

Look At Clouds From Both Sides Now

Different types of cloud formations, including fog, present different challenges for pilots. But it's almost impossible for someone who's never been inside any type of cloud to understand the differences.

GROUND FOG

One problem with the kind of fog pictured here is how it forms close to terrain (fog is just a stratus cloud at or slightly above the ground, of course) as the surface cools. Other kinds of fog form near bodies of water or after heavy rains.

WHITE PUFFIES

Poking in and out of cumulus clouds usually is benign, until they start developing vertically in the afternoon and earn the “nimbus” status. They're usually at altitude, but can confound your search for the airport on a visual approach.

MORE STRATUS

Flat, mid-level cloud formations—unless they're of the lenticular kind—usually don't feature turbulence. They're a great way for cloud-flying neophytes to learn the sights and sensations of being in real weather. In winter, however, they can hold more ice than you ever thought possible.

THUNDERSTORMS

By the time someone earns an instrument rating, they shouldn't have to be warned to stay out of thunderstorms. Yet, a few pilots fail this test each year, often breaking the airplane in the bargain. There's little to learn or gain by flying into one, intentionally or not.

