



Talking senses about cockpit alerts

The many issues raised in “Autoflight Audit” (ASW, 6/08, p. 30), related to the pilot-automation interface, reminded me of one thing I’ve lost transitioning from the old “mechanical” cockpit to the “glass” version, and that was the *click*.

Although not contemplated in the flight manuals, old cockpits actually signaled the flight mode annunciator changes with the audible click of a flipping flag, which caught a pilot’s attention. Glass cockpits, friendly though they are, have grown silent; audible cues are categorized as cautions and warnings; and awareness has come to rely entirely on visual monitoring. The sole remaining discrete aural cue is the triple-click warning for landing capability degradation.

I think that modern cockpit design is wasting some resources in human

input ability — the aural and tactile inputs. In high-workload flight phases, the use of cues other than visual optimizes the human interface. The click announcing a flight mode change is an extra that can capture a pilot’s attention at the right moment, gaining seconds compared to the routine visual scan.

A moving throttle lever informs the pilot of the autothrottle system performance via his hand, while a static lever may require a visual confirmation of the commanded thrust indexes in the center panel at a critical heads-up moment. I believe modern cockpit design should try to use all available physiological capability as well as it uses all available technology.

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