

**T**he reality is, float flying is all that one dreams it to be. It is the outdoors, remoteness, new and unlimited experiences, a flying challenge, the exhilaration of being a boat one minute, an airplane the next. Float flying has it all for those of us who have chosen flying as a hobby and recreation.

Learning to fly has its rewards, but most pilots, after getting their ticket, seek new challenges and experiences. It may be acquiring a new rating, learning aerobatics, mastering an antique, building/rebuilding and flying one's own airplane, going places, and perhaps just hanging around the airport and hangar flying. There is a big world out there for the aviation enthusiast, and for me, the world of float flying offers a special fascination.

Like a lot of pilots who pursue flying floats, I first obtained my rating by training at Jack Brown's Seaplane School in Florida in a J-3 Cub in the late 1960s. This experience at one of several fine flying schools was enough to whet my appetite.

Based on my 18 years of float flying, I compiled the following 10 tips in hopes that it would inspire other water flyers.

**TIP #1** Getting the rating is nothing more than a license to learn.

If one is going to really get serious about float flying, more experience is needed, as much as 100 hours. When I tell someone that flying floats is different, most people look at me with skepticism. The skills of a sailor and canoeist come into play. Understanding weather as a land pilot is one thing, however, weather takes on a whole new dimension for the seaplane pilot. My favorite instructor, Pat Magic, a 20,000 hour float pilot most of which is in a Twin Beech, told me early on—"wind is your #1 challenge, pay attention to it". While learning from him in the 1970s in Ely, MN, in Cessna 185s and 206s, he told me, "don't fly when the wind exceeds 15 kts". Good advice for the inexperienced.

**TIP #2** Advanced ratings and instruction make for a better pilot.



BILL MCCABRELL

# 10 FLOAT FLYING Tips

This is true for landplanes as well. The biannual flight review is one way we are disciplined by the FAA to get instruction and refreshed. No matter how much time one has, there is always something that can be learned, and as float pilots, we probably go several months without water experience, at least those of us in the Northern climates. Each spring, go out with an instructor or an experienced pilot for a few hours. It is amazing what this does for the comfort level, in addition to regaining proficiency.

Also, pull out those float instructional books by J.J. Frey, *How to Fly Floats* and Dr. Dale DeRemer's *Water Flying Concepts*, and refresh your memory. Attend float seminars such as the one in the spring organized by the Minnesota SPA each year in Brainerd, MN. The program is very beneficial and you come away really "thinking floats".

**TIP #3** Finger on the map is still the best way to navigate.

Nav aids are non-existent in the far north, not counting GPS. Loran "gives out" or is unreliable 50 miles north of the Minnesota border. Dead reckoning, and knowing where you are, is essential. The magnetic compass can have an error as much as 35 degrees. And while GPS is the best thing since "sliced bread", I cannot bring myself to rely solely on it. There have been one or

two occasions when signals have been lost. Drawing a line on the map with mileage "ticks" is also a good idea. It is really back to basics, and I suspect many of us need to sharpen our dead reckoning skills.

Remember, floatplane pilots must fly 500 feet above the ground to stay under a ceiling. If you haven't tried it lately, make a cross country in a sparsely settled area. I bet you will be surprised.

Finger on the map? Yes, have you recently tried to find your place on the map when flying in moderate turbulence close to the ground? Finding your location on the map can take your attention away from flying the airplane.

**TIP #4** Never reduce power until at least 500 feet above ground/water has been achieved.

Invariably, when you "blow a jug" or have some other engine malfunction, it is at the first power reduction. I don't have statistics to prove this, but I firmly believe this is the case. Our engines in floatplanes usually get worked harder and longer with high power settings and RPMs. So, come off that power gently and only after sufficient altitude has been gained to land in a decent spot.

**TIP #5** Before climbing, let the airspeed build to something above the power off stall speed.

In my 206, with take off flaps, it is difficult, if not impossible, to get an indicated airspeed above 48 kts while on the water. And I need this speed to get off the water. This speed is well below power off stall speed. If the engine quits, I'd better be close to the water. Therefore, I level off a few feet above the water and allow the speed to build before starting the climb. Also, I start bleeding off the flaps which allows the speed to increase more. However, this is contrary to the recommendation of the *Pilots Operating Handbook*. There has been much debate about this, but it makes sense to me and works well. I believe I can gain more altitude quicker using this technique.

