



Here lies a pilot called "Ace"
Who did loops with such ease and grace.
One day, to his woe, he entered too low.
Unable to recover, he was shocked to discover,
that the ground was now in the wrong place.

AVIATION COURTESY. ...*Richard VanGrunsven*

It upset me to read Luran Paine's column in the Oct. Sport Aviation, titled **Aviation Courtesy**. The topic was errant RV pilot's aggressive and reckless flying that upset and endangered other GA pilots. (The Nov. SA issue included an article by Dave Metheny titled "**The Buzz Monster**", which had a similar theme, though directed to pilots in general.)

Obviously, I am disturbed anytime that the term "Those RV pilots" is used with a negative connotation. I hold in high regard the thousands of you RV pilots, because of the way you build, fly, and enjoy your RVs. The precise and professional ceremonial formation you fly, the tens of thousands of Young Eagle flights you have offered, your breakfast and lunch fly-out, and your mass flights to the Bahama Isles and beyond, all provide a positive image for RV pilots. This is

my image of RV pilots, and I'd like to think that this describes 99+% of you. But, it takes only a few rotten apples to damage that image for all of us. I'd like to believe that the instances mentioned in Lauran's article were isolated exceptions. Unfortunately, I too have occasionally heard the "Those RV Pilots" term used disparagingly, and have also witnessed errant RV flying behavior. I hope that you share the regret and concern that I feel about this.

As described, the flying antics of the RV pilot were well beyond being discourteous, they were dangerous and definitely in violation of FARs.

Even if you view the behavior of the RV pilot as just "good, clean fun", the act of beating up a J-3 Cub with an RV is hardly a badge of honor. It's more like a high school bully picking on a 6 year old.

One recourse not mentioned by the offended J-3 pilot was that of FAA action. The described flying was definitely in violation of FARs, and FARs are the LAW: we are a civilized country. While the offending pilot may be arrogant and unapologetic, (unopen to reason) he is nonetheless open to FAA action. If the J-3 pilot felt endangered, he is fully within his rights to seek a remedy through FAA action. Most pilots don't like to be snitches, but on the other hand they don't need to be helpless victims.

We all know that our RVs are very special airplanes. They are capable of doing all of the great things for you that I mentioned above. But, you also know that "those damned RVs" have ample performance to become a real nuisance and even hazardous in the wrong hands. This was the motivation for the regrettable topic of Lauran's article. There may not be much that any of you can individually do to bring an end to the abusive flying habits of some of our misdirected fellow pilots. However, it's worth a bit of thought and discussion.

In addition to being upset by the justified theme of the article, the topic of reckless flying has occupied a lot of my time over the past year. Last spring I was contacted by Vic Syracuse because of his experiences with and concern about reckless flying antics that all too often lead to fatal accidents. He had drafted an article which he shared with me for the purpose of getting my opinion and support. I liked his article, but decided to take it one step further by re-writing it as a two-author feature with a supportive give-and-take format. The article evolved into one of advocacy rather than just a lamentation over regrettable pilot behavior. I later shared this draft with the EAA Safety Committee and with the EAA Board of Directors. They were supportive and the article was recommended for the pages of Sport Aviation. Though I presented it to Sport Aviation many months ago, it hasn't been scheduled for print yet. Motivated by Lauran's and Dave's articles, I am taking this opportunity to share it with you, because it is appropriate.

As you read the concluding pages of our article, you will see that we want to carry this topic beyond just pleading with readers to fly right. Though both Lauran's and Dave's articles have commendable themes, they are mostly "pleading to the choir". The offending pilots are unlikely to take heed, even if they are literate. The position of Vic and I is that we can all contribute through helping to change the culture of this outdated flight behavior pattern, through peer influence. A tall order, we admit, but not beyond the limits of feasibility if enough pilots are tired of being branded because of the antics of some of our red-neck compatriots. Please read it carefully, see what you think, and let's discuss it further.

