

JOHN MOODY & HIS *Easy Rizer*

EVEN THE BAD GUY
WITH THE
12 GAUGE
SHOTGUN
COULDN'T
SHOOT DOWN THE
ANTIQUUE FLYING WING
BIPLANE

BY NORM GOYER



I'LL START OFF BY SAYING THAT I'M SLIGHTLY BLASE WHEN IT COMES TO "FLYING CLOWN" ACTS AT AIRSHOWS. OH SURE THEY'RE HIGHLY ENTERTAINING FOR "VISITING FIREMEN" AND OTHER YOUNGSTERS, BUT I'M NOT SURE THEY "SELL" AVIATION TO ANYBODY. I THINK I'VE SEEN JUST ABOUT EVERY VERSION OF THESE ACTS, INCLUDING CUBS, CHAMPS, T-CRAFT, SUPER CUBS AND WORLD WAR ONE REPLICAS BEING "STOLEN" AND INEPTLY FLOWN BY INEBRIATED FARMERS OR ANONYMOUS "SPECTATORS."

It seems that the Easy Rizer's small engine will only run for a few minutes at a time so John Moody had to land the plane without its wheels. Spectators wondered how John would be able to get the aircraft down and rolling safely that way. .



Look here - John and his Easy Rizer are now inches off the ground and still flying, though very slowly -- at a slow-walking pace.

But I still have a pretty good sense of humor and I must admit that John Moody and his shotgunwielding friend got me laughing and taking pictures. This is how this story transpired:

While walking around the Ultralight area at Paradise City at Sun 'n Fun this year, I spotted a very old converted hang glider - an Easy Rizer. This aircraft started life as an Icarus hang glider flown by Taras Kiceniuck. The design was then sold as the Easy Rizer.

John Moody bought one, attached a small engine to the craft, and one of the very first true Ultralights was created - although, at that time, the name hadn't yet been coined. There weren't that many other "Ultralight" builders and flyers back then. Chuck Slusarczyk attained that distinction when he attached a lawnmower engine to create what he called the "Hang Loose" glider. And so did Bill Bennett when he attached a small motor to the back of a pilot flying a Flexwing glider. The year was 1973.

The FAA didn't have any rules for Ultralights in those days, so they sort of made some up as the need arose. The Feds had kept their hands off hang gliders, but when people began to add engines, they eventually sat up and took notice. At first the FAA declared that these "vehicles" would be considered powered hang gliders, as long as the pilot used his feet to take off and land. Then some of the older pilots, among them 70-year-old Volmer Jensen, added some small wheels to his powered hang glider. The FAA then stated they'd ignore the wheels, providing the plane was still capable of taking off via a foot launch. It



1
Veteran Ultralight designer John Moody, one of the very first hang glider enthusiasts to install an engine on his glider, walks his Easy Rizer out to the flight line.



2
John Moody performed a very thorough pre-flight inspection on his little biplane, including its very small wheels, then he took off and flew around the area.

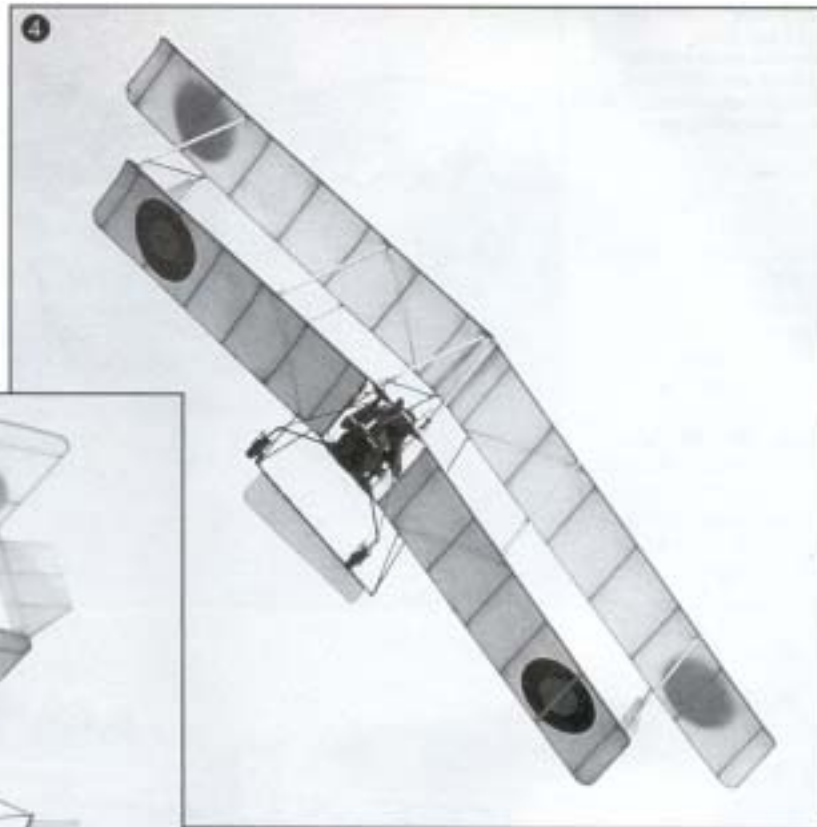
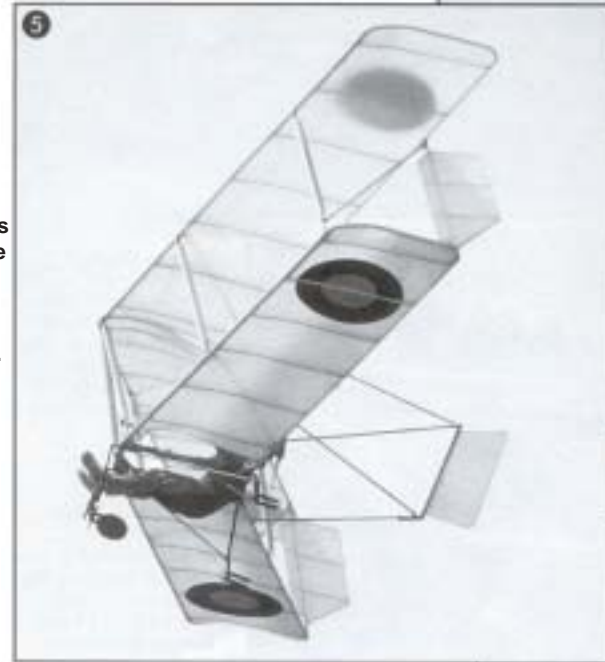