**TIP #6** Practice handling and maneuvering the floatplane in adverse winds and rough water conditions.

Start out with 5-10 knot winds and gradually work up to 10-15 knot winds. When you are comfortable with these kinds of winds, practice with winds above 15 knots. Set your maximum wind limits. (See story on handling rough water operations on page 26 of this issue).

**TIP #7** Don't be underfloated. Would you rather be in a 15-foot canoe or 17-foot canoe under adverse

conditions when fully loaded (at gross)? The answer is obvious to me. However, some prefer smaller floats because performance is improved (speed) in the air. My 206 is on EDO 3430s, which is considered good floatation for this aircraft. The Cessna 185 on straight floats can take either the EDO 3430 or the smaller EDO 2960. On a 185, I prefer the EDO 3430. While the 2960s are good floats, I prefer the extra floatation, and am willing to sacrifice 5 knots in airspeed. The Cessna 185 on EDO 2790 amphibis, to me, is seriously under floated. A similar situation exists with the smaller floats approved for the Beaver. I prefer enough to not enough.

**TIP #8** When flying in sparsely settled areas, wear a life vest that contains survival gear.

This survival gear should include such things as waterproof matches,

insect repellent, first aid kit, water purification tablets, compass, fish hooks and line, etc. Secondly, dress as if you were going to have to live in the bush for several days. Shorts and sandals are a no-no. The mosquitoes will give you serious problems if you don't have adequate protection. Long pants, long sleeve shirt, hat, heavy wool socks and good leather boots are essential.

**TIP #9** Brief passengers on how to exit an airplane inverted in the water.

Accident statistics verify that more people have lost their lives by not knowing how to exit the aircraft when upside down in the water than in the accident itself.

The first thing one needs to know is where the door handle is. When you are upside down, you can be completely disoriented. Know where the handle is in relation to your arm and hand and the direction for opening. This sounds elementary, but it's not.

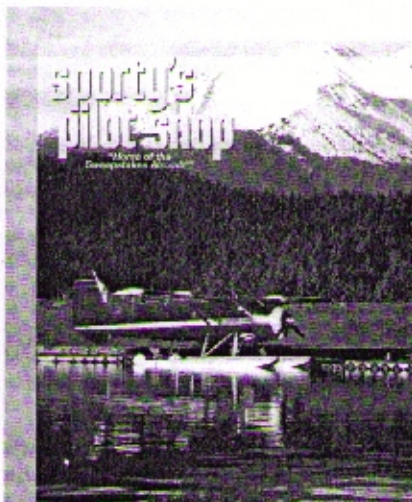
Give a thorough passenger briefing. For example, there is now a way for passengers to exit a standard Cessna 206 on the right side if the flaps are extended by cracking the forward double door and then pulling the lever on the rear door.

**TIP #10** Travel north with at least two aircraft.

This adds to the trip immensely by having several "good buddies" along. Those of us in aviation like to do things together. The safety considerations in traveling with at least two aircraft are obvious. If there are any problems, there is a backup. At least someone else knows exactly where your are.

I hope these thoughts will spur all water flyers to enjoy the ultimate in aviation. □

**Editor's Note:** John Parish Sr. lives in Tullahoma, TN, and Ely, MN. He has over 1000 hours of float time and has owned a Cessna 206 on floats since 1979. He is vice president and board member of the EAA Aviation Foundation and president of the Staggerwing Museum Foundation in Tullahoma. He is the former CEO of Worth Inc., the world's largest manufacturer of bats and balls. His three sons also fly floats and own a Cessna 185.



*Call For Entries:*

SPA/Sporty's Pilot Shop Annual

**PHOTO CONTEST**

1. All entries must be 35 mm slide or 2 1/4 inch color transparencies.
2. Entries should be sent to: SPA Photo Contest, c/o Sporty's Pilot Shop, Clermont County Airport, Batavia, OH 45103
3. Entries will be accepted between July 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999. Late entries will not be accepted, and neither Sporty's Pilot Shop nor the SPA can be held responsible for late, damaged or misdirected mail.
4. Entrants who would like their slides returned must include a self-addressed stamped envelope. The winning slide will become the property of Sporty's Pilot Shop.
5. The winning photo will appear on the cover of an upcoming Sporty's Pilot Shop catalog. The contest winner will be awarded a \$500 gift certificate from Sporty's Pilot Shop catalog and a donation will be given by Sporty's Pilot Shop to the SPA.