



How often has air traffic control made you go east and west, when really you wanted to go north or south? Have you ever wished that the controller could see what flying was like from the front seat of an airplane?

AOPA's Fly-A-Controller program lets you do just that: show a controller what it's like to be a general aviation pilot operating in the air traffic control system. Here's your opportunity to introduce the non-pilot controller to the world he or she hears about but never sees firsthand. Do a familiarization flight!

By taking a controller or Flight Service Station specialist on a general aviation flight, you make a large contribution to better understanding and improved communication between pilots and controllers. The mutual exchange of information helps improve service given general aviation by the air traffic control system.

Seeing is believing. Let an air traffic controller experience a flight from the front seat. You'll do yourself, the controller, and general aviation a favor.

There's a controller at your nearby facility just waiting for your offer!

How Do I Participate?

Contact your nearest military or civilian tower, Air Route Traffic Control Center or Flight Service Station, and tell them you wish to "Fly A Controller." There is a listing of these facilities with phone numbers in AOPA's Airport Directory.

Arrange to meet the controller at a mutually convenient location at the airport of departure.

Brief the controller prior to departure, covering such topics as the route of flight, the duration, and characteristics of the airplane to be flown. The controller might be interested in the best rate of climb speed, approach speed and cruise speed.

Information about the airplane's avionics and systems should be discussed so the controller understands your cockpit workload.

Conduct a local flight in airspace most closely associated with the controller's area of expertise. For example, if the controller works primarily in a tower, spend time at a controlled airport; but contacts with approach control or FSS will also be helpful.

After landing, discuss any problems that arose on this or previous flights. Be sure to get the controller's observations and suggestions.

Before You Fly...

Do ... give the controller a thorough briefing as to the content and conduct of the flight.

Do ... answer all of the controller's questions to the best of your ability. But if you don't know an answer, don't fake it. Write down the question and answer by phone or mail later.

Do ... allow the controller to work the radios and take down clearances during the flight.

Do ... emphasize to the controller your willingness to learn from him or her.

Do ... put the controller at ease during the entire flight.

Things To Avoid...

Don't ... continue the flight if the controller becomes uncomfortable.

Don't ... conduct a VFR flight during "marginal" VFR conditions.

Don't ... use the flight as a means of ventilating all of your complaints about the air traffic control system and/or the FAA.

Don't ... fly in an aircraft that needs paint or repairs.

Toward Ever-Better Communication

Everybody wins-the pilot, controller, and the entire aviation community-with improved communications. All who operate within the air traffic control environment will benefit from the Fly-A-Controller program. Suggestions, concerns and questions should be openly discussed. Pilots should also make the effort to visit the controller's facility to see what ATC is like from his or her side. It may give you a different perspective the next time you think you are getting pushed around the sky. Together, we can make a difference in improving the environment in which we fly. So don't wait! Call your nearest air traffic control facility today.

Have fun and fly safely!

AOPA has other outreach programs, including: Fly A Teacher, Fly A Leader, Fly A Friend, and How to Have a Successful Media Event.

For more information write:
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