

Spotter Responsibility

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While at the field recently I was asked, “What does a Pilot Spotter do?” I quickly told him, “Spot for the Pilot.” I thought about my answer for a few minutes and I realized that was not a good answer. Do you know what the responsibility of the Pilot Spotter is? I asked a few pilots and I got the same answer from most, “Spot for the Pilot”. So, what does that mean?

The Pilot Spotter, or just Spotter, is a safety person for the pilot. The Pilot and Spotter should be a team working together for the safety of the pilot, the spotter, the aircraft, and all parties at or near the field. Whereas the Pilot has the responsibility of flying his/her aircraft in a safe manner, the Spotter has many other responsibilities, which include:

- Relay messages from the flight line and safety personnel to the pilot about landing aircraft, aircraft emergencies or Dead Stick landings by others, aircraft on the field and other information important to the pilot flying the aircraft. The pilot may be concentrating on the aircraft in flight and may not hear or pay attention to background messages on the field.
- Relay messages from the pilot to the flight line and/or safety personnel about landing, emergency or Dead Stick landings, and other information that needs to be passed from the pilot to others.
- Be the eyes of the pilot away from the aircraft. Watch the flight line and inform your pilot of aircraft taxiing in front of the pilot, people on the runway line, obstacles on the ground if the pilot walks around while flying, or other safety issues that your pilot should be aware of.
- Watch the other aircraft in flight and inform your pilot of aircraft that may cross the flight path to your pilot’s aircraft. Changes in pattern direction or aircraft in different flight types (aerobatic vs. pattern flight) crossing your pilot’s flight path should be reported.
- Keep the pilot advised of the type of aircraft that are being started for flight. Some pilots may be flying the pattern and if a 3D aerobatic aircraft is getting ready to fly the pilot may decide to fly at a different altitude or land the aircraft.
- Minimize the distractions to the pilot in flight. The Spotter is the eyes and ears for the pilot. Anything that could distract the attention to the pilot should be explained to the pilot so that the pilot can keep his/her eyes on the aircraft and not look at the distraction.
- A Pilot Spotter may also assist the pilot at contests, such as a Pattern Contest, by providing information to the pilot about the next maneuver at key points of the flight.

The above is not a complete list of responsibilities that the Spotter has. Some pilots will have specific instructions for their Pilot Spotters as to what to do, what to watch for, and what to explain. Each Pilot and Pilot Spotter should discuss these responsibilities before each flight.

Every field has different rules for the use of a Pilot Spotter during flight operations. Most fields do not require a Pilot Spotter when no organized event is scheduled or the number of pilots flying is low. Other fields require a Pilot Spotter on all flight activities. Most fields require the use of a Pilot Spotter during all scheduled events. Do check with your club or field rules about the use of a Pilot Spotter.

The ultimate purpose of a Pilot Spotter is to increase safety for all. So be a good Spotter and help keep our field, and our pilots, safe.