

skywriter



Wew, lucky thing this story is going in a little late. Speaking of Loud Birdmen, I got a call from John Moody* on the morning of Command Day.**

drive, an elevator mounted on a tail assembly, a set of Crosswind landing gear, a GEM exhaust deflector, and now he's even got an authentic Easy Seat. He scrounged up authentic equipment

Sure, it has a ballistic chute, and some minor modifications in keeping with the airshow act, but those of us who remember will be able to say, "Look, Son/Daughter/Kid, that's what

It's been long enough for some nostalgic appeal, and I, for one, would enjoy seeing our founding father flying a restoration/ replica of a typical Golden Age ultralight.

"Golly, Dad/Mom/Person, it sure is loud," the youngster will say.

"Yes, they were loud," the announcer will say. The so-called 'muffler' is actually a flame deflector. All it does is keep the propeller from catching fire. The pilot wears earplugs, of course..."

And like the fighter jocks used to say to those who complained about the noise warbirds made, the old-time ultralight pilot can say, "It's the sound of freedom." Though in the case of ultralights, it is the sound of personal freedom.

"...and of course," the announcer will say, "sometimes people on the ground didn't care much for that sound."

At this point, who shall break away from the crowd but that standard character of airshow tradition, a tradition stretching back at least as far as the Roaring '20s. Yes, it's the Irate and Disbelieving Rural Hayseed Who Ain't Seen Nothing Like It and Ain't Gonna Put Up With It. He'll run up to the announcer's stand, ranting and raving and shaking his fist.

"What's that again, sir?" the announcer will ask. "I can't hear you over the noise of the ultralight. Oh, the noise? You want him to stop making that noise? I'm sorry, sir, we can't stop the airshow. You'll have to return to the gallery. No, there's

"What makes people like John Moody remarkable is not that they think of things nobody else has thought of, but that they actually do the things they think of."

John needed "...one of those sling seats you used to make."

Sure thing, John. Why, are you building a new ultralight? "It's built and flying. I just don't like the seat, and for what I'm doing, I think one of yours would be better."

Oh? What are you doing?

"Well, I've got this airshow act. I'm working on..."

Here's the act: John will debut before a live audience at a small airshow in Zephyrhills, Florida a couple of weeks before this issue of UK hits the stands, and then (knock on wood) he's hoping to perform at Sun 'n Fun.

He has an Easy Riser biplane, tricked out with all the options available at the end of the '70s: a 12-hp Mac 101 (McCulloch) supplying the power through a Moody Maximizer reduction

of the era, and with the exception of the tail assembly (which looks authentic but is actually a '96 look-alike) it's the genuine article - a fully restored, old enough to vote, antique ultralight, circa 1978.

ultralights were like back when the tough guys used to fly," just like the WWII jocks said at airshows in the early '60s when the P-51s went by. And that's the initial premise of John's act.



no way to get him to stop flying now. No, there's nothing you can do."

At which point the previously described hayseed will pull a shotgun out of the leg of his bib overalls and... Well, I hate to ruin the surprise for you, but the Irate and Disbelieving Etc. Etc. is part of the act, and the shotgun is full of blanks.

...and as John flies by, I & D Etc. Etc. will raise the shotgun to his shoulder and take aim and BLAMMO, blow the nose gear right off that sucker. Clack, he chambers another shell, and BLAMMO, blows off a main wheel. As the wheels bounce down the runway, John will fly around for another pass and BLAMMO, off comes the other main, and clack BLAMMO, the fourth blast from the shotgun blows off the tail!

Naturally, John's Easy Riser will wobble a bit, and the announcer will be screaming for security to do something about the crazy man with the shotgun, but John will add power and climb up out of range.

"I guess it's okay now, folks. John has climbed high enough that the madman with the shotgun can't possibly do any more damage. I don't think Annie Oakley could hit him at this distance. Even the legendary Wyatt Earp couldn't ... wait a minute, he's taking aim, and..."

BLAMMO, he fires, and the ultralight emits a puff of smoke and the engine quits.

