

All in a Spin

by Nicky Scrivener



“I’ve found the elixir of youth and the ultimate facelift!” I said as I walked into the tea room.

Ahh! but I hear you thinking... that is impossible, irrational and smacks of insecurity & sounds even shallow. Well...read on, I’ll let you be the judge!

It was one of those unbelievably shiny days that follows rough weather. A little mist and fog early in the morning which burns off leaving the clearest sky which reveals the almost iridescent green of the Hahndorf and Mt Barker valleys like a patchwork quilt veiled with a blue sky puffed with fluffy cumulus clouds. You know it... a day when it just feels great to be alive - a magic day when anything could happen.



It was Ladies Day Out at the Recreational Pilots Academy. Yep, a day already full of the promise of something new – it had the WOW factor and the dials of my dashboard were already well primed.

First up, I managed to neither frighten the be-jeebers out of either myself or my trusty instructor James. Yep I had the controls for the very first time ever of a “little” Jabiru. Hey we all know size is relative, so once up it was only a matter of making sure I concentrated and followed instructions – a good lesson for later. Well that kept us flying for half an hour and then thanks to the steady hands beside me down again safely, allowing me to savour the rush of adrenaline and sense of achievement.

So – is that the elixir? Oh no, that was just the primer for my makeover!

Simon and Diane arrived. They



own a Pitts Special which Doc Rock (Simon) flies.



A spunky red and white biplane which could be described as a billy cart (simple – for those who don’t know better) with a jet engine powering it. I was invited to go up with Simon who was out to practice some aerobatic manoeuvres. Having been up in a Tiger Moth where we did a few simpler manoeuvres, I jumped at the opportunity. Was I nervous? Simon asked as he helped me buckle up securely. No, I relied for I only had the butterflies of anticipation tickling my gut.



Off we went zig zagging up the taxiway to the runway – there is zero forward ground visibility in this spunky craft. A short run up and off we went – it’s a marvellous feeling and she slipped through the air easily as we climbed to 3000 feet. Below was the snaking Murray River full of water from recent heavy rain.

Ready? Thumbs up - Yes... ready to go. Big breath as I prepared myself. Off we went – loops and aileron rolls. How was that? he buzzed. Wow!...that’s great – so now for the more adventurous manoeuvres. In all we did Cubans, 4 point hesitation rolls, humpty doos, reverse Cubans and hammerheads. OH Boy! Straight up, this is where you get the facelift, then over and straight down in a spin. It was about then, when the ASI was showing less than 40, that I thought it would be good for the engine to kick in as the verdant green sped towards us.

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Again and again, we soured rolled turned and dived. Simon had been worried I might disgrace myself with a techni-colour yawn as they say. My trick was to find an internal visual point and focus on that, keeping my eyes wide open and to breathe more deeply to maintain relaxation. Being relaxed is ESSENTIAL!



Probably, the most weird was the landing approach while flying sideways. No forward ground visibility, we approached that way until the last minute when Simon expertly set us straight and down we went to a beautiful smooth landing.



Whew! I had a system positively full of adrenaline. No jelly legs no swirling gut only exhilaration and a grin that just keeps coming.

Reckless, unachievable even mad you think – well I have other words. Truly awesome, exhilarating, challenging and worthwhile. An exercise in self control, trust, assessing calculated risk, daring and faith in your self. Better than any pill, potion or procedure. A reminder that life is for living to the hilt -not really reckless- well maybe a tiny little bit!



My appreciation of the sheer strength and skill that aerobic pilots achieve is boundless. While I was busy maintaining equilibrium, they do that, plus aviate, navigate and all the while Simon was talking to me. Absolutely unbelievable! All I can say to you the reader is - if the opportunity arises, do it, you will never be the same. You may still have wrinkles but they will not be from worry only constant grinning.



Soar safely Simon as you reach for your dream. Thank you for fulfilling one of mine!

Nicky Scrivener – 31 August 2010