

I learned about flying from that

The Extra spins on.

It occurs to me with a sense of mild injustice that in the next twenty seconds I am going to die.

And I do not know why.

My right leg and arm are bar-taut and quivering, jamming full rudder and full forward stick. We *must* recover.

The Extra spins on.

Fright is the ignitor of true fear. But this has happened so quickly there has been no time even for fright. I am simply observing the fields of Buckinghamshire whirling past the nose and wondering what I am doing wrong that is going to make me die on this sunny summer morning.

The power is off. Even if my left hand wasn't hauling the throttle hard back I'd know because of the noise. The sound of the airflow in this spin is an eerie whistle such as I have never heard before in the Extra's cockpit.

We spin on.

The Extra does not *do* this.

The Extra EA 230, designed by the near-genius Walter Extra and built with Teutonic precision by *Extra Flugzeugbau*, spins like an obedient politician. And of course recovery is equally mannerly. No fancy techniques needed; just *rudder-stick* and it stops. *Bingo*.

In fact, as in most aerobatic hot ships, you never normally even think about the tiny matter of recovery from a mere spin. When you require to stop a spin in this kind of aeroplane you require it in the down-vertical on heading and you require it *exactly* on heading, not a sloppy three or four degrees off. So you do not go think *rudder-stick*; instead you *slam* the controls like cracking a whip; hit whatever you need to translate instantly from auto-rotation to vertical dive. In the course of this ungentle procedure the actual spin recovery is an almost incidental by-product. It *always* stops. Every time.

That is, it was every time.

Here and now the Extra spins on. And I still have not the slightest idea why.

In a short time I shall never know why in this world. Because in a short time this aeroplane and I will be an intermixed mass in one of the peaceful fields below.

In one way, of course, it was due. If a man will earn his living flying displays of aerobatics at low level, there will inevitably be moments when Old Man Death reaches out a beckoning hand. In the early years you laugh off these encounters with varying degrees of conviction. But as more years roll by the mirth tends to acquire a certain hollow ring, until eventually (unless you are completely lacking in all imagination) you come to accept that diligently as you may scheme to avoid the final summons, still the Old Man will probably have his way in the end if you persist in your calling. This is the unvarnished law of averages, and is not to be denied. It is why life insurance in this line of work is for all practical purposes unaffordable.

I have been around for a fair while. I have nodded to the Old Man on several occasions. This likely termination is, by dry actuarial reckoning, due and overdue.

But *this way!* This is not the sometime-inevitable mistake. This is total betrayal . . .

The treachery is absolute. Against all reason the Extra has simply decided to throw away the known laws of aerodynamics and whirl on down to its destruction. And mine.

Four years ago I would have been less astonished at such infidelity. Then the Extra was new and I was not used to Extras and there was a period of deliberate vulgarity while I established just what my new lady would let me get away with. In-spin aileron, out-spin aileron, stick-

The spin, by Brian Lecomber

before-rudder, power-on, power-off, stick back Müller-style — all the liberties which might have been expected to prompt a fit of passion and a slap around the face.

And — nothing. The Extra was the perfect mistress. Spin how you will, hash up the controls, come home drunk singing dirty songs — still she smiled demurely and forgave. To stop a spin, just *stop* and you've stopped.

So what, in heaven's name *what*, is different now?

Two differences spring to mind which I do not wish to dwell upon.

The first is that four years ago I was up at 4,000 feet conducting my nervous experimentations. And the second is that at that time I dressed slightly differently, to the extent of rounding off my outfit with the small frippery of a parachute.

Either luxury would now be most appreciated. Neither, unfortunately, is present.

We spin on.

A separate part of me notes that the nose is high and the rotation is very fast. This probably means we are not coming down particularly quickly as spins go — a factor which, even if true, is of very little consequence indeed, especially since this separate part also notes that the whirling panorama of the ground is slowly swelling up around us. Being an experienced separate part it knows that 'slowly' is an illusion brought on by the imminence of demise; the ground only ever appears to swell up when you are close to it and becoming rapidly closer.

I check feet again. Hitting the wrong rudder is the oldest killer in the book and far easier to do than many aviators would believe; the main lesson long experience teaches is that long experience does not render one immune.

But I am not doing it; we are spinning *left*, and my quivering leg is locked on *right* rudder.

God! Come on! *What is it?*

God (if there is a God), what am I doing, or not doing, which is making this spin different? And Sir — and I didn't mean that bit if there is a God — if you're going to let me know, please do so very soon . . .

The spectre of structural failure has already crossed my mind. If a rudder cable or something has broken I could shove my foot halfway through the Lycoming's crankcase without achieving the slightest result. But the aeroplane *feels* all right; the Extra and I have now long been one, and even in this extreme I am sure I would know if our body was wounded.

Also, of course, if something *has* bust there is exactly and precisely nothing I can do about it. This truth renders all thoughts on the subject nothing but a pure waste of seconds — seconds I require for more positive considerations.

