

# MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

## Mentoring the Neophyte

By Bruce Johnson IAC 7146

**M**uch like the debate that raged back in the 60s regarding mandatory motorcycle helmet use, we, at IAC, are also engaged in much the same way over spin training and helmet use. Many of our members have weighed in with statements, both pro and con, on whether to mandate or leave as status quo these two issues. For instance, some have argued that in a single-seat aerobatic aircraft, only one person is affected. Also statements such as, "A helmet is too hot," or "I'm self-taught, I've experienced all types of spins," have been made. Others feel that an endorsement should be given for aerobatic flight that must be obtained like the high-performance endorsement now required for aircraft over 200 hp. These statements may have some merit. Therefore, does the data show a need for more regulation?

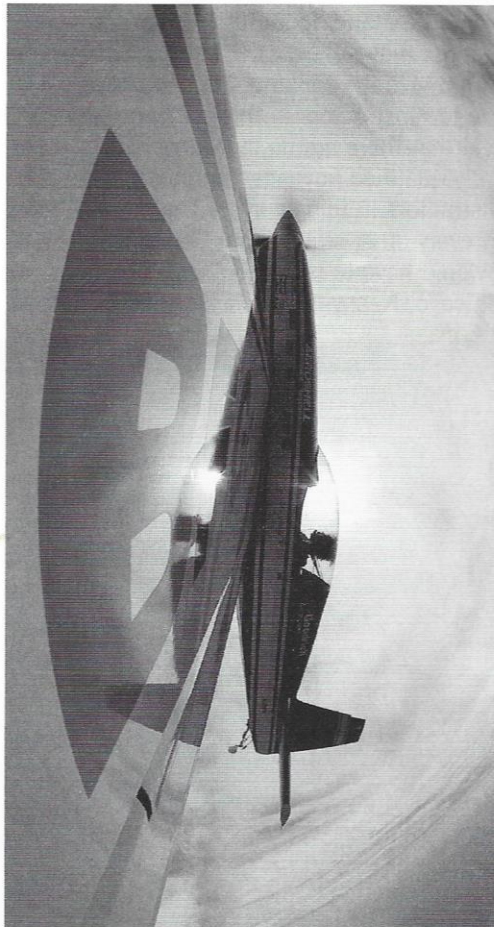
For the calendar year of 1999, there were 20 aerobatic-related mishaps in the United States, which produced 22 fatalities. Nine of the mishaps were known to involve IAC members. Even though many of the NTSB final reports are not complete, some factors that were involved in these accidents can be determined. Of the 20, the significant factors were:

Low Altitude	10
Spin-Related	3
Mechanical	3
Over G	1
Still Unknown	3

These statistics are typical over the last decade, with 21 accidents being the average. The occurrence of 10 low altitude-related accidents is right on average as well. Spin-related mishaps were one below average, and the rest of the categories were near average.

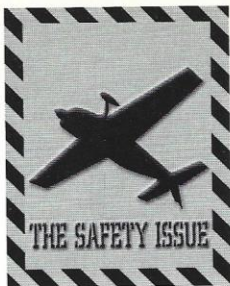
So, the data shows that 50 percent of all aerobatic mishaps have altitude as a factor. There is already a rule governing

this—FAR 91.303. It cites a minimum altitude of 1,500 feet AGL for aerobatic flight, and no aerobatic flight may be conducted inside the lateral confines of Class B, C, D, or E (if designated for an airport) airspace. The second major cause is a tie between mechanical and spins. In recent years mechanical mishaps have been rising and spin mishaps have been falling. We attribute the rise in mechanical mishaps to aging aircraft and harder flying. We strongly feel that spin-awareness programs, using methods such as the Beggs-Mueller recovery technique, are responsible for the decline in spin mishaps over the last 15 years. Still, there have been many people calling for mandatory spin training as a



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JAY WEIDL



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prerequisite to IAC competition. Thus far, there haven't been any mishaps in competition, but a few members of this organization have perished while practicing spins for upcoming contests. If the question is whether proper training should be required prior to any complex task where failure would be catastrophic, the answer is yes. Should we have aerobatic and spin training prior to attempting aerobatic flight? YES. Do we need to mandate it? This question has plagued this organization since its inception. Maybe the question should not be "should we," but "can we."

Each individual has a unique and varied background. One member may have been military trained, attended test pilot school, and teaches F-16 post stall departure training. Most would feel that this pilot should be exempt from any spin training rule, yet F-16 spins bear little likeness to those in a Great Lakes or a Super Decathlon. Another may have been trained in a Cessna Aerobat and now wishes to compete in a modified Pitts S-1X; there are many differences here, too. What syllabus would be mandated? But the real show-stopper may not be what training, but who would give the training. I spoke to some of the top instructors in this sport, and they feel that there are no more than 15 to 25 truly qualified advanced aerobatic and spin instructors in this country. That is only one in every other state! From Columbus, Ohio, I would have to travel to Annapolis, Chicago, Nashville, or Kansas City to get

training from one of these pilots. Further, the likelihood that this number will drastically increase in the near future is very slim.

Currently, there is only one insurance provider that is writing policies for commercial instruction. You can imagine what the cost of that must be. Should we make the effort to travel to the next state to learn how to recover from an unexpected exotic spin? The answer is an obvious yes. But a mandate may only deter those who are

interested in joining our sport. To travel such a long distance just to enter their first Sportsman contest may just end that interest. Rather, I suggest we mentor and encourage those interested in joining this sport to seek out this instruction, come to chapter meetings (and discuss safety issues at these meetings), or join or start an Alpha Charlie Club (shared ownership). Through our encouragement we can "raise" our beginner aerobatic pilots to become responsible aerobats.

Positive intervention on three issues will decrease the aerobatic mishap count by 66 percent.

- 1) ZERO tolerance on low-altitude aerobatics (outside of waived airspace).
- 2) Get the proper training.
- 3) Fly a properly maintained aircraft.

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