

# FIRST ACCOUNTS

## Two Saved by Spin Training

By Dan Wilson IAC 21123

**The provision for a safety pilot is to allow pilots new to the sport of aerobatics who do not own an aerobatic aircraft to rent or borrow one without the insurance issues. Therefore, it is imperative that the owner of the aircraft make certain that the safety pilot is well qualified. In the following case a qualified safety pilot with spin training did ensure that the flight was conducted safely. However, I'm sure a spin refresher course would have spared some nervous moments.**

**—Safety Ed.**

**I** realize that this title is a very strong statement, but this did happen in July 1999.

It had been six years since my son Adam and I spotted a gorgeous red and white Pitts S-2B in Watertown, Wisconsin. We were on our way to Oshkosh that year and decided to stop and see the Pitts; we had heard it was for sale. We were both so excited about what we saw that we camped outside overnight at the Watertown Airport so that the owner could give us a demo flight the next day. Needless to say, I was sold with a little encouragement (or maybe I should say a lot) from Adam.

After that summer day in 1993, Adam, then 13 years old, dreamed of the day that he could fly the Pitts. As time went on his dream came true; in 1997 he soloed the S-2B. The next year we both started flying aerobatics together, including all types of spin training. Even though I felt comfortable with my previous spin training (both military and civilian), I thought it wise to get a refresher course for me and an initial course for Adam. So we sought out Clint McHenry and flew all variations of spins. Later that year Adam flew his first contest at the 1998 Ohio Aerobatic Open and won the first-time Sportsman Award. The following year after much practice flying sequences, Adam's hard work paid off when he won the Sportsman Award at the 1999 Ohio Aerobatic Open, although we had spent little time reviewing spins.

While Adam was competing in Sportsman, his friend Andy had competed (with myself as a safety pilot) in Basic at two other contests. Until this time (July 1999), both Adam and Andy practiced their aerobatic flying under my supervision. That was to change on July 2, 1999.

It was a bright, sunny Friday afternoon when Adam, with Andy in the front seat, started the S-2B. I can remember how the sunlight was flashing off the freshly polished prop. Beside them was a single-seat Pitts,

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MIKE HUSAR





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flown by Jim Hogg. I felt proud that my son had come so far. He would be flying up to Jackson, Michigan, in formation with Jim, who was an experienced Advanced pilot. What was not discussed was Andy's practice flights once they got to the contest site. Andy had not competed for nearly a year and had flown very little aerobatics since that time. Better judgment would have had Andy flying with Jim, with a thorough briefing about the Basic sequence.

The following is Andy and Adam's account of that practice flight on July 2. Andy was to fly the Basic sequence with Adam as the safety pilot in the backseat of the S-2B:

Shortly after takeoff, Andy took the controls and climbed to 3,200 feet AGL. He slowed the plane to enter the first figure, a one-turn spin. As he finished, Andy rushed the recovery and had only 130 mph for his next figure, the loop. In addition, he had only set the power to 20 inches of manifold pressure (there had been an erroneous instrument indication in the front cockpit in the past, which would explain Adam's failure to correct the low power state). As Andy pulled through the vertical, he rushed the loop because of the slow speed and stalled the airplane. At that point, Andy pushed forward to decrease the angle of attack, but ran out of airspeed. Adam took the airplane at that instant and thought he was in position for a Hammerhead. In fact, when Andy pushed forward, he created a negative angle of attack. When Adam applied left rudder with power still up and in a negative angle of attack, they went into an inverted flat

spin. It took Adam a moment to remember the emergency spin recovery procedure. By the time he did, the Pitts had completed at least two turns and recovered at 1,100 feet AGL. They started the loop at 2,200 feet. By the time Adam recognized the situation and applied the proper recovery procedures, they had lost half of their altitude.

I am 100 percent convinced that spin training saved my son's and his friend's life. Are you? If you're not, I hope an accident or incident does not have to occur to prove you wrong. Think of it this way: Would you as a pilot want to send your spouse or children up in an aircraft with a pilot who had never been exposed

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to any type of stall-recovery training? Certainly not! You would want that pilot to be able to recognize the impending stall if conditions warranted and recover. Because spin recognition (or the flight conditions that lead to one, as in my son's case) is so difficult to perceive, we have to put extreme emphasis on the recovery steps. Here are the five steps that kept this story from having a tragic ending:

1. Throttle—Idle
  2. Stick—Release
  3. Full rudder—Opposite yaw direction
- If after three seconds with no recovery:**
4. Reverse rudder
  5. Recover from the dive

By the way, my son and I still enjoy flying the Pitts, of course with a new manifold pressure gauge in the front cockpit.

