

# OSCAR X-RAY

*When you are flying on instruments, always stay flexible.*

Geoffrey Rice

Instrument flying instructor, Oxford Kidlington,

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Many have a dream, some live one; a golf handicap of four, the summit of Mont Blanc, racing a vintage Talbot at Le Mans or sailing the Atlantic Ocean. My personal Waterloo was to gain the Instrument Rating (I/R), a professional flying qualification, and fly a perfect four-minute hold over the Oxford non-directional beacon at Kidlington Aerodrome; call sign OX or Oscar X-ray. Its frequency, 403 kHz, lies in my heart, like Calais in the heart of Queen Mary I; or it did until it was retuned to 376.5kHz. Nerd.

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When we learn to walk, drive or fly we use the special senses: vision, balance, hearing and proprioception – the means by which we know the position of our limbs without having to take a look at them. We are also able to perceive vibration, pressure, pain, temperature, touch and smell. Smell may not seem too important in an aircraft but it may warn of smoke, and fire obeys no checklists. In one aeroplane I owned it was the only way of telling if the petrol-burning heater was on. These modalities are integrated by the brain and help us to determine where we are in relation to our environment. Flying involves primarily vision but balance and proprioception are of major importance too. Without instruments, in that strange aviation jargon, we fly