3
Within very few feet, the little plane broke ground, then very slowly began to climb.

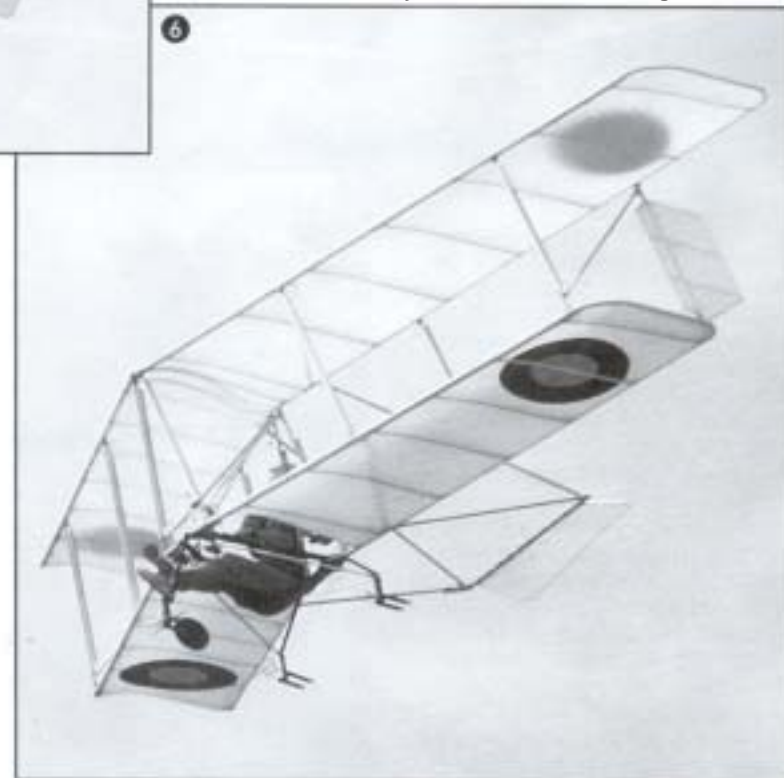
must have been obvious to the Feds - and to everyone else - that many more "improvements" were still to come. At this point, the FAA started working on rules for these so-called Ultralights in what would become Part 103 of their regulations.

As a pilot of light sport aircraft, I've been aware of the existence of Ultralights since their very beginnings. I'd seen these early attempts at powered flight, and in the process met most of the people who were involved in the sport. So I recognized that Easy Rizer as soon as I saw it at Sun 'n Fun, and hoped that whoever owned the craft was going to get it into the air. It would sure

Suddenly, an irate-looking Ultralight pilot came out on the field and shot the wheels off John Moody's Easy Rizer. This is how the plane looked as it cruised overhead minus wheels.



After climb-out, when John Moody made the turn to stay over the field, his Easy Rizer was still wearing its wheels.



Even though this part of the hilarious noontime airshow was so unbelievable, all the spectators loved it -- even the "bad guy" with the beer belly and blank-firing 12-gauge shotgun.

bring back some fond memories.

About the middle of the week I was roaming around taking pictures, hangar flying, and generally enjoyed the beautiful day. The announcer came on the PA system and told us that there would be a special treat during that day's noontime break. I waited and waited, and finally it was announced that Ultralight pioneer John Moody was going to fly his very rare, very old Easy Rizer.

