

The Fire Hose Chronicles

G550 Initial Type Rating at FlightSafety | by Matt Thurber

A text from the boss, highly unusual: “Check your email.” Must be something important, and indeed it is. He says I’m going to FlightSafety International’s Long Beach, Calif. learning center for a Gulfstream G550 type rating! I’m speechless, and enormously grateful for a fantastic opportunity. Little did I know what I was getting myself into, but I would soon learn.

My last type-rating exposure was also at Long Beach, in the Citation 500. It was a terrific experience, especially for someone (me) who is a seriously addicted training junkie. While that experience was somewhat stressful and fairly full of extra-curricular studying, I spent some time before class studying the Pilot Training Handbook (PTH) and other materials that FlightSafety provided in advance of the start date. These were all printed, not electronic like the current materials.

I knew the G550 initial course would be far more challenging. The G550 is a much more complex airplane, the initial course is nearly a month long and I was new to its Honeywell Epic-based PlaneView avionics and also had zero experience flying with a traditional flight management system (FMS). Add to that my lack of regular two-crew flight time and I would have some serious learning curves to scale.

Compared to my classmates I would be at a bit of a disadvantage, and I did worry that I might hold them back. They, after all, were coming to class right off the line, flying similarly large jets in highly structured professionally run flight operations. Surely the class would be easier for them?



FlightSafety uses graphical flight deck simulators as a bridge between ground school and full-motion simulators. The device replicates what pilots will see in the sim, allowing them to review system schematics, checklists and lessons and practice crew resource management. In addition, students can use it as part of instructor-led or self-paced learning.



As it turned out, and from discussions I’ve had with other pilots after the class, a large-jet type-rating course is a stressful event for every student, some more than others, and it’s no cakewalk for anyone. Sure it’s an advantage for a pilot to be familiar with using FMS and two-crew CRM and international long-distance flying, but the course

imposes its own demands that seem to be designed to extract maximum performance from each participant.

I opted for the class scheduled May 16 through June 7, which I thought would give me plenty of time to pre-study. I had already downloaded the study materials on the FlightSafety iPad app because I had used that to prepare for

the one-day FlightSafety upset recovery training course in the G550 simulator in Savannah, Ga., that I did last year. But in any case, as soon as I signed up for the initial course in Long Beach, the current G550 training materials were available.

So I spent my spare time in the two months before the course going over much of this material. I read the entire

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606-page airplane/systems PTH and the 269-page avionics PTH. I studied the FMS training handbook, although it's hard to get much out of that without an actual or simulated FMS to play with. I spent some time with the Client Guide, which helpfully lays out the precise curricula for the graphical flight deck simulator (GFDS) and flight simulator sessions. I read through some of the daily questions that we are supposed to be able to



For an undertaking as complex as G550 initial training, preparation is key. The author spent two months studying the materials on the FlightSafety app before ever setting foot on the company's campus. Below, the path from ground school to the front office of a G550 is an arduous one, but well worth it.

answer, later realizing I should have spent more time on these. I also completed FlightSafety's excellent online G550 recurrent training course, which helped me get more familiar with the G550's systems.

While I appreciated having access to all this material ahead of time, and it did help me, one drawback that I found is that much of the explanations in the PTHs revolve around detailed discussions of what a particular switchlight does. The G550 cockpit is crammed with switchlights, and it's important to understand not only what they do but in what position they are normally supposed to be. Leaving the cabin window heat switch in the wrong position, for example, can cause windows to overheat on the ground, a mistake that costs tens of thousands of dollars to repair.

Each chapter for each system does start out with a basic description of how it works, and I was somewhat pleased to see that the descriptions didn't get too granular. Apparently the trend toward not giving pilots too much useless information is well on its way to being implemented. But I did think that the switchlight explanations were a little hard to follow and difficult

to relate to the operation of the system. I looked forward to ground school, where I hoped the relationship between all the switches and the systems would be better integrated. I also noticed that there are no memory items for the G550, which came as a bit of a surprise. It turns out that Gulfstream has moved away from the memory item philosophy. That was a relief, although there was still plenty of memorization to do, such as all the limitations and answers to questions in the Study Guide.

Weeks 1 and 2: Groundschool

I should know better. When the instructor starts out by saying, "This is a nice easy kind of day," you know that the fire hose is about to get stuck in and switched on to the high-flow setting.

