

HOW NOT TO MAKE A FIRST FLIGHT

Doug Leihy

A few years ago, Moore and Pat Stuart were over for dinner. Moore suggested we build airplanes together. My wife thought it was a fantastic idea and said she would help build the plane. Moore then ordered the tail kit from Van's Aircraft and convinced me to do the same. I also ordered all the necessary tools to build the RV from Avery Tools. When I received the order, I had no idea what most of the tools were used for. They were silly looking things, which seemed to have no purpose. They looked like they belonged in a dentist's office. I was having second thoughts about building the airplane.

When I received the tail kit and instruction manual from Van's, I started reading the manual from back to front. I came across a section in the back of the book saying, "fabricate your exhaust manifold." Hell, I'm a dumb business major from San Jose State and don't have the slightest idea what the word "fabricate" means. Still don't. After reviewing the manual further, I was convinced I could not build the airplane.

I had no idea how to read plans. I knew nothing about wiring or electricity except I was able to turn lights on and off. I never built anything in my life. This was a big mistake.

I told Moore I was going to return the tail kit because the project looked too difficult to complete. He convinced me the project could be completed and suggested we go to work. Five years later we both have flying RV-6As. Mary did help build the plane. She did 12 out of 16,000 rivets. Unfortunately, I had to drill out 9 of them. She did, however, give me great support and encouragement.

On Sunday January 7, 2001, the airplane was ready to fly. As it turned out, I wasn't. I was at the airport early working on the plane when Moore and Pat came to the hangar. Moore helped me put the cowling on and wanted me to do some high speed taxi tests. He wanted me to lift the plane off the ground a couple of feet then land to be sure the plane would not roll and would be stable.

I did not want to do this. I would rather have continued working on installing carpets or do anything other than lifting the plane off the ground. Moore told me to go back and forth on the runway, increasing the rpm a little each time. He had a hand held radio and was going to tell me when I lifted off a foot or two.

I was at the end of runway 35 and started taxiing uphill and 2,000 rpm. About a third of the way down the runway, the plane jumped off the ground and before I could do anything, I was around 30 feet in the air. I immediately cut

power and lowered the nose. Then I realized I was too high and too fast to safely land before I ran out of runway. The only thing I could do at this point was give the plane full power and go around. Hell, I had no intention of flying. I didn't even do a mag check.

I was petrified. Then on the radio I heard Moore say "you are airborne" Well, I knew that. What I didn't know was how I was going to get back down.

Moore then came back on the radio and suggested that he takeoff in his plane to join me. He said we could fly together to check airspeeds, try a few approach stalls, or maybe go to Oroville for my first landing. I said "No" He then said "what are your intentions." I said "to land!" As I was turning downwind, I noticed I was breaking through 2300 feet and climbing. I leveled the plane and noticed the airspeed was indicating 180 mph. This was not good. I brought the rpm's down to 2000 and still was going 170 mph.



He's grinning now, but Doug Leihy's first flight was more exciting than he really wanted.

The engine on this aircraft has not run for over 8 years. When it was first started, it backfired and sputtered. When I brought it back to idle, the engine normally quit. Don Ramose and Chuck Jerry helped set the idle and suggested I replace all the intake manifold gaskets because they probably were dried out and were letting too much air into the engine. I did this and the engine ran better. I still didn't trust it.

Anyway, here I was going 170 mph and was very reluctant to pull back on the power. I had no choice. I brought the power back to 900 rpm and held the nose up until the airspeed hit 100 mph. By this time, I was down by Beale Airforce Base. I turned base and put on 10 degrees of flap. Turned final and put 20 degrees of flap. This was probably the worst pattern ever flown at the Paradise Airport. Moore was calling my base and final because I was too scared to talk. I was supposed to be doing taxi tests.

When I landed on the main gear, I gave the stick a little backpressure. I apparently also gave it a little up pressure because the push-to-talk wooden handle came off in my hand. This got my attention. I gave the plane full power, grabbed the stick again and took off. The second time around, the pattern was a little better. I came around and landed to complete my first flight.

I would like to thank everyone who helped and supported me during the building process. I would especially like to thank Moore and Pat Stuart for their help, support and patience. Without their help, I would probably still be trying to figure out the purpose of all those Avery tools.