

Eyes Outside, Not On The Boxes!

July 16, 2013

I hope everyone is having a good soaring season even with the recent monsoon weather pattern.

The recent Asiana Airlines accident brings home some elementary aviation truths that bear repeating. Perhaps one causal factor in that tragedy is the level of automation which is even creeping into soaring and sailplanes. The connection - basic flying skills and discipline degrading or being ignored whether you are flying an Airbus or a Grob 103A.

In sailplanes there are a lot of new "boxes" being used and relied upon. As heads down time increases heads up time decreases. As heads up time decreases safety decreases.

The modern soaring pilot is going to have to gain new skill sets to not get trapped in a situation where simple see and avoid is not practiced resulting in an incident or accident perhaps fatally!

Something new today is PFLARM which overall can increase safety but if relied upon too heavily will certainly decrease safety.

PFLARM is a great new technology when properly used and in an environment where all or most other sailplanes are equipped with it. There are important limitations you should be aware of however with this device.

At the start, let's state that everyone realizes visual lookout is still primary. Broadcasting location and intentions via radio as gliders move around is critical for situational awareness in limited airspace such as a gaggle or contest area. Note that the PFLARM has one feature of the system which is to discard traffic while circling so "See and be Seen" remains primary for survival in the gaggle.

Remember PFLARM is only good for other such equipped aircraft (ADS-B when the norm will show up and see you also) so be alert along the Salt Lake City corridors especially as fast moving, level, climbing or descending private or commercial aircraft will not be seeing you nor will fast moving military aircraft.

Keep your eyes outside for safety!

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