Our first instructor was Michael Wetsman, an experienced airline and corporate pilot whose first business jet job was in a G550 and who flies gliders for fun. I learned that my classmates included two experienced corporate pilots, one a South African based in Abu Dhabi and the other a Saudi Arabian based in Dubai. A young student from China was there to train as

second-in-command, and he had an even steeper learning curve than I, having earned his U.S. pilot certificates and about 300 hours of flying time at a school in Florida. I was partnered with Mario Martinez, a FlightSafety instructor who was upgrading to the G550 after teaching in the King Airs and Citations. Martinez also leads the instructor mentorship program at the Long Beach learning center.

Soon after the introductions, learning center manager Todd Bitgood visited the class. "We're all here to make sure you're successful and meet your objectives," he told us, urging us to let anyone at FlightSafety know if we had any problem or concern. "Problems are relatively easy to fix when they're small," he said. "Our whole team is on your side."

He also explained that the Long Beach center hosts catered client appreciation lunches every Monday. Bitgood introduced senior GV-series program manager Matt Williams, who was available for any Gulfstream-related questions. Like typical FlightSafety facilities, the Long Beach center has a well equipped lounge area with a refrigerator, microwave, brewed and pod coffee, handy food items such as ramen noodles, fruit and other snacks and vending machines.

"There's a lot of nice to know and need to know," Wetsman explained. "I'll tell you which is which. There is so much information; we want you to get the basic foundation." And while, he added, "They tell us you don't need to memorize a lot of numbers, there are some we need to know." He finished the initial briefing by warning us about the written test at the end of the second week, which requires a minimum 80 percent passing score.



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Wetsman next introduced us to all the materials we would be studying and had us sign up for myGulfstream accounts, which would give us access to updated materials on Gulfstream's PlaneBook app. PlaneBook gives access to the actual operating manuals used when flying

the airplane and comprises about 30,000 pages of information. "There is no possible way to learn all this stuff," he assured us, but we would need to learn how to find information quickly.

FlightSafety's own app contains all of the training material

(and has since been updated to the FlightBag app), including the PTHs, Quick Reference Handbook (QRH), FMS task list, iFlightDeck and study guides. The iFlightDeck is particularly handy because it has all the chapters in the systems PTH plus cockpit flow patterns that allow the student to learn and practice the flows independently, without having to use GFDS or desktop simulator (DTS).

Learning the flows would be important, because the G550 is a complex airplane and there are many steps needed to go from dark cockpit to ready to taxi. Knowing the flows speeds things up considerably. Wetsman promised to introduce us to the GFDS sooner than our scheduled Systems Integration

Training (SIT) sessions in the device so we could get more comfortable with the G550 cockpit. "It's all about repetition," he explained. "It's a bridge from ground school to the simulator."

Two books in the FlightSafety app would become familiar to us: the Study Guide and the Client Guide. The latter outlines the syllabus so we know what to expect to cover in each day's class or simulator sessions. At the end of each day, Wetsman promised, he would give us a homework assignment with questions in the Study Guide covering the material we had learned that day. I found the Study Guide helpful, but I think it could use a redesign to make it more useful. As is, each question is followed immediately by the



Students hit the ground running with desktop simulators in their classroom training. The goal is to bring the content of the company's full-motion sims to the classroom, so there are no surprises when pilots strap into the sim midway through the course. Below, pilots finally got a chance to step into the simulator, and instructors made sure to emphasize the purpose was training, not evaluation.



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answer; there isn't a good way to hide the answer, at least while using the guide on the iPad. A little more interactivity would be helpful, where the answer doesn't show and the student has to fill in blanks or figure out the answer first.

Drilling Down

To get us more familiar with the G550, Wetsman went over some important documents such as the Stall Awareness Client Guide, PlaneBook materials, limitations that we'd need to memorize and the QRH, which is 600-plus pages of hyperlinked CAS messages, checklists and other quickly available information.

The discussion of crew resource management (CRM) went over some fundamentals that were important not only for me, an occasional two-crew pilot, but also for the students in the class who fly regularly. Wetsman said that he sees pilots in recurrent training getting lazy with CRM, and it shows in standard operating procedures (SOPs). The current flavor of CRM taught by FlightSafety is the concept of one pilot flying and the other pilot monitoring. "You can't monitor the pilot flying if you don't know what he's supposed to be doing," he pointed out.

