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Pilot Perspectives: Lori MacNichol

AUGUST 20, 2017 BY [DEREK ROBERTS](#) — [7 COMMENTS](#)

With miles of unmanned wilderness, the backcountry of Idaho is an untamed expanse that begs to be explored.

A mix of jagged and rolling alpine peaks, vast glacial lakes and canyons as grand as any that claim to be, it's an aviators paradise, open to all those brave enough to explore it.

Of course, bravery alone is short lived. For those who seek immersion in their exploration and many a returned journeys, guidance is key. Knowing where to go is one thing, knowing how to come back is another.

Stationed at the gates of the vast wild, in McCall, Idaho, Lori MacNichol has been teaching fellow aviators the necessary advanced “stick and rudder” skills for more than 25 years.



With nearly 12,000 hours of total time, MacNichols estimates that “more than 80%” has been flown in the backcountry.

While her journeys as a pilot have taken her around the globe, in more than 100 different aircraft, it’s Idaho that reigns as her favorite flight destination and the headquarters of her renowned flight school, [McCall Mountain Canyon Flying Seminars](#).

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Operating out of the McCall airport, close to dozens of backcountry airstrips, students have the opportunity to learn from MacNichol and a cast of expert instructors, whose mountain flying teaching skills continue to be called upon by individuals, aircraft manufacturers and the United States military.



In the most comprehensive four-day course, MacNichol notes that we “treat high altitude-confined area flying as a rating.”

Emphasizing that although the FAA does not recognize it as such, “there are goals, objectives, tasks, and completion standards.”

It’s a rigorous syllabus, intended for rugged country and delivered by an instructor whose passion is to teach aviation.

If, on the off chance, MacNichol’s enthusiasm isn’t enough to excite one for the challenge, it’s safe to say that a single backcountry landing would — the moment when an unmanned wilderness temporarily becomes manned.

What do you fly?

A certified 1974 PA-18 Super Cub with VGs on the wings and a strake near the tail. Other than that it’s stock with 31-inch bushwheels.



Why do you fly it?

You can barely get killed in a Cub — sorry that's bad! It's an honest airplane, it has good stall speed spreads, the approach speed is very manageable. It feels like home. It fits man! It's just an airplane that you can simply ask to do some things — and, with the right skillset, you can accomplish those things.



How do you fly it?

When you work as an instructor for a living, I'll be in the airplane, yes I'm logging time but I'm not working on my own skills. So, when I fly I work on my own skills. I love to challenge myself on where exactly I'm going to place my wheels. I'm asking people to do hard things, so I go out and ask myself to do hard things.

Operating Costs (based on 100 hours per year)

Fuel	7 GPH @ 5.35	\$37.45
Annual	\$2,700	\$ 27.00
Insurance (CFI Aircraft)	\$1,600 Annually	\$16.00
Engine Reserve	\$ 37,000 Overhaul/2000TBO	\$18.5*
Total		\$98.95 Per Hour

*Lori notes that in her experience, aircraft rarely make it to TBO.

Flying advice

This is a response geared towards the backcountry: Don't commit to land. To amplify that — and it's another thing that's a large part of our program — is overhead observation. To

minimize the risk, we have to choose the approach path, an abort path, the decision height. I've found over the years, working with the NTSB and the FAA and going to a lot of accidents that the landing was rushed.



I always say overhead look at it and say “I think this might work out” and then fly what you perceive.

Don't commit to land, fly that abort path, and get back to altitude and then say a ha! I didn't know what I didn't know. I got to 200 feet AGL, I made a safe missed approach, and now I can fly it down to 100. Be a technician.



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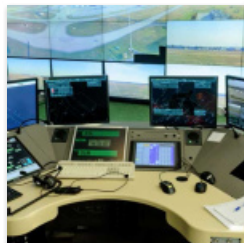


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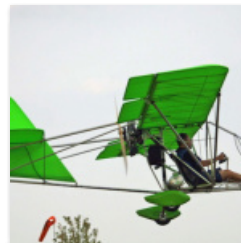
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