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## *SFAR outlines more stringent training for MU-2 pilots*

by Matt Thurber

More than two years after the FAA completed its latest evaluation of the relatively high accident rate of the Mitsubishi MU-2 twin turboprop, the agency issued a special FAR (SFAR 108) that makes MU-2 training mandatory for all pilots who want to fly the airplane. The action marks only the second time that the FAA has issued special training regulations for type-specific pilot training in aircraft that don't require a type rating. In the mid-1990s the FAA issued an SFAR for the Robinson R22 two-seat helicopter, later adding the four-seat R44.

In January 2006 an FAA flight standardization board (FSB) issued a report on the MU-2 after flight testing the airplane as part of an FAA safety evaluation. Once the FSB issued its report, commercial operators of the MU-2 were required to adopt new training standards that became the basis of SFAR 108. These standards, now codified in the SFAR and applying to all MU-2 pilots, include mandatory training for new MU-2 pilots, mandatory recurrent training and a requirement that pilots use the Mitsubishi standardized cockpit checklist and latest revision of the AFM. In addition, a working autopilot is required for nearly all single-pilot flights. The new MU-2 training is available at SimCom, Howell Enterprises and Professional Flight Training.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries America officials have for many years asked the FAA to impose a type-rating requirement on the MU-2, in an effort to tighten training standards for the airplane. The MU-2, like any turboprop that weighs less than 12,500 pounds, can be flown by any multiengine-rated pilot, regardless of whether that pilot has any experience operating turbine engines and pressurization systems. Type ratings don't include a recurrent training requirement, so SFAR 108 is actually more stringent than a type rating.

### **Safety Record Improves**

After the FAA issued the FSB report, the MU-2 accident record improved, and there have been no accidents among commercial operators of the MU-2 since then. During 2006 there were three fatal Part 91 MU-2 accidents, but even before the SFAR was issued, MU-2 training companies began teaching to the proposed new requirements. No MU-2s have crashed since the 2006 accidents.

The FAA safety evaluation was a response to political pressure to address an accident rate that some people claimed was extraordinarily high. Studies of accident histories have shown that the MU-2's accident rate is not necessarily high compared to its turboprop peers. But families of accident victims persuaded some lawmakers to contact the FAA in an effort either to tighten MU-2 operational requirements or

ground the few hundred that remain. Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-Colo.) was one of the more vocal legislators who contacted the FAA. Tancredo even sponsored a bill in the House of Representatives, H.R.6058, that would have directed "the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration to prohibit the operation of the aircraft known as the Mitsubishi MU-2 in the airspace of the United States until the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration certifies that the aircraft is safe and the certification is approved by law." The bill never gained traction.

One long-time MU-2 pilot told **AIN** that the SFAR "is a feel-good thing." However, he added, "I'm all for recurrent training, mandatory if necessary. We think it's a great airplane, safe, efficient, fast, but it's got to be flown by the book." □