



Cat & Duck Method of Instrument Flight

The basic rules for the Cat and Duck method of instrument flight are fairly well known and are extremely simple. Here's how it's done:

1. Place a live cat on the cockpit floor; because a cat always remains upright, he or she can be used in lieu of a needle and ball. Merely watch to see which way the cat leans to determine if a wing is low, and if so, which one.
2. The duck is used for the instrument approach and landing. Because of the fact that any sensible duck will refuse to fly under instrument conditions, it is only necessary to hurl your duck out of the plane and follow her to the ground.

There are some limitations to the Cat and Duck Method, but by rigidly adhering to the following checklist, a degree of success will be achieved which will surely startle you, your passengers, and even an occasional tower operator:

1. Get a wide-awake cat. Most cats do not want to stand up at all. It may be necessary to carry a large dog in the cockpit to keep the cat at attention.
2. Make sure your cat is clean. Dirty cats will spend all their time washing. Trying to follow a washing cat usually results in a tight snap roll followed by an inverted spin (flat).
3. Use old cats only. Young cats have nine lives, but old, used-up cats with only one life left have just as much to lose as you do and will be more dependable.
4. Beware of cowardly ducks. If the duck discovers that you are using the cat to stay upright, she will refuse to leave without the cat. Ducks are no better in IFR conditions than you are.
5. Be sure that the duck has good eyesight. Nearsighted ducks sometimes fail to realize that they are on the gauges and go flogging off into the nearest hill. Very nearsighted ducks will not realize they have been thrown out and will descend to the ground in a sitting position. This maneuver is very difficult to follow in an airplane.
6. Use land-loving ducks. It is very discouraging to break out and find yourself on final for a rice paddy, particularly if there are duck hunters around. Duck hunters suffer from temporary insanity while sitting in freezing weather in the blinds and will shoot at anything that flies.
7. Choose your duck carefully. It is easy to confuse ducks with geese because many water birds look alike. While they are very competent instrument fliers, geese seldom want to go in the same direction as you. If your duck heads off for Canada or Mexico, you may be sure that you have been given the goose.

From Instrument Flying by Richard Taylor