Always check the security of the seats and particularly the pilot's seat. There have been several fatal accidents over the years as the result of a pilot's seat sliding back on its tracks just after takeoff. Also check the integrity of window and door locks. While windows popping open in flight tend to be more frightening to passengers than anything serious, a door popping open can have consequences. Most aircraft can fly with an unlatched door, but I once had a door pop open during an instrument approach in a multiengine aircraft and it scattered the approach charts, in my admittedly open binder, all over the aircraft. Baggage and access doors, on the other hand, can cause problems if they open in flight, depending on where they're located. Twins with wing lockers may have baggage come streaming out. Single-engine aircraft cowling doors can tear off and fly into the windshield.

Finally, an aircraft with an organized cabin is easier and less stressful to fly. Have your pilot's bag behind the front passenger's seat so it is easy to reach across and find something. Put things in the same logical places all the time so you know where to reach for them when the pressure is on. And make sure they're secured so they don't float around in flight unless, of course, you want to impress your friends.

When I was a young, brash flight instructor, I used to call my handmade IFR clipboard George and always leave it right on the instrument panel when flying with a student. Inevitably, students would ask why I called it George and I'd tell them that I had designed and built it to do most of the organization for me so the old saying about "Let George do it" had come to mind. Then I would tell them George and I had bonded and I wouldn't fly without him. In fact, George will even come to me if I call him, I would tell them with a deadpan expression.

Now flight students can be naive and they certainly don't want to get on the wrong side of their instructor, but that was too tall a tale for anyone to take quietly. So they'd challenge me, we'd bet a cup of coffee on it, and then I'd simply extend my hand in the air above it, call out, "Come, George," and pull a few negative Gs so it would float up and into my hand. Okay, it was kind of a stupid trick in retrospect, as if a trainer aircraft needed any additional Gs, but it never failed to get a laugh from the student and a free cup of coffee for me. That little game ended when one day a student surprised me and stalled out the aircraft on takeoff. As I was wrestling the controls from the student, George kissed me right between the eyes and came close to getting all three of us killed. From that day forward, everything was secured in the cabin of any aircraft I flew.

TRANSPARENCIES

For all the years I taught in collegiate aviation, I don't think I ever encountered a student who knew that aircraft windows are properly called transparencies. For many years transparencies were exclusively made of glass. There is actually a lot to be said for glass, as it has excellent optical qualities, is easy to maintain, and is very resistant to scratching. In fact, scratches were often the result of windshield wipers dragging trapped sand and dirt across the surface of the glass, a problem that could be virtually eliminated by cleaning the blades often and never running the wipers when the window was dry. Light to moderate surface scratches in glass are acceptable until they get to the point that they