

Reminiscence of the First IAC
Competition Flight Line
Giles Henderson IAC #159

Accuracy is always at risk when reminiscing about people and events that occurred nearly 40 years ago. My own memories of May 17, 1970 have likely been distorted with time and may not exactly coincide with those of other folks who also attended the first IAC-sanctioned contest. The contest was held at the old Chicago-Hammond airport and was a Sportsman only contest sponsored by EAA Chapter 260. As I remember, it was a beautiful, blue sky, CAVU day. I competed with the same Clipped Wing Cub I fly today. However, at that time it was powered with a non-inverted, 65 hp Continental, turning a wood propeller.

All the competition and airshow planes were parked together along the show line, facing towards the spectators. I remember my envy of Dan McGarry's shiny polished prop and his big fuel injected C-90. Dan's Cub had been built by Bill Adams. Bill was a nationally known airshow pilot who had recently been killed by a crankshaft/propeller failure in a 450 Stearman. Don DeWitt was also running a hot-rod Cub set up with an inverted fuel system on an injected C-85. In addition to the three Clipped Cubs, Dion Stans competed with an 85 hp Cassutt Racer, Jim Dees flew a powerful P J-260 biplane and Jim Lacey flew his new 125 hp Pitts Special. The Cubs dominated the contest: Dan finished in 1st place, Don 2nd and I wound up in 4th.

After the competition flying was completed, the judges flew an airshow: John Lumlely in his P J, Bob Heuer in his new Pitts and Pete Myers in a highly modified Clipped Cub known as the Myers Special. Today the Myers Special is on display in the EAA museum at Oshkosh. Bob eventually sold his Pitts "Dam Yankee" to Charlie Hillard. Hillard won the world championship with this aircraft in 1972. "Dam Yankee" is also displayed in the EAA museum. John Lumlely sold his PJ which subsequently suffered a non-fatal structural failure while filming an aerobatic sequence over the Gulf of Mexico. To the best of my knowledge, Don DeWitt and I are the only pilots who flew at Chicago-Hammond who still own and fly those same aircraft.

During that era, we saw a much greater diversity of competition aircraft than we did in pilot dress. The Clipped T-Craft, Citabria, Monocoupe, Luscombe, Stearman, Great Lakes, Fleet, Waco, Bucker Jungmann and Jungmeister, PJ-260/295, Starduster, Acroduster, EAA Biplane, Smith Miniplane, Rose Parakeet, Ryan STA, Ryan PT-22, Stits Playboy, deHavilland Chipmunk, Cassutt, Dart, Globe Swift, Zlin and Stephens Akro were some of examples we saw competing in 1970. The Pitts Special was by then dominating unlimited competition and was to become the aircraft of choice for many.

However, it was red shirts and white pants that distinguished the IAC pilots of that era. These colors matched the paint job on all four of Bob Heuer's aerobatic machines and were no doubt his favorites.

In 1970, a Clipped Wing Cub was not very expensive. I got started by recruiting two partners. We each put up \$500 to buy a stock J-3 which I flew it in ACA primary contests in 1968. After a year of comments like "Hey, the wings are going to come off that lil ole Cub "; "I'm sorry, this ramp area is reserved for the aerobatic aircraft "; "Let me see your Operation Limitation Certificate;" and "No, son, that was a CLIPPED WING Cub the Cole brothers used," we bought some drawings on where to cut the wing spars. In '69, I participated with the 65 hp engine and short wings at ACA contests in Bastrop, LA, Aurora IL, St. Charles, MO, Dacy Airport at Harvard, IL (in conjunction with the EAA convention at Rockford) and the AAA contest at Ottumwa, IA.

During the IAC's first 15 years, Sportsman sequences were generally designed by folks who had first hand experience with high drag, low powered aircraft. These sequences were characterized by good energy flow in which airmanship trumped aircraft performance. The first IAC Sportsman Known started with a half snap to inverted followed by a split-S, loop, Immelmann, 45-down- snap, hammerhead, barrel roll, half-Cuban and ended with a slow roll. The first maneuver provided some entertainment for the spectators, not to mention anxiety for IAC officials. The half snap would often result in some serious heading errors. On occasion, attempts to crisply terminate autorotation, abrupt forward stick, opposite aileron and rudder, rendered inverted spins. A half snap was particularly difficult to do with a J-3. It was probably the most rainy-day, hangar-flown, Sportsman figure of 1970. Those of us with wood props and no inverted fuel systems flew through slow rolls and Immelmans with engine coughs and loss of power. We had to carefully integrate our roll with our half loop during an Immelmann turn to avoid a prop stoppage. A windmilling engine would reliably start once fuel flow was reestablished. However, with no starters and a dead stick a very prolonged dive was required to restart the engine followed by a break and climb to resume the sequence.

I was so disappointed with my hammerhead score at the Hammond contest, I called one of the judges on the phone that evening to see if he had any recollections of my problem. (In those days the competitor never saw his raw scores or judges comments) "Giles, we didn't mark you down because your up line was so short. We marked you down because you weren't vertical." It was this conversation that caused me to learn that it might be necessary to create illusions to win. Given the angle of incidence and the position of the horizontal tail surfaces relative to the wings, a J-3 going 100 mph in level flight looks like it's diving. In a vertical attitude it looks positive. We learned that you could get good marks if you went 10 or 12 degrees past vertical, providing you could deal with the adverse effect this attitude could cause on the pivot.

Pete Myers had acquired more experience with Clipped Cubs than anyone of that time. He provided Dan with a lot of advice and suggestions, and it was valuable to keep a close eye on Dan's latest mods. Little things like elevator gap seals and stall strips made big differences in how the Cubs flew. Later that year at Fond du Lac, Pete flew Dan's Cub through the most impressive clipped Cub airshow routine I've ever seen.

My years of flying the Cub in airshows and aerobatic competition provided a stimulating challenge and the opportunity to meet and know some truly great people. However,

sustaining a safe and competitive level of proficiency requires a serious commitment and dedication to practice and aircraft maintenance. Fifteen years ago I decided that in order to pursue other goals and interests, it was best to retire from airshow flying and serious competition.