In modern cockpits like the G550's, the flight mode annunciator (FMA) is key to monitoring the flight path and an important part of CRM. Wetsman likes to see pilots verbally calling out modes and other indications such as lateral and vertical changes. "It's an automation discipline," he said. "I find people staring at it and they don't know what to expect. If I call

it out loud, they know what to expect. You should be aware of what the mode should be. If you do it the same every time, the pilot monitoring knows what to expect. I've got to know what you're supposed to do to know that you're making a mistake."

We would be using the cockpit flow process for checklists, and there are nine flow patterns that we had to memorize, in addition to the standard maneuvers and callouts that are somewhat common in most business jets but have some specifics that apply to the G550. The latter included everything from calling out "1,000 to go"

when approaching a cleared altitude to detailed profiles for takeoffs, various approaches and landings. Using flows, Wetsman said, speeds up cockpit tasks and, when followed by the "read and do" checklist, ensures that the crew verifies each item on the checklist. "You have to force yourself to look at the button again," he said. "Your expectations mislead you, and you have to slow it up and look. We teach the flow, we expect the flow."

Avionics and Systems

During the rest of the day and the following two weeks, we

dived into the G550's avionics and systems. As promised, Wetsman took us to the GFDS and showed us how to run it. The GFDS replicates the G550 cockpit using touchscreen monitors, so there are no physical buttons and knobs. The GFDS is an excellent training device, especially considering it is built on an ancient Microsoft Windows XP operating system. Not only could we practice all the cockpit flows in the GFDS, but we could also use it to set up and fly takeoffs, departures, arrivals and approaches.

For an airplane with so many pushbutton switchlights, the GFDS proved extremely useful. But it was somewhat difficult to use for what should be relatively simple actions such as changing a heading or altitude. Because it has no physical knobs, the GFDS uses pop-up plus or minus boxes for setting these numbers, and they were difficult to use and often required lots of back and forth to get the right number set. FlightSafety is working on updating the GFDS software, which will be a welcome improvement.

We also used the DTS in class, which replicate a lot of the GFDS functionality but using a trackball instead of touchscreen. The DTS is also a helpful training tool, especially when practicing FMS programming, and it, too, is getting upgraded. I would have liked more access to the DTS after class hours, but FlightSafety keeps classrooms locked when not in use.

The 10 days of ground-school weren't too stressful, but day by day it was clear that our workload was accelerating.

Before students could set foot in the G500 full-motion sim, they needed to score at least 80 percent on their ground-school test. No surprise: these professional pilots went beyond 'good enough' and everyone scored at least 90 percent.



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The number of questions in the Client Guide kept climbing, the limitations and flash-card memory items required a lot of time and effort and we all knew we needed to have the nine cockpit flows down cold before we started flying in the simulator. Add to that learning how to use the FMS, plus what seemed, to me at least, to be a convoluted method for setting up an instrument approach in the PlaneView cockpit, and the pressure began to build.

We spent the second week in groundschool with instructor Matt Abel, another talented member of the FlightSafety Long Beach instructor team. I quickly realized that instructors bring their own individual experience and background to the classroom, and this

reminded me that the training replicates what many pilots experience when flying with different crewmembers. Instructors each have their own methods and areas of focus, and students are exposed to different ways of looking at the material. This is good preparation for learning to deal with fellow pilots who aren't all cookie-cutter similar, but it also occasionally resulted in a little head scratching as we tried to figure out where to focus our limited attention spans.

What I liked about Abel's classroom was his easygoing manner, which helped keep us on an even keel, but at the same time he managed to cram a lot of information into our overstuffed brains.

He was especially helpful in giving us tips about what to expect when flying the G550 and for handling the inevitable emergencies.

Going to any training company is often like old home week, with frequent opportunities to run into old friends and instructors from previous programs. I met a lot of interesting pilots and mechanics during my G550 initial and renewed acquaintanceships with friends I hadn't seen in a while. When I ran into Al Dyer, my simulator instructor for the Citation type rating I had done four years earlier, he asked how things were going. When I told him that my brain was already starting to feel over full, he laughed and told me his penguin analogy. Our brains aren't equipped to hold unlimited

amounts of information, so like penguins fighting over a limited space on an ice floe, where one can climb on only after another dives off, we need to make space for all the new information that is being dumped on us. Little did I know that my penguin troubles were just beginning.