"Well, I'll be!" says the announcer, with deep respect in his voice. "You can say what you want about the appropriateness of his noise abatement procedures, but you can't deny that fellow's marksmanship. Let's give our volunteer from the audience a big hand!"

The hayseed with the shotgun smiles and waves to the applauding crowd.

"John?" says the announcer. "John? Can you hear me up there?"

He can't, of course, but since they've practiced this routine and he knows the timing, John calls back plaintively, "Get me doooowwn!" He's gliding around with a dead engine, no elevator and no wheels.

"Stay calm, John," the announcer says. "I'll get you out of this." The Easy Riser starts to porpoise and wobble.

"Careful, John," says the announcer. "He's blown your tail off, so you'll have to fly by weight-shift. And all your landing gear has been blown away. Rock your wings if you understand.

"No, not that much! Don't rock your wings anymore. Now, you're going to have to land on your feet. Don't rock your wings anymore. If you understand, just nod your head.

"Wow, that thing sure is pitch sensitive! You better not nod your head anymore, either.

Okay, turn base and lower your gear.

"Uh, your right main leg doesn't look all the way down and locked, double check your dash lights. That's better. Say, did you ever consider a Reebok sponsorship?

"Ladies and gentlemen, John Moody is coming in for a dead engine foot-landing and ... he's down! Let's hear it for John Moody, the father of ultralight aviation! Okay, that's enough, he can't hear you anyway, after all that noise..."

That's pretty much the gist of John's act. He just gave me a rough outline, and I filled in the details myself. I think I'll fax him a copy, so he can add my announcer patter to his act.

I'm looking forward to seeing it performed. I think I've got a ringside seat for Sun 'n Fun, since I believe I have convinced*** John that I would be the perfect hayseed for his needs at his first major airshow:

The ultralight is ready, and John is ready. He told me he was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to get back in the saddle after all these years, and that even zero-wind foot launch was a piece of cake. I can't think of a better person for the job.

I can think of one thing that would make the job easier, and it's something that most of the pros on the airshow circuit enjoy: John could use a sponsor.

He is a man of strong beliefs, and he'd far rather eat worms than accept a beer or cigarette sponsorship, but I recall his very first Icarus II hang glider had Yummy Yummy Pizza Pizza written on the wings, and a modern pizza chain could cash in on the historical connection if it cared to. And with the resilience of his aircraft being the theme of his act, I'm sure he'd paint it pink if the Energizer Bunny folks wanted a part of it ("It keeps going and going and going..."). And even though I was making a joke about the Reebok sponsorship, if the only thing between John and the ground is a pair of shoes and a whole lot of sky, it seems it would draw attention to the product.

It's going to be great to see a literal living legend back in action. I wish John beau coup bookings and enthusiastic audiences, and a national sponsor would be nice, too.

Now then, what I was going to say about the Loud Birdmen was ... but it seems we're out of room. I'll see you at Sun 'n Fun, in the USDA tent. I'll have a portable computer and printer there, so I can process Loud Birdmen applications and membership certificates right on site. If you're already a member, you can pick up your membership card, too (finally!). Otherwise it'll go out in the mail

when the show is over. I'll see you there, and I hope you'll see John Moody there, too.

One last comment about John's act: You may be wondering, Gosh, why didn't anybody think of that before? It's a good one to wonder. The technology has been available since the '70s, and it could have been performed 18 years ago.

The answer is, it has been thought of before, by lots of folks. Powered hang gliders had been thought of before John did that, too. What makes people like John Moody remarkable is not that they think of things nobody else has thought of, but that they actually do the things they think of.

*Anybody who says, "Who's John Moody?" is hereby shunned, and needs to take up a new hobby.

**March 4!

***Please please please Mr. Moody you gotta let me please please please oh puleeeeeeze...

JACK MCCORNACK is the 1993 and 1994 U.S. Microlight Champion, and represented the U.S. at the 1994 World Microlight Championships. As a long-time member of the ultralight community, Jack is active in ultralight design, construction, flight operation and philosophy. Founder of the Loud Birdmen society; he is ultralight aviation's resident humorist, writing about ultralights in UF! for more than 15 years.