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Why Did You Go Around? You Wasted A Lot Of Fuel!

A few years back I was flying a Learjet 25 and I had onboard a relatively high-profile passenger who chartered our aircraft for a one-way trip from Michigan to Teterboro Airport in New Jersey. The flight was conducted in the early evening and the weather for the route was good VFR with some occasional light turbulence. Upon our arrival into the New York area there was a significant amount of turbulence and windshear due to a strong cold front that had just passed through the area. Surface winds were out of the north/northwest at 15-25 knots with occasional higher gusts and windshear was being reported by all aircraft landing in the New York metro area. The Teterboro ATIS reported that Runway 01 was closed due to construction which meant that we would have to land on Runway 06 with a direct crosswind and windshear. Threat and error management red flags were popping up all over the place. Our arrival into Teterboro unfolded as follows:

It took everything I had to maintain a stabilized approach path. Below 500 feet the windshear was so bad that at times I needed full power to maintain our target Vref speed. I had a decision to make at about 200 feet; do I continue for the sake of getting the passenger to his destination and to satisfy my boss, or do I execute a go-around and then try to sort out options, which included a diversion to Newark? I chose to go-around. At the same time, the passenger, who was visibly annoyed, came to the front of the airplane and asked why we didn't land. I explained and was

then chastised because he had a tight schedule and someone waiting to pick him up. He said I would hear about it if he had to wind up in Newark. I informed him that I would try one more approach and if we couldn't get in then we had no choice but to divert to Newark. He walked back to his seat (which he should have been in to begin with...seatbelt securely fastened) and gave me a dirty look. I briefed my first officer that I was going to give it one more try into Teterboro. However, if the picture still looked the same, we would divert to Newark without question. We were fortunate on our second approach in that the windshear subsided enough to allow me to make a safe landing. We taxied to the FBO, dropped off our passenger, and went to the hotel for the evening. The outcome was successful and I slept well that night.

The next day I received a call from my charter company asking why I had to conduct a go-around (since go-arounds are a fairly rare event). I gave them the details and in the interest of safety certainly felt that I made the right decision. The response from the charter company was that I wasted quite a bit of fuel on the go-around and that is a cost that the company would have to absorb. Not once was I commended for making a prudent, safe decision as the captain of their aircraft. On the other hand I am absolutely sure that if I would have landed and had an accident this same company would have been the first to ask how I could have made such a terrible decision to land in those conditions (if I were alive to talk about it). And as far as the passenger...well...he was a very high-profile attorney. Need I say more?

Do you have any similar stories? I'd love to hear about them!