

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Grass Runway Opens April 30th

The final walk through of the grass runway project was completed. One condition was noted where the northeast side of 22 had settlement over the sprinkler piping trench during the wet winter months resulting in a drop-off of about 4" to 6" right at the edge of the new grass. Several of us thought this was an unsafe condition and the engineer agreed. As a result, we had the contractor bring in additional fill to level up the edge of the runway. The fill was compacted and then reseeded. Now we are waiting for the seed to germinate before opening up the runway.

My plan is to open the runway on Friday, April 30th and have a ribbon cutting ceremony with a barbecue of burgers and hotdogs. Keep this day open on your schedule.

Campground Opened

The fly-in campground is now officially open. We turned on the water last week and Dennis and Fred have been cleaning up the windfall branches and mowing. TCAA held their annual spring clean-up day last weekend so the campground is ready for the summer season.

Ultralight Aircraft

From time to time we have ultralight aircraft in our traffic pattern. There are a few ultralights based at Columbia airport and often times I see visiting ultralights arrive for a visit to Columbia State Park or to visit

friends in the area. Recently one ultralight pilot doing touch and goes at Columbia was told over the radio to "get your ultralight out of our pattern" or words to that effect! While this may reflect the sentiment of small fraction of the pilot community, everyone should know that ultralights have the right to use our public airports just as much as other aircraft.

As with all aircraft using Columbia or Pine Mountain Lake Airports, we expect everyone to use their radio if so equipped. Whether you are an ultralight or a Learjet, please listen for traffic as you approach the airport and announce your position and intentions. Give the right of way to aircraft in the pattern, to slower traffic, and to landing traffic. Courtesy goes a long way in making our Airports friendly, fun and safe.

Noise Complaints

One of the not-so-fun aspects of being the Airports Director is, having to answer phone calls from nearby residents complaining of low flying aircraft. This last month I received two such calls. Surprisingly, the calls came from residents that live on the approach path to runway 17. Normally, one would think that complaints would come from the departure end of a runway where the aircraft are running full power and climbing at a slow airspeed. These complaints came from knowledgeable individuals that knew the airplanes were "dragging it in" using considerable power on their final approach. Not only does this type of approach annoy our neighbors, but it is reducing the margin of error of the landing. I realize that many aircraft need to carry power on landing, but having to use high

power settings on landing shows poor pilot technique at best and possibly the need for more practice or even some ground school on the basics of airplane aerodynamics.

Before the readers jump down my throat, I do want to say that I know there is a time and place for a flat, power on approach. Runway 17 is 4,670' long and does not require short field landing technique, and flying the VASIs does not require that much power. Let's keep the pattern up and the power down so my phone stays quiet. Thanks.

Columbia Airport Representative

Nobody jumped to my rescue last month when I asked for a volunteer to represent Columbia Airport on the Columbia Area Advisory Council. This could be a good opportunity for someone to get involved with the decision making for the Columbia community and also work to protect Columbia Airport. If you have been thinking about helping me out, please don't be shy. Give me a call and I'll be glad to discuss with you the details of this position.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

I made a stupid move the other day (yea me). I was returning home to Pine Mountain Lake Airport and entered right traffic for 27 because the wind and traffic favored landing to the west. Most times I'll use runway 9 because the winds are fairly calm, the sun is at my back, and its uphill. This time the winds clearly favored 27 and there was a departing aircraft, so around the pattern I flew. When I rolled out on final, I caught an updraft, the sun made me squint, and runway was far below me. With power off, I could have landed on the "far" numbers.

This situation screams "go around" something I hadn't practiced in a long time, but my pilot ego said, just put on full flaps, slip the plane and point the nose down...you

will make it. I did just that and I made a perfectly terrible landing half way down the runway. There were no rubber marks left on the runway, nor did I scratch a wingtip, but the resulting landing was not pretty and one I am not proud of. What hurt the most was the realization that I made a poor decision. Initially, I thought my pride would be hurt if I didn't make the runway, but in the end, I found that my confidence was shaken because I made a poor decision. The right thing to do would have been to declare a go-around and come back and make a better approach followed by a smoother landing.

Often times I see pilots try and make up for a bad approach by burning a flat spot on their tires. When a plane comes whistling by my office window (located over 1/2 way down runway 17) still 30' in the air, it gives me the willies. More than once I have jumped up to see if the pilot "got it stopped" before the end of the runway.

When you find yourself too high, too fast, and too close to the threshold, get smart and get some practice...go-around. There are many variables that contribute to a safe and successful landing. They don't always occur together as they are supposed to. When they don't cooperate, get smart, swallow your pilot pride and try again. The observers on the ground will admire you for your decision making not your failure to put it all together every time.

Stupid Pilot Tricks is a monthly article that attempts to raise awareness of safety and courtesy issues around our airports.

The Manager's Approach is a monthly publication from the Tuolumne County Airports Director for the purpose of keeping our community informed of local aviation and airport issues. You can contact me at:

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