

Pass It On®...

How to Land an Airplane Without Landing Gear.

17-year-old Maggie Taraska landed her airplane without landing gear on her way to flying solo cross-country.

At 17 years old, most people are still struggling to parallel park. Yes, it takes a bit of practice. And once the car is parked, the day is packed with school activities and homework and just hanging out with friends. But at 17, Maggie Taraska had an outrageous goal in mind: Fly solo across the United States.

Both of Maggie's parents are Air Force veterans, so the urge to be airborne is in Maggie's genes. So she went to flight school, put in the hours with an instructor and started on her solo hours. But on her first solo takeoff, out of a small airport in Massachusetts, something didn't sound right. The plane had lost one of the landing gear wheels.

"As soon as I took off, I heard something," Maggie said. "I just felt something was wrong instinctively."

The Piper Cub had plenty of gas, so her instructor had time to talk her through the maneuvers from the ground while she circled a few times to gather herself.

"I was just petrified. I was thinking about all of the bad things that could've happened; I was thinking about how my parents were on the ground and I knew that they were watching."

Stress and panic can cause any of us to make rash decisions. It takes mental practice to calm down. Take a few breaths, focus on the moment, follow the plan. And remember to breathe. "I panicked a bit, but I followed my training."

Maggie was a little shaky as she talked to the tower, but she executed a perfect belly landing that skidded on the infield grass. Her father couldn't be more proud.

"By the time I saw Maggie on her approach, it was a better approach than I could've flown," he said. Cheers erupted in the tower when she landed, and Maggie took a deep breath and climbed out of the plane.

Credit does go to the crew for talking her through the procedure. We all need someone to talk us through challenging times. But in the end, it was all Maggie at the controls.

We could all be forgiven for calling it quits after an ordeal like that. After all, it was a bit traumatic. So walking away would be understandable. But five days later, Maggie was going through her pre-flight safety inspections, checking under the hood, checking the wings, and especially checking the landing gear.

"It feels amazing," she said about being up in the air again. "It feels really freeing."

At some point in our lives, we will all be in a situation for the first time. It's scary. But if you face your fears, the whole world opens up to you.

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