

What type of pilot are you?

By Bob Kirkby - March 2002

I have a theory about pilot stereotypes and what causes us to become pilots in the first place. For most of us the burning desire to become a pilot starts at some young age and may be fulfilled anywhere from late teens to old age. I believe there are three types of pilots, from the motivational point of view.

Stereotype A is the individual who, in grade school, knew that he or she would someday be a pilot, and wear a sparkling blue uniform with a captain's hat. When all the boys were announcing plans to become firemen and the girls nurses, type A was defiantly planning a career as an airline pilot. A make-believe captain's cap hung on the bedroom wall. A Saturday afternoon spent at the local airport gazing longingly at airplanes and the people that made them go, was ecstasy. The decision to become a pilot came long before the first airplane ride, which may have been the first flight lesson. He or she will go all the way to an ATP rating and will not be content until reaching the left seat of a 747. I call this type The Quintessential Pilot.

Stereotype B is the person who decided to become a pilot after the first airplane ride. It may have been a ride with a friend or family member or a person who grew up in a flying family. They had little notion of flying until sitting in the right seat for the first time. The eyes went big as saucers at the sight of all those dials, switches and levers. They went even bigger when they saw how the switches and levers made the airplane perform. The adrenaline created by the thunder of the engine on takeoff and the ability to control this monster in three dimensional flight were the deciding factors. This type usually prefers IFR over VFR flight because it is the aircraft and its systems that provide the exhilaration, not flying itself. I call this type The Nintendo Pilot.



Stereotype C didn't really make a conscious decision to become a pilot. It just sort of happened. This is the person who always looked to the sky at whatever was there. Mostly it was clouds and birds. Huge birds like hawks and eagles who soar gracefully in the summer heat. This is the type who would gaze skyward for hours on end, mystified by the huge cumulus clouds boiling and frothing as they presented a visualization of the power of mother nature. Whose head would turn skyward at the slightest sound of a throbbing aircraft engine. Squinting eyes would faithfully follow the aircraft until it disappeared over the horizon. This is the person who was drawn to aviation as a means of experiencing the mystery of flight and to explore the vastness of the skies. A reincarnation of John Gillespie Magee Jr. For this pilot every flight is a rekindling of the spirit. I call this type The Renaissance Pilot.

Most of us have a bit of each type, but there is definitely a predominant characteristic that defines us. So which type of pilot are you: Quintessential, Nintendo or Renaissance?