

OUR ROOTS: AEROBATICS IN THE '60's

With the onset of cold weather and the lack of chapter news, I will take liberties with this installment to share some of our heritage. I first participated in formal aerobatic competition in 1968. At that time US competition was sanctioned by the ACA (Aerobatic Club of America) and was divided into three competition categories: Primary, Advanced and Unlimited. After three wins, Primary contestants were required to move up. In 1968 I was married with two boys and earning a whopping \$820 a month as a chemistry instructor. I competed that year in Primary with a stock 65 hp J3 Cub. The '68 Primary sequence was well designed and accommodated good energy management:

Spin

Loop

Immelman

45 down snap

Half Cuban

Barrel Roll

Hammerhead

Slow Roll

Reverse Half Cuban

Four Point Roll

Those of us without inverted fuel often experienced loss of power during the Immelman and appreciated the subsequent 45 down line in order to restart our engines. Contests in '68 were held at Monroe, LA; Vandalia, IL; Ottumwa, IA; Rockford (Harvard) IL and the Nationals at Oak Grove airport, Fort Worth, TX.

One of the pleasures of this era was the wide variety of competing aircraft. They included a lively mix of both monoplanes (clipped Cub and T-Craft, Luscombe, Ryan PT-22 and STA, Citabria, Stitts Playboy, Cassutt Racer, Chipmunk, Dart, and Zlin) and biplanes (Smith Miniplane, EAA Biplane, Pitts Special, PJ-260, Stampe, Bucker Jungmeister and Jungmann, Great Lakes, Wacos, and Stearman).

Many of these early airplanes were modified to enhance their strength, control systems and to implement inverted power. Some of the early aircraft were equipped with little auxiliary fuel cans, sometime attached to the landing gear, other times hidden under the cowl, that would fill up with fuel when upright and drain their fuel into the induction system through some kind of orifice that would hopefully meter fuel at a rate which would provide a combustionable mixture at full throttle.

I recall one of our southern Illinois Luscombe pilots who somehow implemented inverted fuel injection on a Continental A-65 equipped with a modified Stromberg carburetor by blowing into a small hose he kept in his mouth. As he rolled inverted, the little A-65 would cough a couple of times and then take off and run for as long as Dean could maintain just the right pressure with his lungs. His inverted duration was of course limited to how long he could go before needing a breath of fresh air. Some aircraft were set up with two float carbs, one right side up and the other upside down and a gravity

operated baffle valve, which determined which one to use. Some of the C-85's were equipped with Excelo fuel injectors. Others were set up with the PS-5 pressure carbs.

Our older chapter members may remember Midwest judges of the 60's: Dale Drummond, Pete Myers, Gene and Kit Heacock, Bob Heuer and Ernest (Pinky) Opp.

Pinky competed in unlimited competition with a 125 hp Stitts Playboy and later pylon raced with a T-6. He was one of the first to write a text on outside maneuvers. Several of our chapter members got their first aerobatic dual with Pinky. He has helped the chapter for many years as a starter, assistant judge or boundary judge.

Pete Myers was well known for the Pete Myers Special, a highly modified Clipped Wing Cub, now displayed at the EAA museum in Oshkosh. This aircraft had a unique appearance with its distinctive short fuselage (about 4 feet shorter than a Cub), dorsal fin, a larger balanced rudder, Super Cub elevator, clipped and modified T-craft wings with spill plates and a cleaned up landing gear. An O-320 Lycoming engine under a pressure cowl, a Bendix PS-5-C pressure carburetor, inverted fuel, oil and smoke systems produced astonishing performance. Pete won the first EAA Unlimited Aerobatic Championship with this aircraft in 1966. Watching Pete's perform in the Myers Special was one of my inspirations to take a saw to the spars of my Cub.

Some of the unlimited aerobatic champs from the 60's included Duane and Marion Cole, Frank Price, Harold Krier, Pete Myers, Charlie Hillard, Ed Mahler, Bob Heuer, Mary Gaffaney, Margaret Ritchie, Bob Herendeen and Art Scholl. Krier, Hillard, Mahler, Rithie, Herendeen and Scholl were all killed in aircraft accidents.

Some of us managed successful competition and/or airshow careers without any aerobatic dual or coaching. We did however have the benefit of some written instructional materials. Some Midwest pilots had the Opp manual. Many had Harold Krier's *Modern Aerobatics and Precision Flying*. Harold was a flight engineer on a B-17 during WW II. He started his aerobatic career with a Clipped Wing Cub and later acquired a Great Lakes. Harold then built a beautiful, one of a kind Jungmeister / Great Lakes hybrid known as the Krier Kraft, powered with a 185 Warner. Wanting a heavier aircraft with more speed and vertical penetration, he sold the Krier Kraft to Charlie Hillard and built up a highly modified DeHavilland Chipmunk. Harold's spectacular performance in the Chipmunk inspired Art Scholl's Chipmunk career.

One of the most practical and useful books for the self-taught acro pilot of that time was Duane Cole's *Roll Around a Point*. Duane was an aerobatic instructor during WW-II. He and his brothers started their more than 50-year professional airshow careers (Cole Brothers Airshows) in the 1940's and were well known to the EAA membership as performers at Rockford and later, Oshkosh. Duane's low level, extreme-outside routine with his 85 hp Taylorcraft made him and his aircraft legends in their own time. His example of what was possible with good airmanship and an inexpensive, low performance aircraft was an incredible inspiration to many of us.

SNAPSHOTS OF SOME OF OUR HEROES FROM THE 60's



Bob Heuer and his beautiful Ranger powered Ryan STA.



Frank Price and his original Jungmeister, 89P.



Frank with his Lycoming powered Jungmeister were featured in the movie "The Great Waldo Pepper".

Harold Krier and his ranger powered Chipmunk.



Duane Cole and his famous Clipped Wing Taylorcraft, now displayed in the EAA museum at Oshkosh.



Mary Gaffaney, women's world champion aerobatic pilot.



Margaret Ritchie in her Clipped Wing Taylorcraft.



Ed Mahler and the PJ-260.



Bob Herendeen's Pitts Special



Charlie Hillard in the KrierCraft, a one of a kind homebuilt Great Lakes / Jungmeister hybrid.



Art Scholl, one of America's greatest airshow pilots being Art Scholl with his single place, retractable geared, Lycoming powered Super Chipmunk.



Pete Myers, 1966 EAA Unlimited Aerobatic Champion, and his *Special*, a highly modified Clipped Wing Cub now in the EAA museum.

Marion Cole with the first Pitts S2A, one of his many aerobatic airplanes.