As John Moody and his helpers moved the fragile-looking flying-wing biplane to the end of the runway, the announcer gave spectators a running commentary about Moody saying that he was the "Father of Ultralights." Other aircraft continued to fly for about half an hour as John very carefully checked every single stitch, bolt, and I swear, even the piston on the tiny engine which, I believe, was a small McCullough from a go-cart. The announcer emphasized that the engine very rarely ran any longer than a few minutes without busting something. I sure hoped it wouldn't fail while John was performing his flight demonstration at low altitude right overhead.

Mr. Moody finally decided that all was well with his tiny airplane, and the starters signaled all the other aircraft back to the ground. It was "Show Time," and a great show it would be.

I would have been happy with watching the old airplane fly after all of these years (in Ultralight circles, 25 years is probably equal to 100 years of any other product).

"Gentleman, start your engine!" called out the announcer. Well, John tried to do that, and after a bit of cranking, swearing, and threatening, the little two-stroke started running.

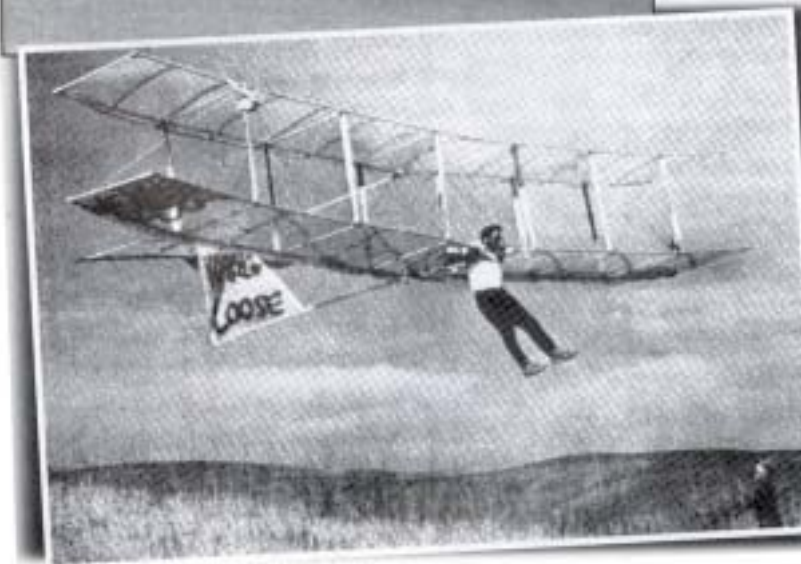
The plane headed down the runway on tiny wheels, probably with a little help from John Moody's feet. Within a few feet, the Easy Rizer was airborne and it climbed out nicely. I will say one thing for the Easy Rizer - it could certainly turn on a dime. John Moody made several circuits of the field, staying right over the runway. I figured he was doing that because when the little engine started spewing parts, John wanted to be very near a landing spot and I sure can't blame him for that. Otherwise, he'd have to land on the tents, parked cars, trees, adjacent factories and stores, etc.

I was just about out of film when a guy with a shotgun came running out of the crowd and started yelling at Moody, ordering him to land immediately. I rapidly inserted a new roll of film. John blissfully ignored him and just kept on sailing around the strip. That seemed to make the guy with the gun angry because as soon as the Easy Rizer was overhead, the shooter blasted away at the plane. Immediately a part of the airplane (one of the sets of wheels, I think) came tumbling down. There was more repartee from the announcer, and the guy blasted again. This time a white panel came floating down. The plane was dipping and turning, but it was flying just fine. Then the guy blasted one more time, and the Easy Rizer's remaining landing gear came tumbling down. Soon a uniformed "officer" ran out onto the runway, corralled the shotgun-wielding "Ultralight hater" and dragged him off to the tiedown area.

The announcer voiced his and everybody else's concern, wondering how the plane was going to land without a landing gear or a rudder (supposedly that white panel which came floating down).



Here's John, finally on the ground, using his Nikes as a landing gear. Of course many old timers there remembered John doing that back when his original Easy Rizer had no landing gear at all. It was "foot-launched and landed."



I'm not sure that anybody there, except a few old timers like me, remembered that this plane never had a landing gear in the first place, and the white panel which came floating down was only a piece of foam that John had dropped. As for me, I also knew that the show was about over, because the engine had already been running about 15 minutes and that was its limit before it ran out gas or was up for a complete overhaul, whichever came first.

Sure enough, the Easy Rizer soon came floating down very slowly. As the Easy Rizer neared the surface of the strip, John Moody simply put his feet down, and

practically walked the plane onto the ground. The crowd loved it. What we were privileged to see that day was a demonstration of early Ultralight airman-ship, flown by a master Ultralight pilot who had concocted a little drama into his demonstration flights.

Comy? Yes, out I really enjoyed it for a number of reasons. I saw a very famous early Ultralight pioneer flying. I saw one of the very first Ultralights being flown as it had 25 years ago. I saw the crowd enjoying the spectacle for what it was, a new takeoff on the old clown act - but done so much better.

There were many other flight demonstrations held at Sun 'n Fun the rest of the week, but I've been there and seen them all dozens of times. I truly enjoyed watching John Moody, his Easy Rizer, and his shotgun-toting buddy so much because it was new and different.