

PILOTSAFETY.ORG

PROVIDES MASTERY AVIONICS TRAINING

STORY BY DALE SMITH

You know when someone says something that resonates. Well, not long ago, I chatted with Lee Lauderback, the legendary P-51 pilot/instructor and chief pilot for the Unusual Attitude Training program, and he said, “When confronted with a crisis, you will not rise to the occasion; you will descend to the level of your training.”

Of course, at the time, we were discussing the plethora of creative ways general aviation pilots keep finding to bend perfectly good airplanes. But upon further reflection, he might as well have been describing the typical pilot and their advanced glass avionics.

I can hear you saying it now, “Pilots don’t need structured avionics training.” Well, that might have been true when a Garmin 430/530 was at the top of a pilot’s wish list, but not today.

With avionics delivering more sophistication and capabilities than ever, the need for increased and specialized training has become more necessary now than ever. And just because you can use your iPhone, don’t think you’re a master of your plane’s panel.

That is, of course, unless you’ve invested the time and effort to learn your avionics suite’s ins, outs, and WTFs. Or, better yet, have joined a growing number of pilots and taken advantage of the array of training offerings developed by Gary “GPS” (Guy in the Pink Shirt) Reeves and found exclusively at PilotSafety.org.

With more than 8,300 hours and two decades of CFI experience (he was also named the Federal Aviation Administration’s National CFI of the Year in 2019), Reeves’ goal with PilotSafety.org is to provide the highest level of real-world inspired situational instruction to IFR pilots flying the coolest new glass and digital avionics from Avidyne, Aspen, Garmin, L3Harris and other manufacturers.

“I originally started PilotSafety.org when I owned my flight school in Long Beach (California),” Reeves said. “It was a nonprofit organization designed to help reduce common GA accidents like avoiding midairs, better ATC communications, handling engine failures – things like that.

“Then I started seeing the issues pilots were having learning their new avionics without any formal training, and it seemed backward to me. I ended up selling the flight school and redirecting PilotSafety.org into a for-profit enterprise. I started selling the ForeFlight and the Garmin 430/530 programs on DVDs at Oshkosh.

“That quickly evolved into a program for the G1000 system, and that evolved into Avidyne approaching me about being their national training provider. Now, along with the online video courses, I provide personal in-aircraft training to individual pilots and large fleet operators.”

Not all training is the right training

After investing over 4,000 hours in creating content for his “Mastery Not Minimums” training program, Reeves

believes that not all training is created equal.

“I’m not downplaying the value of a good local flight instructor; they’re invaluable,” he said. “But their expertise is usually helping people pass check rides. That’s something I’m not good at. My value is showing them the real-world shortcuts and emergency use that most local instructors don’t have experience using.

“You rarely practice what you don’t know. The problem is you often don’t know what you don’t know.”

In his opinion, that’s sort of the same problem with all the current avionics training video options. It’s not that they’re not good – they are. But the majority are just video versions of the information that’s in the front three-quarters of an avionics pilot operating handbook – information most pilots never bother to read in the first place.

Be that as it may, the information contained in the videos is excellent up to a point, but all too often falls short of teaching pilots what they need to do when things don’t go as planned.

“The problem is the video content is not real-world, in-cockpit experiences,” he said. “A pilot who goes through the training with me knows why they’re telling the avionics to do

something, not just how to do it.

“So when something along the flight does go wrong, you’ll know why it went wrong and what to do about fixing it. You can’t just teach yourself to push buttons, hoping everything works out. With my tools, you’ll immediately know what to do to set it right again. That’s invaluable training in a busy IFR cockpit.”

He explained that, in most cases, the problem isn’t with the avionics unit itself; it’s more that the new units from Avidyne, Garmin, and others are so advanced that there are often multiple ways to do something, and it’s easy to get sideways with all of it.

Reeves has spent thousands of hours flying all kinds of airplanes in all kinds of weather worldwide. And he’s captured a lot of it and used those real-world scenarios to create his book “Single-Pilot IFR Pro Tips” and the PilotSafety.org series of instructional videos.



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Great training good for avionics shops

While the value of any additional training a pilot receives is great, Reeves said a significant side benefit to his program is that it can help reduce the amount of time an avionics shop often spends troubleshooting an owner's new avionics installation.

"I've heard it so many times from so many avionics shops. An owner watches a free YouTube video or plays with an avionics simulator on their iPad for a while, so they think they know how it works," Reeves said. "Then they pick up their airplane and fly it home. Not long after, they discover a problem. The unit won't do what they want it to do. They either get the shop on the phone or fly back to have the issue looked at.

"When the technician gets in the airplane, it all works fine; it's just that the pilot didn't know what they were doing, so they think the unit is broken. These situations can cost an avionics shop a lot of lost time and money in helping an owner understand what they are doing wrong. That's lost revenue chasing problems that are operator related."

Reeves said the majority of avionics shops don't have

CFIs on staff and truly don't want to be in the training business.

"PilotSafety.org has a series of free getting-started videos that an AEA member avionics shop can give their clients when they are shopping for new avionics," he said. "If they watch our Garmin or Avidyne videos, they'll get great insights into how these units work in situations they are familiar with. The information is also repeated on a laminated card that the avionics shop can give the buyer."

