



President's Page

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Some Thoughts Regarding Spins

I would like to dedicate this month's "President Page" to a subject that we need to continue emphasizing for pilots venturing outside of the normal flight envelope. It is very important to understand that even though you may become very handy at maneuvering your airplane through a sequence of rehearsed aerobatic figures, including precision spins, that doesn't necessarily equate to being completely proficient with your aircraft's auto-rotation characteristics. When you get right down to some serious soul searching, I'll bet a fair number of pilots do not feel comfortable doing anything other than a normal upright spin. As your organization's leader, I would like to share with you a few of my personal thoughts regarding spins.

Most would agree that all popular aerobatic aircraft have excellent spin and spin recovery characteristics. Therefore, assuming a properly loaded aerobatic aircraft, problems with spins can be attributed almost solely to improper pilot technique. Think about that for a minute. It would seem simple that if pilots were properly trained and proficient, we would not have another spin accident. So why do spins continue to be a problem for aviation? There isn't any one simple answer for this, but there are some common threads.

It goes without saying that proper training is the smart and responsible way to approach spins. It will also cut down on the time it takes to

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cover a significant amount of material. Like anything else, dual spin training is just a starting point for your comprehensive understanding. Spins must be practiced regularly to maintain currency for accurate perceptions and awareness. After a long winter, good pilots get reacquainted with how their airplane spins—up-

right, inverted, flat, and accelerated. The more you do, the more you will see, feel, and hear and the more comfortable you feel doing them. Practice will enhance your understanding of what the controls do and will allow you to become more proficient in optimizing the control of your airplane in auto-rotation.

Common threads in spin weakness include pilots who have simply not done certain types of spins. Doing an accelerated, inverted spin is not the same as a one and one-quarter upright spin. Pilots may say, "Well, I don't plan on doing any inverted spins, so I don't have to learn them." The problem is it may not be your choice if you're not having a good day. The more you explore the flight envelope and your personal limits, the more exposure you will have to an unfamiliar auto-rotation. This is not a big deal if you are proficient in the major types of positive and negative spins, but if you're not, it will probably make a lasting impression (that's if you're lucky!).

I can't think of any other figure that has so many variables of perception for a pilot to digest all at once. Emergency spin recovery procedures are designed to take most of the necessary perceptions out of the recovery equation and to be simple enough to employ even under duress. Pilots should practice emergency recovery procedures often enough to have the confidence to go to it immediately if one has to, espe-

cially in the discovery phase of your aerobatic education. Why do emergency spin recovery techniques advocate letting go of the stick in confusing situations in addition to reducing the power to idle and applying opposite rudder? It's not only because you may be totally confused; it's also because you may not properly perceive where your hands are. With the powerful flight controls of modern aerobatic aircraft, a little off could easily make a big difference, especially with ailerons.

Any unintentional application of the wrong control in sufficient amounts to delay recovery beyond that which is expected can instantly cause doubt in the correctness of the control input. What is potentially dangerous are the ensuing irrational control inputs, further confusion, and panic that may follow. At this point a pilot must default to a methodical procedure and recover to controlled flight. When practicing something new or even getting reac-

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quainted with spins, always give yourself plenty of altitude to work with. Why add to your exposure by shorting yourself in this area? Have a plan and then follow it.

I'm asking you to be honest with yourself when it comes to your spin proficiency. Only you can know with certainty if you possess credible

experience and maintain a responsible proficiency with all types of spins. If you own a two-place airplane, be careful to not allow someone else to put you in a position beyond your limitations. You may not know their limits, but you should know yours. If you find yourself short of being proficient, be more conservative with your aerobatic activity until you get squared away. This may be an excuse to invest in a nice Christmas present like a spin course. Please take spin safety seriously. The proficiency of the pilot in command is the key.

This is my last note to you for 2003. Thanks for a fantastic year for the IAC. I have seen so many instances of our members providing positive leadership to further safe aerobatic activity and education. It's been very gratifying, and all members can be proud of the organization's accomplishments. From my family to yours, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. ✈

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