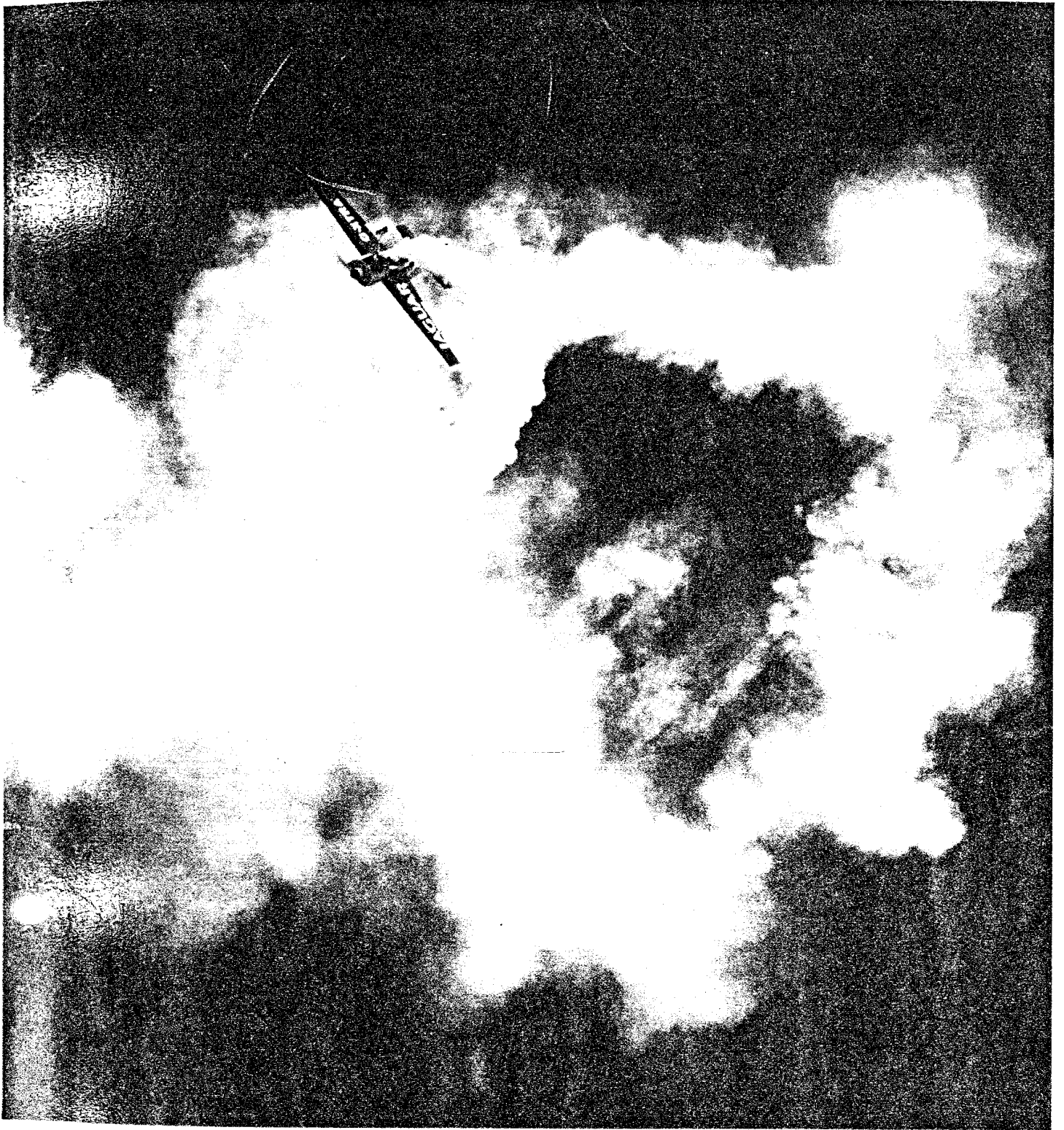
Or at least, I would require them if I could think of anything positive to consider. As it is I am consumed by utter helplessness. The unnatural whistling of the airflow seems to freeze my brain and curdle the very marrow of my bones.

I suppose the sound is a function of the very fast rotation, which is certainly the fastest I have ever experienced in any aeroplane. And *that* is probably due to the way we went in.

The way we went in was highly inadvertently. I was practising knife-edge spins. These are rapid negative-g semi-stalled gyrations with the wings in the vertical plane. They look sickeningly weird — which is not misleading — and their overall flight path is straight down with the subtlety of a dropped brick.

Some aeroplanes — among which the Extra 230 is definitely numbered — require a certain degree of tact and diplomacy on entry to the knife-edge spin, lest they become cantankerous. My technique is to enter off a stall-turn; most gingerly at first to get the rotation started, and then delicately smashing every control hard into the appropriate corner of the cockpit to wind up the revolutions.

The right moment to smash is critical. Too late and you go into a highly



uncomfortable negative-g down-vertical barrel roll; too early and the whole world explodes into such a maelstrom of whirling violence that you can only cling on aghast, convinced that no aircraft can possibly gyrate this fast whilst still maintaining possession of all its major appendages, such as wings.

When this happenstance occurs, the only thought you have in the world is to halt the proceedings at the earliest possible moment before your head flies off your shoulders. This instinct is most sound, since even if your head remains attached there is certainly a very real danger of the propeller parting company from the rest of the assembly. So you tramp on opposite rudder and un-bash the stick and wait for anxious moments ...

Which is what I did when it happened to me thirty seconds ago. Resulting in this spin.

The transition from super-fast negative knife-edge spin to very fast positive ordinary spin happened too quickly for perception. There was a second or so of that ominous rolling-sliding feeling which all aeroplanes can produce when they seriously wish to inform you that things have got out of hand, and then there we were, spinning.

And not, ridiculously *not*, stopping spinning when so directed.

The whistling noise is grimly steady, testifying to the locked-in state of the spin. My leg muscles shake as if in disbelief that their strength is not this time halting the ghastly rotation of the landscape around the engine cowling.