According to Reeves, PilotSafety.org currently has videos covering the majority of the Garmin and Avidyne products, the Genesys Aerosystems S-TEC 3100, and the Lynx ADS-B transponder. He has others in the works.

With all the free, high-quality training available, it's no surprise that a growing number of avionics shops are taking advantage of what PilotSafety.org has to offer them and their customers.

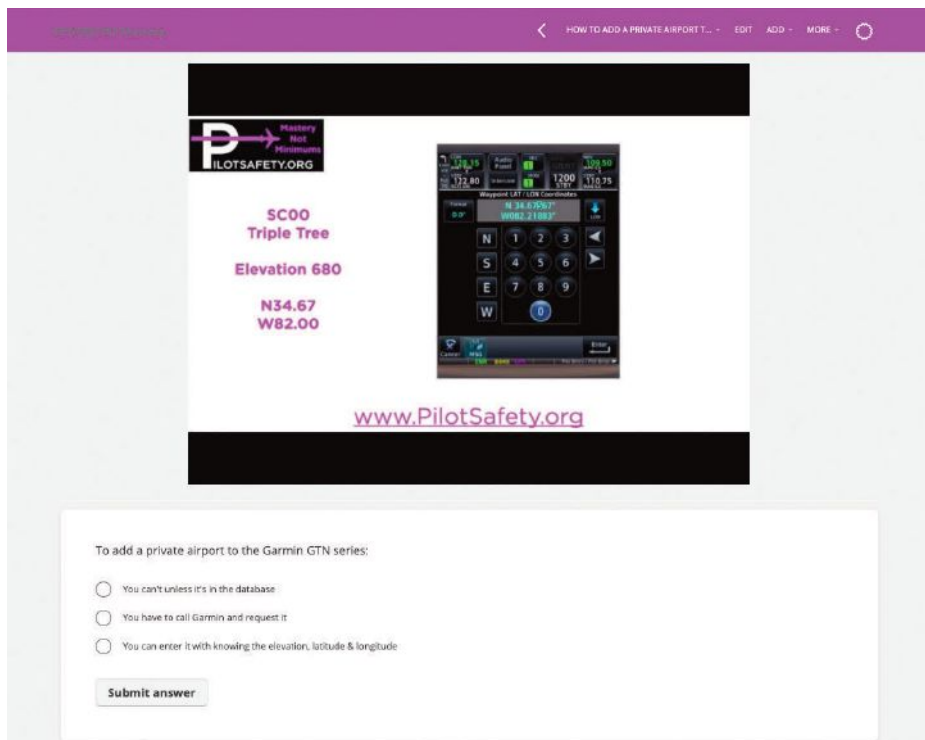
Anthony Arispe, president of McKinney, Texas-based Airspeed & Altitude, said his avionics shop has been partnering with Reeves for over four years, and he's found the training package to be a great help to all his customers.

"When a client buys an Avidyne avionics package from us, the first thing we do is give them access

to the training on Gary's website. That way, they can familiarize themselves with the equipment while we are doing the installation," he explained. "Then, when the owners come to pick up their airplanes, they're well ahead of the equipment."

Aside from saving his shop time with both pre- and post-delivery questions and training, Arispe said knowing that his customers are familiar and comfortable with their new avionics gives him a high level of confidence that they will fly better and safer.

In addition to using the materials for his avionics customers, Arispe said Airspeed & Altitude uses all of the PilotSafety.org materials in its flight school.



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- Gary Reeves

“All of our flight school airplanes are Avidyne equipped, so we provide our instructors and students with Gary’s materials,” Arispe said. “We know that our CFIs and students are familiar with what the avionics can do so they can concentrate on flying the airplane.”

Arispe said that whether he’s handing the PilotSafety.org web link or a copy of Reeves’ book to a student or seasoned IFR pilot, the information will be “absolutely a benefit to any pilot who uses it.”

And, while there’s no charge for the “getting started” videos, Reeves does require the shop to be a current AEA member.

“The shop just has to visit pilotsafety.org/aea, and they can access the videos or order our free support cards,” he said. “They can put their name on the card, and the customer then uses it to access the free videos on our website.”

Reeves explained that he had recently returned from Ketchikan, Alaska, after completing a custom training program for TEMSCO Helicopters and its Avidyne IFD550-equipped fleet.

“They are one of the largest helicopter operators in the territory and have the unique challenge of needing to train up to 50 pilots at the beginning of Alaska’s sightseeing season,” he said. “This combination of online and in-person training program had to be custom developed to meet the unique needs of TEMSCO’s Part 135 operations, which range from VFR tours to SAR, firefighting, and other mission types.

“Real-world training is the only way to prepare their pilots – or any pilot for that matter – to be ready to safely and efficiently handle any situation they will face on their next flight. That’s PilotSafety.org’s past, present, and future mission.” □

One can be the most effective number

While Reeves’ videos and books are extremely beneficial to the majority of IFR pilots, there are still times when an individual pilot or fleet operator wants personalized training in their aircraft.

“I do private three-day programs that include over 30 hours of pre-visit training and then another 20 hours in their aircraft at my airport here in Texas or at their home airport,” he said. “I’m the only one who offers this level of training in the customer’s aircraft.”

Reversing Course

- Press **D/E** Button
- Turn Right Bottom Knob **Left** to show previous waypoint
- Push **ENTR** button 2x

AVIDYNE www.AvidyneTraining.com