Per the concluding position of the article, a broad culture shift in GA would be needed to significantly affect this problem. Our optimistic thought process was that broad coverage of this topic would be needed in all GA magazines and media sites. While to be effective a broad approach must be pursued, there is no reason that our RV community can't take the lead. Since some of our numbers are among the targeted offenders, maybe we need to demonstrate that "all RV pilots are **NOT** like that"! Thus, I feel it important that we take seriously the errant behavior of some of our fellow RV pilots. While there may not be much that we can directly do, my article mentions some possible long-term processes; some approaches that we can collectively take. I think that you'll agree that the overwhelming majority of us don't deserve the "danged RV pilots" label.

DUMB STUNTS. ...*Vic Syracuse & Dick VanGrunsven*

(Vic)

I've always been fascinated by the early flying machines at the dawn of aviation. Lucky for us there were really bold pilots that were willing to take chances and tread while others stood by and watched. However, if you follow some of the early pilots' careers it becomes very clear that longevity was not always in the cards. The old adage of "there are old pilots and bold pilots, but no old bold pilots" rings true. The pilots back then were truly pioneers, with rickety machines and unreliable power plants. A certain amount of bravado and devil-may-care attitude was probably required, and if it wasn't for them aviation progress may have been much slower.

As aviation continued, methodical approaches to new designs and flight testing came to be, albeit not without some dramatic loss of lives.

It's always been so disappointing to me to see some pilots continue to do dumb and stupid things, giving the rest of us a bad reputation. I haven't figured out if aviation creates the daredevil/showboat mentality in the pilot, or if it is just Darwinian behavior. I do know some of

them should not be allowed in an airplane, at least one with passengers. To date, two airplanes I built have crashed performing low-level aerobatics, killing 4 people. It's so unnecessary, and I am not certain how we should proactively deal with it. I have tried multiple times to intercede, and have not been successful. We currently have another potential one unfolding in our neighborhood, and I fear the outcome will be the same.

Let me share with you a few examples of careless behavior that had very tragic consequences. Way back in 1981, when I finished my RV-4, the Christen Eagles were the hottest thing going. The kits were fantastic, the paint jobs were to die for, and we all watched Tom Poberezny and the Eagles Aerobatic Team perform at Oshkosh. As luck would have it, back at my home airport in Elyria, Ohio a father and son team had just recently finished one and wanted to share a hangar with me. The son was older than I was, and the father had been a very successful finish carpenter, the skills of which transferred very nicely to some parts of the Eagle's construction. Theirs was just as beautiful as any other that I had seen, and I couldn't wait to get a ride in it.

I learned that the son was a recently minted Private Pilot with 69 hours TT, and they could not get insurance for him until he had 100 hours. No problem, I could wait for my ride. Then it happened. One beautiful day I helped get the airplane out of the hangar so he could go flying and I watched him immediately roll on takeoff and climb out inverted! Right then I knew I would never get my ride. There's no doubt I would love to sit in the cockpit and view that takeoff, as long as someone qualified like Tom Poberezny was at the controls. It must be a real rush. Come to think of it, it would probably be an even greater rush with a low time pilot at the controls, hoping the outcome would be the same! I still remember coming home and telling Carol I was never going to get my ride in the Eagle.

After watching the same performance, including loops on takeoff, I worked up the courage to speak with the father. Boy; that was a mistake. I was basically ostracized, they moved out of my hangar, and the next time I saw the dad was at the funeral for his son, caused by performing a loop on takeoff. What a surprise! I remember hearing about it on the news one morning on the way to work. Even though I saw it coming I was quite shocked. It was the first personal friend in aviation that was killed in an air crash. Unfortunately, there would be more.

What was even more shocking was what happened next. At the funeral, before I could say anything, the father said that there was something wrong with that airplane and that he was going to rebuild it to figure it out. Huh??? BTW, I forgot to mention that about a year earlier dad had run the very same aircraft out of fuel and landed it in Lake Erie, requiring a Coast Guard tow to shore? I was dumbfounded, but kept my mouth shut. Not unexpectedly, he did rebuild it and proceeded to kill himself and a passenger about a year later doing low-level aerobatics. I still can't fathom the unwillingness of some pilots to take a look at themselves instead of the airplane.

