



Inaccurate news coverage of general aviation probably began with the first ground loop. If some journalists are to be believed, all airplanes smaller than a Boeing 727 are called Piper Cubs. All too often, the general aviation safety record - actually a constantly and dramatically improving one - is maligned, or the "...small, private airplane" is assumed to be at fault before the facts are known. Often a reporter's story reflects public perceptions. What can you do to change those perceptions?

Write businesslike, polite letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines when you see inaccuracies in reporting. This makes reporters and editors more careful the next time. Get AOPA's brochure, *How to Write a Letter to the Editor*.

Hold a Media Day at your airport. This is the subject of another AOPA brochure, *How to Have a Successful Media Event*, which can be obtained by calling 1-800-USA-AOPA.

Participate in this Fly-A-Reporter program!
Before You Fly A Reporter...

DON'T ... fly a reporter who says "I'd rather not go." Flying isn't for everybody.
DON'T... fly in bad weather or rough air. That could destroy the favorable impression you seek.
DON'T ... turn the flight into an aerobatic joyride or as tall recovery demonstration.
DON'T ... fly in an aircraft that needs painting or interior repairs. DO make sure all the proper documents are on board. Have an airsick bag easily accessible but hidden from view.
DON'T... tell hangar stories. The kind of positive impression you want to make is destroyed by macho tales of thrills and danger.
DON'T ... attempt flying that makes you uncomfortable. If you haven't been in a Class B airspace for awhile, this isn't the time to go.
DON'T ... forget that the nature of a reporter's business is news. If the reporter calls at the last minute and cancels because of breaking news, reschedule the flight.

OKAY, I'm ready-Where's The Reporter?

NEWSPAPERS Larger newspapers have reporters who cover transportation, business or lifestyle issues, perhaps including aviation. Notice the byline on articles dealing with aviation, and call that individual. Editorial page writers who shape public opinion on transportation issues might also be interested.

Finally, don't forget columnists. Many syndicated columnists - or even your hometown newspaper columnist - have written about aviation and might appreciate an offer to go flying.

RADIO STATIONS Call the radio station and ask who might be the appropriate reporter or editor to go on a flight.

CABLE TV Cable television operations sometimes have large blocks of air time to fill and welcome ideas for programs. Visit the station and discuss with an editor or producer a program on general aviation, the local airport, or aviation careers.

TELEVISION STATIONS Television is a natural for a hands-on general aviation flight. You may have seen a reporter covering aviation stories already, so contact that person first. Be aware that a TV crew consists of two or three people plus heavy equipment.
And Away You Go

The airplane is clean and working perfectly. It's a CAVU day and you are armed with extra copies of the latest charts and sectionals. You've planned a 30-minute flight taking you into different types of airspace.

DO... take the time to do a thorough preflight, with the reporter participating. (Note: The real pros at media rides. test-hop the airplane before the press arrives, assuring that pilot, airplane and local conditions are all ready!)
DO ... encourage questions, as cockpit duties permit. Answer them to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer right away, tell the reporter you'll get the answer after the flight.
DO... encourage photo-taking. Journalists can always use aerial photos - if not for an immediate story, then maybe for a later time.
DO ... cut the flight short if the reporter doesn't feel well or is not enjoying the flight.

Tips On Flying A Reporter

Use the flight as an opportunity to familiarize the reporter with aviation terms and facts. Bring along a copy of AOPA's Fact Card and brochures such as *What is General Aviation* and *The ABCs of Aviation* (available by calling 1-800-USA-AOPA).

Explain how flight plans work and the differences between flying VFR and IFR. Hopefully, the reporter will no longer blame accidents on the lack of a "flight plan." Take some time to describe how airspace works, what ATC and control towers do and don't do, and the importance of see-and-avoid scanning even when flying IFR under radar surveillance.

Give the reporter a feel for the pilot's workload and for the numerous regulations which affect general aviation. Explain why you are flying at 3,500 feet eastbound and 4,500 westbound; show how the airport traffic pattern and UNICOM traffic advisories work.

Point out that general aviation's safety record has steadily and dramatically improved.

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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