As soon as we were checked out in the GFDS, we all began spending spare time practicing flows and running through the various "snapshots" programmed into the system to get familiar with takeoffs, landings, approaches and so on and the roles each pilot plays. I spent hours in the GFDS, before class, during lunch and after class. After arriving home (I live about 30 minutes from the Long Beach center), I would quickly eat dinner then dig back



The G550 is an airplane that you fly by the numbers, not by how it feels, and the simulator drove that lesson home pretty quickly.

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into the iPad to study some more. I give great credit to my family for putting up with me during this time as they saw me only during mealtimes, but they never complained and left me to my studies.

By the end of the ground-school, we felt confident about the written test, and we all passed with more than 90 percent. Time to go fly the simulator.

Weeks 3 and 4: **Simulator**

Before we could start flying the simulator, we were each scheduled for three SIT sessions in the GFDS. These sessions were designed to get us up to speed on cockpit flows, FMS programming, approach setups, and so on, so we would have more time to concentrate on flying the G550 simulator. Martinez and I had our SITs with Peter Elmore, who has an extensive background in developing Rnav approaches and is an expert in modern avionics capabilities. His demonstration of flying a full Waas-LPV approach in the GFDS, despite its limitations, made me appreciate the device even more.

Our first SIT was on the Saturday between the two weeks of groundschool, then we had sessions on the following Saturday and Sunday before starting the simulator sessions. Elmore was able to schedule us for the final SIT session in the G550 simulator, and this was a big step up from the GFDS.

Elmore urged us to understand vertical navigation (Vnav) “and what it will and won’t do

for you. It won’t fix mistakes, but it helps prevent them.” He also gave us a helpful summary of automation, which is unavoidable in the G550. “We are no longer in the Wilbur and Orville school of flight,” he said. “We are in the Buck Rogers school. The FAA is designing procedures for airplanes like this. Know why it’s doing what it’s doing. Automation is the one thing that will get you into trouble real quick.”

In the simulator we finally got to try a startup from dark cockpit to ready to taxi, and it took us well over an hour. Getting to feel the switchlights pushing and clicking into place was tremendously satisfying, as was being able to move the throttles during the ground spoiler functional check and moving the parking brake handle for real, instead of pushing the GFDS’s touchscreen. Martinez and I both found that the look and feel in the simulator was far different from the GFDS. Some switchlights, for example, are blocked by various controls, so you have to look carefully to make sure you are seeing the action on the switchlight while running the checklist.

We had two simulator instructors, Allen Spencer and Shahab Malik, both highly experienced Gulfstream pilots. Spencer reminded us during the preflight briefing that “this is all training, nothing but training. We will not evaluate you. There is nothing you can do wrong in the simulator, because we’re going to train. Let’s make it a point that we’re going to learn about this airplane together.”

In the first simulator session, Martinez was pilot flying in the left seat and I flew right seat. In every maneuver, which included airwork such as steep turns and stalls, Martinez made flying the G550 look so easy that I probably got a little over-confident. His landing at the end of the session was perfect, and even though he hadn’t flown with a head-up display (HUD) before, he latched onto that device quickly and came to appreciate its value.

Left Seat in the Sim

It was my turn to fly from the left seat on the second day, and I quickly learned that the G550 doesn’t tolerate any sloppiness. The previous day I had thought I could easily fly the stall recoveries and steep turns as well as Martinez, but they were more difficult than I thought. When I finally got to land the G550, I was somewhat embarrassed when I had a hard time keeping the big jet lined up with the runway. My problem, it turned out, was that I was trying to fly the G550 “emotionally,” that is, by feel and not by the numbers. You just can’t do that with such a large heavy airplane, and I found I had to work on this constantly during the rest of the training.

During the third session with Spencer, he added more complex operations, flight planning, diversions, V₁ cuts and other emergencies, and I came to appreciate Martinez’s skills at the controls. No matter what the instructor threw at him, Martinez handled the situation calmly, professionally and with

an amazingly smooth touch on the controls.

During the simulator sessions with Spencer, he also introduced us to the circling approach at Memphis, where we began with a localizer approach to Runway 27, then broke off and circled to land on Runway 18R. While Martinez flew this perfectly the first few times, I had a lot of trouble with this one, and it was mostly because I was flying emotionally. I was trying to muscle the G550 around and judge the right time to descend and turn for the runway just by feel. This clearly wasn’t working, even though Spencer let me try it a bunch of times. Another problem with this approach is that at the end, we are required to touch down -250 or +500 feet from the aiming point markings on the runway. Even if the runway is plenty long, we are still held to a tight standard after an approach where we’re trying to maneuver 80,000 pounds of airplane just below the clouds at 600 feet agl.