I eventually sold my RV-4, thinking I could build a Prescott pusher to solve the 4-seat family I now had. The Prescott didn't prove to be the airplane I wanted, so I sold it and continued to build other aircraft.

20 years after selling my RV-4, I received a phone call that it had crashed killing 2 people. I was mortified, until I learned that they were headed home from an air show and were seen doing low level rolls and loops at 250' right up until the crash! You've got to be kidding me! The owner was 70 years old. I guess the desire to showboat sometimes never goes away.

The third accident involved another aircraft I built, a Kitfox Speedster. Some of you may remember that the Speedster was an aerobatic version of the Kitfox, and many of us saw Jimmy Franklin put on quite a show at OSHKOSH with the fluorescent green factory demonstrator. Jimmy's show was so low that more than once we thought he crashed in between the taxiway and runway 18/36, but it was just an optical illusion due to the dip in the terrain. While I thoroughly tested mine during Phase I, including taking it to 5.5 g's, it was all flown way up high. After flying it for 10 years, I sold it to build an RV-6, after having soloed my youngest son in it. The speedster was a great fun machine. On the day I sold it, we watched as the new owner and his flight instructor took off and then came around in a high-banked, high speed pass with the engine screaming like I had never heard it before. I remarked that I hoped we wouldn't hear about this one too.

That was February. On Christmas Eve the same year I received a phone call from a radio station in Colorado asking if I knew that an airplane I had built had crashed killing 2 people? I was at a loss for words, but expressed my condolences to the families and hung up. Within a few minutes we learned that hunter had observed the aircraft flying low and doing vertical pull-ups, before descending straight down and recovering. "The airplane had gone away and returned a short time later, executing the same maneuver over a frozen lake. This time the outcome was not successful, and the Kitfox nosedived straight into the frozen lake, killing both the pilot and the passenger. We came to learn that on the first flight he had his younger brother on board, and had returned to the airport to pick up his friend. His brother sure was extremely lucky, but not so his friend. His friend was much heavier, and the weight difference could have been a contributing factor to the accident. The light weight and low horsepower of the Kitfox requires careful energy management during vertical maneuvering, a characteristic unfamiliar to an untrained pilot.

I felt really terrible about this accident because I had come to know the father during the sales process. He was buying it for his 26 year old son to fly, and he planned to learn to fly in it as well. I did call him on Christmas Day to express my condolences. Between conversations with his dad and the NTSB inspector I came to learn that the son had some history of showboating.

(Van)

That's a very sad trail of tragedies. I'm sure that most pilots have witnessed similar instances during their flying careers. While my own witness has not been as close and as sad as yours, I am aware of dozens of similar accidents in RV's over the years. It saddens me nearly to tears every time another such accident occurs. They are so senseless and unnecessary. Such a waste of life in airplanes that, when flown within limits, are very safe and enjoyable.

(Vic)

In addition to the specific accidents I mentioned, it seems that a high percentage of Show Boating accidents involve homebuilt and warbird planes. I suppose that the high performance attributes of these planes appeal to aggressive pilots, and bring out the worst in them. Run-away egos?

(Van)

Pilot's egos- Yes, that seems to be a common thread. I think that there is a cultural connection also. I think that this problem, at least partially, is a byproduct of our macho male culture and our aviation history. Culturally, we seem to have some affection for mavericks! The cowboy that could tame and ride the wildest horse was admired, regardless his other faults. In school, pranksters got more adulation than academic achievers. Since the earliest days of aviation, the pilots who took (perhaps necessary, then) risks were admired. Wartime fighter pilots returned from the front, "beat up the aerodrome", and did victory rolls. That's what "real pilots" did, and the on-lookers usually applauded, whether or not their superiors did. Historically, airshow performers may also have been unwitting role models for other's questionable flight behavior. Monkey see; monkey do!

