

Confessions of a FlightSim Newbie

By Bill Caton

When I was deciding on the merits of investing in a home flight simulator, the ABS office suggested I check into the Touch Trainer by Fly This Sim (www.flythissim.com). Like always, ABS was so right! Initially I was looking at less of an investment than this powerful tool. My purposes were to become a safer IFR pilot; provide a platform for my non-pilot wife to practice so that if I did the proverbial conk out our chances of survival would be greatly increased; and finally, to get the feel of instrument approaches for upcoming destinations before actually taking the trip, in case weather deteriorates more than the forecast.



Once on course I set up for cruise with the gear finally retracted and the engine leaned. I had the plan: hold my altitude, maintain heading, fly my course, and set radios for intercepting a radial to track to the ILS. After intercepting the radial and while descending, the airspeed starting going up and the sound of the power was trailing down. A power loss? Why? I had touched nothing. The realism of this sim is amazing! The throttle was at a normal setting. I was in the clouds and intent on determining why the power was low.

I advanced the throttle. Still nothing. Now the speed started to decrease. I was looking all over the panel trying to figure out what was going wrong. I even blamed the simulator's computer programmers for my predicament! The temp was 21°C so it was not ice. There was plenty of fuel. I established an engine-out glide, but couldn't figure out why my power was a thing of the past and my airspeed was slowly fading away. Ultimately, I landed on a highway... opposite traffic, at that. I will say the cars on the sim's visual display are amazingly real. There are some nice rides on highway California's Highway 101.

The time seemed to go fast and my thinking was jumbled. I couldn't believe it was happening. At one point my mind and emotions were so much in an airplane I didn't realize it was a simulator. Yet, I would survive.



Fly This Sim worked with me to create this replica of my turbonormalized A36's panel.

That is the fancy, glossed over version. There is this thing about making mistakes by doing things in the sim that you would do... and would not do... in a real airplane. This is where the learning curve shoots up. My learning experience in the sim was an IFR flight from Monterey to San Jose, California. This is where the learning curve initiates its takeoff roll.

On departure from Monterey, I was about to enter the 200 foot ceiling when a jet appeared on my nose doing

an approach in the opposite direction. I veered left to avert an unscheduled meeting and instantly I was in clouds. This was a little nerve wracking, to say the least. I lumbered along my flight, taking my sweet time to climb and get set for cruise. The reason I had plenty of time was that the airplane was quite dirty. It took 15 minutes for me to figure out I had neglected to raise the gear after the stress of the near miss. Why do they call it a "near" miss? We *did* miss. Anyway, I let my scan get stuck. There were lots of clues I did not see.

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After I was down, it hit me. What was my great revelation? I had failed to richen the mixture while descending. I can't believe I missed something so obvious. As I was advancing the throttle I was adding more air to an already lean-of-peak mixture setting from my cruise. The mixture became more and more lean as I descended. When I followed my instinct, advancing the throttle, the power declined further and the engine eventually quit.

What did I learn?

First, my investment in the Touch Trainer by Fly This Sim was probably my best investment in aviation in a long time (along with my ABS Life Membership). I had looked at other sims, but to me this one by far exceeds the others in realism and real-life scenarios given the amount I invested. No, they did not pay me to say this.

Second, I wasted valuable time trying to mentally troubleshoot rather than going through the emergency checklist procedure. Those procedures would have revealed and resolved the issue quickly. When an unusual event happens, believe it is happening and respond with the checklist response!

Third, had I used a pre-landing checklist the emergency procedures would never have come into play.

There is more to learn and experience, such as seeing the view of descending below decision height. Seeing how low you really are will scare you into *not* ever "ducking under" in actual instrument conditions.

Thank you, Fly This Sim!