Meanwhile, I used the extra time before and after the sim sessions to study the Study Guide questions, flashcards, QRH, PTH and performance calculations, and I spent more time in the GFDS, practicing flows, profiles and setups. At home, my family could tell that I was getting increasingly stressed. I snapped at my wife to turn off the light late at night when I couldn’t sleep. When my daughter, who was in her first year of college, asked me how the training was going, I told

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her I was starting to feel overwhelmed. “Welcome to my life, Dad,” she said wryly.

I felt like the penguins were not playing fair and jumping off the ice floe to make more room for other penguins, but mounting a furious battle over limited brain space and getting ready to move into my increasingly nervous stomach.

Martinez and I progressed in the simulator, with the next three sessions taught by Malik. When we first met with Malik, he said, “There’s no stress with me. We can freeze the simulator. If you have any questions, ask for a freeze.”

It was interesting to see the differences in how the two instructors prepared and taught their lessons, and it was refreshing to experience their different viewpoints on flying the G550. Malik had some excellent suggestions for pre-takeoff and approach and landing briefings and other processes such as setting up the approach, and I adopted some of his suggestions because I liked their brevity and they were easy to memorize. I did learn, however, that it can be confusing to make a change in my processes this late in the game. I think it would be better to settle on these items before starting the class or at least before flying in the simulator to keep it simpler and avoid confusion, and perhaps more experienced corporate pilots do this.

I did find it helpful to write out all the procedures and profiles, just to help cement them in my memory. Another move that helped was preparing for the next day’s flight by studying the maneuvers and writing down the steps required.

With Malik, we spent more time flying scenarios that

included emergencies such as a dual hydraulic system failure and no-flaps landing (ably handled by the skillful Martinez at the suddenly heavy controls), wind-shear encounters, engine fires and failures, emergency evacuation, emergency descents and an ILS approach using the standby flight display.

This simulates a complete electrical failure that leaves only emergency battery power. When I flew that approach, Martinez was amazingly steady handling the throttles and giving me instructions to help me fly the raw data ILS, and we ended up with a decent approach and landing. When it was his turn to fly the same approach, my ability to keep him on track and speed resulted in some largish excursions, and I could tell that he was a bit frustrated, but we broke out of the simulated clouds and landed safely. I felt bad for not being a better copilot, but it was a good learning experience. Gulfstreams are reliable, and this scenario is unlikely, yet it is worthwhile to have been exposed to that maneuver.

By this time we were supposed to be ready for our checkrides. Martinez certainly was ready, at least from the flying standpoint. He also had to study a lot of extra material because he was taking a Part 135 checkride and thus had to know the operator’s SOPs. Malik had also run me through the Memphis circling approach a few times, with results that weren’t exactly satisfactory. I wasn’t feeling terribly confident at this point; the penguins were about to stage a mutiny, and I was running out of time to nail down all the study material to prepare for the checkride.

We had one more simulator

session with Spencer before the checkride, and we used that to go over airwork, to practice handling emergencies and to attempt to straighten out my Memphis circling approach. It didn’t get a whole lot better. The pressure was mounting and coming to a head.

Additional Prep Time

I was studying in the break room on Monday the day before the checkride when I was called into the office of program manager Williams. He explained that they were scheduling me for an additional simulator session, to help finish off my rough edges. Rather than feeling disappointed, I felt a huge weight lift off my shoulders. This would give me a whole extra day-and-a-half to prepare, as the checkride was now scheduled for Thursday afternoon, with my last session with Spencer on Wednesday.

My family noticed my less stressed-out demeanor when I got home, and for the first time in weeks I didn’t go right upstairs to study after dinner but relaxed for a bit. I slept well that night, then dug in for the final study effort.

I had two major goals at this point: finish studying all the answers to the 35 pages of Study Guide questions and figure out how to nail that Memphis circling approach.

Earlier, I had printed out all 35 pages of questions, and as I studied them I split them into three piles: all, some and few answers known. The pile started off a few days before with most pages in the latter two categories, but they were gradually moving into the known pile, and I kept working on them over and over.

Meanwhile, I had discussed

the Memphis circling approach with Spencer, and he helped me figure out a procedure that would help me fly less emotionally and more step-by-step. We honed it closer to the required standard during the sixth sim session, and I could see that the procedure was working.