(Vic)

I see what you mean. When you think about it, we do seem to have an undertone of anti-authority in much of our society. "Smokey and the Bandit" and "Dukes of Hazzard" are example of loveable though mischievous hero figures. At least in a large sub-culture, this is a prevailing mindset.

(Van)

Adding a bit of perspective to this discussion, I've got to admit that in my much younger years I was prone to a bit of showboating myself. There weren't many planes around at the time that could perform like my homebuilts, and I was often asked to "show us what that plane can do".

Yes, I sometimes complied with their wishes. However, through self-examination I soon came to some conclusions. I was admittedly indulging my ego, my desire for attention, and my willingness to please. But I was also taking some very real risks, both flight risks and the risk of possible FAA action, and primarily for the benefit of the spectators. I soon realized that I didn't owe them that! Had there been an accident, these same on-lookers would no doubt have been the first to wag their heads and lament that "I was afraid that this would happen. He was always showing off".

Though I have long passed that phase, I have continued to witness the same type of encouragement from spectators. More often than not, bystanders like what they see (reckless flying), and don't see it as wrong or damaging to aviation. I'm still amazed by the cluelessness of so many in aviation. They contribute to the problem by being ego enablers, from their safe vantage point of sideline anonymity.

(Vic)

Good point. If the pilot was flying strictly for his own amusement and pleasure, he could do so out in the hinterlands, unseen by anyone and endangering only himself. Obviously he chooses a more visible venue. So what are the possible remedies? I've tried some, to no effect. These pilot's egos don't respond well to reason. Maybe this is why we don't see much attention paid to this otherwise obvious accident category. It's a tough nut to crack. Why even try! Much emphasis is currently (and rightly so) being placed on minimizing LOC (loss of control) accidents. Show Off accidents can also be classified as loss of control. But rather than the usual Low Speed Stall/Spin loss of control, these accidents result from judgment related altitude and attitude loss of control. Challenging though it is, there must be some way to make inroads into this problem area.

(Van)

I think that it will require a culture shift. This may be a convenient politically correct term, but it's a starting point.

I think that we can identify much of what motivates Show Boat pilots, but I agree with your experience that there is probably little that can be accomplished when dealing directly with them.

I do feel that it is more likely that the rest of us, those on the airport sidelines, can bring about change. Some degree of spectator education and culture shift is possible. We just need to realize that though we are not the actors (aggressors), there are consequences of how we collectively react, and that we can have a positive impact. How? We just need to quit encouraging and enabling errant pilots. For example; if after a pilot shows off and lands, no

one offers any acknowledgment at all. Zip, Zed, Zero! It's bound to have an ego deflating effect, perhaps just causing said pilot to denounce observers as unappreciative jerks. This might only cause him to take his show elsewhere. However, if he met the same non-reception everywhere, it might eventually sink in. This is where I feel that a culture shift could help.

Gliderport example.

One day a couple of years ago I was visiting our nearby gliderport and witness the arrival of a new club member flying his RV-6. Said arrival consisted of a max. speed worm-burner buzz job with a very abrupt, high G, rolling pitch out. I was appalled and comment to one of the instructors that this guy should be counseled. The instructor agreed, but seems powerless to do anything, stating that this guy did this all of the time. I witnessed his similar antics, from a distance, on a couple later occasions. Then a few months later I learned that this pilot had been discharged from the club and banned from the gliderport because of his abusive flying of both gliders and his power plane. This is one example of a positive airport safety culture in action. It can work!

The next step would be that of expressing disapproval. Let the pilot know, either individually or collectively, that his flying is endangering not only himself but others, and that at the very least is giving aviation a bad image. Let him know that his antics adversely affect all of us in aviation, and that we will do everything we can to stop it. I know, this is an application of "reason", which may not fall on fertile soil. However, I am still optimistic enough to feel that properly applied **peer influence** can be a positive factor.

