even when it does, airlines have until 2019 to comply. And with further automation coming into the picture with ADS-B and NextGen, there will be even less stick time for pilots in the future, the AP quotes the report as saying. "The opportunities air carrier pilots have during live operations to maintain proficiency in manual flight are limited and likely to diminish," the report said. "While the FAA has taken steps to emphasize the importance of pilots' manual flying and monitoring skills, the agency can and should do more to ensure that carriers are sufficiently training their pilots on these skills." For what it's worth, the report apparently says the FAA agrees with those sentiments and hopes to have the new rules ready in about a year.

FAA Wants GA Hand Flying Skills Checked

Flight instructors conducting GA flight reviews and instrument proficiency checks are being directed to make sure pilots can hand fly the aircraft well enough to get themselves out of trouble. AOPA is reporting that the FAA has issued a new advisory circular for instructors that adds emphasis to hand flying skills for the periodic reviews. It also wants instructors to make sure pilots know how to use the wonder boxes and what to do if they go dark. "The FAA reminds CFIs conducting flight reviews and IPCs to ensure that a pilot under evaluation is proficient with the automated system and knows what to do if it fails," the AC says.

The revised guidance is also concerned that pilots are relying too much on aircraft systems. "Automation can lull some pilots into complacency. Furthermore, automation bias presented a new breed of accident by creating the potential to erode a complacent pilot's manual flight skills," the AC says. "Automation bias refers to the willingness of the pilot to trust and utilize automated systems while feeling that the automation is more capable than the pilot." Instructors are urged to make sure pilots are using the automation to its best advantage without considering it a panacea