

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Columbia Airport Turns 75

I thought that I would spread the word a little early this year that the theme of this year's Father's Day Fly-In is "Columbia Airport Celebrates Its 75th Birthday". Yep, that's right; the airport will be 75 years old on Father's Day weekend this year. The airport was dedicated on June 16, 1935 and originally called Ralph Field, after local pilot Lowell Ralph, and then later changed to Columbia Airport. It should be noted that June 16, 1935 was the third Sunday in June and which is now commonly recognized as Father's Day.

For this year's Father's Day Fly-In we are trying to get several 1930's vintage aircraft and automobiles so we can display typical aircraft and autos that would have been at the airport dedication in 1935. Mark your calendars for this year's Father's Day Fly-In to be held on June 19th and 20th. As always we are in need of volunteers to work the Fly-In. This year's Volunteer Form will be available on the internet and at the Columbia Airport office.

Columbia Airport Weather

Thanks to the effort of several people, we now have better weather information available at Columbia Airport. The actual METAR is now displayed on the bottom of the AWOS page when you view it over the internet. Columbia Airport's AWOS information can be viewed at <http://awos.co.tuolumne.ca.us/>.

Also, the resolution of the four weather cameras at Columbia Airport has been improved. The new images are larger and show more detail. However, the cameras are not high resolution cameras so the quality of the images is now at its maximum.

The weather camera technology is improving all the time and it is hoped that newer cameras with more capability will be installed at both Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports this coming year.

PML Airport Hangars

The new hangars at Pine Mountain Lake Airport are rapidly being constructed. Despite some bad weather, the new hangar project is coming right along. The main steel is erected and some of the siding installed. According to Gold Country Hangars, if the weather cooperates, the project should be finished by April 1st.

The hangars at Columbia Airport are in the final design stage and the long term ground lease is being finalized. It is anticipated that construction of the Columbia hangars will begin in late April.



Early Turns and Short Approaches

The AIM (Aeronautical Information Manual) says that departing aircraft should not turn until after the plane is beyond the end of the runway. My observation is that

aircraft that get airborne quickly are more likely to turn prior to passing the end of the runway and my guess is that the pilot feels that he has gained sufficient altitude to execute a safe turn. Unfortunately, early turns on departure are more noticeable by people on the ground because an aircraft is traveling somewhere that is not normally observed.

The same is true for pilots making a short approach. Pilots should try to make their short approach such that the final portion of their flight still contains a short final leg. Constant turn approaches can still be made this way. The aircraft should cross the threshold of the runway, not come in from an angle part way down the runway.

When doing a low approach to check for deer or obstacle on the runway, or any other reason, the approach should be made such that the aircraft crosses both the approach and departure thresholds.

The reason that pilots should cross the threshold of the runway is because off the end of every runway is an area called the Runway Protection Zone (RPZ). The RPZ is a trapezoidal shaped area that is intended to be clear of residences and gathering places because statistically this area has a higher probability of an aircraft accident. When a pilot performs an early turnout or an excessively short approach he is missing the RPZ and possibly flying low over a home, an office, or other occupied area. This can be disconcerting to people on the ground and often result in a phone call of concern to my office.

Smart Pilot Tricks

Letting the Other Plane Land First

Did you notice the change in the title of this article? Yep, were talking “Smart” Pilot Tricks now. A couple of weeks ago a pilot came by my office and suggested that I emphasize the positive every once in a while and talk about what pilots do right. I pondered the idea for a millisecond and had to wholeheartedly agree with his suggestion.

One of the best things I hear and see pilots do is to let the faster or larger airplane land first. This often happens when there is an inbound high performance retractable gear airplane and a lower performance fixed gear plane. The pilot of the slower plane will broadcast that he will “slow it up a bit more and let the Bonanza go ahead and land first”. I’ve also heard a pilot announce that he will perform a 360 to provide better spacing with other aircraft inbound to the airport. Such courtesy goes a long way toward making an enjoyable flight. Nobody likes to be cut off in the pattern, but if we willingly adjust our speed or flight path to accommodate other aircraft in the pattern, the day just seems to go much better.

All pilots should know that the aircraft in the air has the right-of-way over one on the ground. However, I often hear a pilot in the pattern announce that they “will extend their downwind leg” to provide the opportunity for an aircraft on the ground to take off.

Being polite and considerate of other aircraft goes a long way toward making a pleasurable and safe flight. Your fellow pilots will notice if you accommodate a higher performance aircraft, provide some extra distance or maneuvering room, or just sit patiently on the ground while traffic pattern clears up a bit. Smart Pilot tricks will go a long way toward keeping our skies safe.

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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Noise Sensitive Areas

As a reminder to our local pilots, we have several noise sensitive areas near our airports. Maps showing these areas are posted at both airports. Please be neighborly and avoid these areas.