A third approach could be a last-resort step following the disapproval/peer influence effort. That is, the threat of FAA violation enforcement. Many, if not most, forms of low level show-boat flying involve FAA airspace violations. If the Show Off will not respond to any form or reasoning, he needs to be put on notice that, for the good of all, he may soon find himself explaining his actions to the FAA. I know, no one wants to snitch on a fellow pilot, but it may in some instances be the only effective remedy.

(Vic)

I agree that fear of FAA action might be get a little traction. However, the FAA has just recently implemented a more lenient enforcement policy that might weaken that tactic.

(Van)

On the contrary, the new FAA policy specifically addresses inadvertent violations and oversights, where a soft approach and re-education can be effectively applied. They still maintain a firm stance against intentional and repeated offences.

(Vic)

OK, but these are rather idealistic goals, and would require universal application. However, they are worth a try.

(Van and Vic)

We are just two concerned pilots relating our experiences and opinions. If we are to reduce Show Off accidents, universal cooperation and action will be needed. We want to start a serious dialogue and engage as many as possible with their supportive viewpoints and suggestions. What has been your experience? Have you witnessed instances similar to those we have described? Have you participated in any forms of corrective action? Do you agree that bystanders and onlookers have contributed to the problem? Are you a “reformed sinner” who can offer insights we are not aware of. We need your input, whether or not you agree. We need to build upon all positive means that can be brought to bear.

Agree or disagree; let’s talk. We need to get hundreds of you involved who are willing to open this topic at EAA meetings and other aviation venues. We truly need to reach enough pilots to bring about a culture shift. We cannot expect to identify problem pilots and their supportive environments from offices in Oshkosh or Washington D.C. We need eyes and voices in the field, far from the haunts of officialdom, where some may still be applying their own interpretation of regulations and acceptable flying behavior.

With your input, we plan follow-up articles with greater details of the nature and dangers of reckless Show Boat flying.

Sidebar: (direct copy from a late-February 2016 forum post on VansAirForce.net)

(We do not know the details of this story, so are not offering it here for judgement. We are including this simply because it appears to offer a differing viewpoint than that shared by Vic and I. It includes elements of spectator approval and encouragement of Show Boating)

He made a widow cry.....Bill R. Post.

I live on a small airpark maybe 20 homes and a smooth 2500’ grass strip down the middle.

A friend with an F1 Rocket called me Saturday morning and as it turned out, he was in the neighborhood topping off his tanks on the way home.

I was out helping a neighbor clean up his hangar when we heard the sound of a high speed airplane approaching. As we stepped outside, we could see the F1 circling high overhead. The F1 completed the last circle, and dove for the end of the runway, in compliance with our HOA operating procedures, he performed a low "clearing " pass, pulled up, dropped his flaps and promptly landed.

We stood outside, by the F1, talking airplanes and catching up.

Eventually, it was time to go and he asked which way was best for his departure. After pointing to the other end of the runway, he climbed in, fired up, and taxied down the runway.

At midfield, he turned around and departed in spectacular F1 Rocket fashion. Meaning, he rolled about 200 feet and then went almost vertical. After doing some mild acro, he again made a departing pass down the runway, zoomed up and disappeared behind the trees.

As I looked down the runway, I noticed one of the longtime residents standing by the edge of the runway, It was BettyJane. BJ's husband had died a year earlier and he was an amazing guy; A26 Marine pilot in WWII, NASCAR in the 50's, and Pitts pilot (his neighbor in FL was Curtis Pitts)

As I approached BJ, I realized she was crying. She looked at me and said, "This is how Cotton used to fly! Make sure he comes back and does that again! Oh, and I want a ride!

What a great lady!

One other thing, after he left, my neighbors started blowing up my phone with text messages. The best message was simply, "WOW!"

Readers: Please provide feedback to Van and Vic by emailing Support@vansaircraft.com