I fired up my X-Plane desktop simulator at home and loaded the heaviest airplane that I could find that was a jet and also had decent flight characteristics and the necessary cockpit features. No one has created a good Gulfstream for X-Plane yet, so I had to settle for the 777.

I set the 777 up on the Runway 27 localizer approach for Memphis. I had written out the step-by-step circling procedure on a 3-by-5 card, and I spent hours flying it over and over, with the weather set up exactly like the FlightSafety simulator, about 900 overcast with two miles visibility. The key to getting it right is to stay on autopilot after leveling off at circling minimums, then keep your eyes on the flashing lead-in lights for Runway 27, then watch them while using the heading bug to turn right 30 degrees and keep looking outside for the end of Runway 18L, then 18C and finally 18R. As soon as you see 18C, you can start turning back toward 18R, but keep using the heading bug and stay on autopilot. Don’t turn too much or you won’t be able to line up with the runway. If you turn too little, you’ll overshoot.

I couldn’t quite set the 777 simulation up the same as the G550, but by shooting the approach a few dozen times, I trained my brain to recognize the environment and got comfortable turning just the correct amount to the right, then

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steering back as I saw the end of the runway. I couldn't really use the autopilot like in the G550, but ultimately this exercise did help a lot.

I spent the rest of the afternoon shuffling the questions to the known pile and finished most of them by the following morning. As is always the case with tests, I felt like I was as ready as I was going to get. But I was also grateful for the extra training session and time.

I felt confident going into the checkride, and the oral and all the maneuvers seemed to go well, but I did have a little concern about the circling approach. When it was time, I fell back on my practice and the by-now familiar procedure. We broke out below the cloud deck and leveled off at circling minimums, and I kept my gaze outside looking for the lights on Runway 27. As soon as I saw them, I used the heading bug to turn 30 degrees to the right and started looking for the 18 runways.

I had already asked my copilot, the talented FlightSafety intern Thomas Jacobson, to set the guidance panel up with a three-degree descent angle. And this is the key to getting

this approach right: when you see Runway 18R, it's time to descend, but if you switch off the autopilot and try to finesse it—flying emotionally—you're not going to make it and will probably descend too quickly or not enough.

I held my finger over the selector button for flight path angle on the guidance panel, and moments after spotting 18R, I pushed that button, and the autopilot obediently pitched down at the required three-degree angle.

In a few moments, everything looked perfect so I clicked off the autopilot and let the autothrottles maintain airspeed at VREF while I lined the G550 up with Runway 18R then touched down relatively smoothly within the required distance from the aiming point markings.

The last maneuver was a no-flaps landing, and after that the examiner didn't make me sweat too long before he told me that I had passed the checkride.

My fellow classmates all passed with flying colors, although one had an additional challenge: an FAA inspector sitting in on his entire checkride.

He was fine with the FAA oversight and took it in stride. Our Chinese colleague amazed everyone with his knowledge of the G550's systems and cockpit procedures, and he worked extremely hard to overcome any deficiencies related to his lack of experience.

Prep for Procedures

I had spent the two months before the class studying all the FlightSafety handbooks and exercising my flying muscles in the most sophisticated airplane I could rent, a Cirrus SR20 with the Garmin-based Perspective integrated flight deck. While there was little transfer of learning between the Cirrus and the G550, I found that flying the SR20 helped rewire my brain to become more used to the G550's displays and interfaces.

The advantage of flying the SR20 with synthetic vision and its keyboard FMS interface is that it forces the pilot to think more about following profiles and procedures, something that is required in the G550, as well as monitoring flightpath according to the guidance panel and flight mode annunciators.

In recent years, Cirrus has

focused much of its training on teaching pilots to use consistent procedures and to fly according to profiles outlined in its flight operations manual. This attitude toward flying is much more professional and will help pilots prepare better when transitioning into larger, faster and more complex airplanes.

In my case, lacking a regular jet flying job, the Cirrus flying helped me get more ready for the G550 training than I would have been otherwise.

Transitioning into any new aircraft is always fun, but spending nearly a month in class and in a simulator and learning how to fly a complex airplane like the G550 was a huge challenge. I did enjoy the process, even though it was stressful and occasionally overwhelming. All in all, it has made me a better pilot and provided far more understanding of what professional pilots experience as a normal part of their careers. □

After the grueling training Thurber takes to the air. Read "Flying the G550" in next month's issue.