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Rotorcraft welcomes your submissions pertaining to fly-ins, builds, upcoming events, and any other items regarding the world of rotorcraft.

Deadline for submissions is the first of the month. All articles, photographs and information should be emailed to Editor@PRA.org.

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On The Cover:

A Tribute to the Late George Charlet

George Charlet, former president of PRA (succeeding Ken Brock) passed away quietly, Saturday, March 3, 2012, at approximately 8:45 CT, after suffering a stroke and lapsing into a coma. George was a CFI and helped design the first two-place gyroplane with long-time friend, Bill Parsons. George also worked with Don Farrington to obtain the FAA Flight Training 5209 Exemption.

As Rotorcraft’s special tribute to George, we have included the following recounts from those who were closest to him:

JENNIFER GILMORE

George hired me to be the first full time secretary/office manager for PRA, following the last convention held in Middletown, OH. He encouraged me to attend the conventions, and my first was the one at Hearne, TX.

I had no idea that gyroplanes existed when I interviewed for the job. He tossed out a Rotorcraft magazine and showed what we were talking about. Dennis Fetters was on the cover. I remember telling him I thought that type of aircraft was strictly something built for James Bond type movies. He laughed.

Sometime later, he was asked to do a piece for a local public TV station. Again, encouraging me to take part and learn what my job was all about, he towed me along. With trembling knees and wild eyes, I took my first gyroplane flight in his blue Barnett.

What a thrill! I was hooked, and the story continued with me moving to Indiana when PRA bought the Mentone Airport.

Always encouraging me, George was a friend, mentor, and much like a dad to me.

DUANE HUNN

I met George Charlet when I went to work for Bill Parsons years ago, in the early 1980s. I was a flight instructor for Bill Parsons for 2-1/2 to 3 years. Bill had a shop where he did a lot of testing and building of gyroplanes and teaching at Flagler Beach, FL.

I met George when he would stop by and visit with Bill. At that time, Bill was working on a two-place tandem gyro. George became interested and started to help with the building.

The two-place machine completely changed the gyro community. It enabled a flight instructor to fly with his students in one machine, instead of pulling a two-place side-by-side gyroplane with a rope. This was “back when the earth was cooling off,” as Bill would always say.

Together, Bill and George took the tandem to a different level. Bill was a dealer for Arrow Engines. Utilizing his access to the new engine and more power, he created a tandem two-place with an engine powerful enough to carry two people safely.

At one point, we had a guest who manufactured floats for aircraft. Bill asked him if he would build a set for the two-place gyro. They were huge. We all put some time into working on the floats and hooking them up on the tandem. When we were finished, the testing started. This is where the fun began.

I wasn’t there when they put it in water, but this is the story I was told. With George in the back of the tandem and Bill in the front, they began the first tests. They pushed the tandem off into the water. And by golly, it didn’t sink, so you guessed it! Bill yells “Clear prop!” History was in the making and they were “living the dream!”

Now you have to realize they had a 6-cylinder arrow engine on board with 800 lb. of thrust. They didn’t realize the propeller was a little bit in the water and kicking up rooster tail out the back. Now picture Mutt and Jeff!

They didn’t have any radios, so Bill couldn’t hear George’s warnings to stop. They managed to get it into the air and flew low level around the patch and landed. After they shut it down and got off they
found out there wasn’t much of the prop left and realized they were all wet. That’s when the laughing began.

Later, Bill took off the floats, and it sat around for awhile. One day Bill ran across a Air Command two-place side-by-side. Hmmm... you guessed right! He made it into a three-place. It was side-by-side in the back seat and solo in the front seat. He gave rides at Wauchula.

Maxie Wildes and myself rode the back seat. What a ride!

Later, George became president of PRA. I saw him regularly at airshows. For years afterward, we would joke around the campfire about our experiences.

George was a big part of the PRA and helped in the development of the tandem. I will really miss the camaraderie and friendship that we shared.

RON IACONIS

When Jennifer Gilmore sent me a text message regarding George Charlet’s having suffered a serious stroke and that Betty Charlet felt that George might not survive the ordeal, I prepared myself for the inevitable.

George served on the National Board of PRA as our President back in the late 1980’s and into the early 1990’s.

George was a Bensen dealer in Clinton, Louisiana, and he, Ken Brock, Bill Parsons, Dave Prater, Russ Jansen, Bob Tozer, Don Farrington, Jim McCutchen, Gary Goldsberry, Willard Meyers, Ed Alderfer, Floyd Brown, and so many more wonderful folks were a great brotherhood of gyronauts. I have many great memories of our meetings and flying activities!

After Ken Brock had his injury, George was elected president of PRA and George did us good. He operated four funeral homes in Louisiana. Jennifer was employed by George in the funeral home business and was also our secretary. George used to communicate with us board members regularly, sending us requests to answer letters from the members at large.

Overall George was very active in PRA. Some will remember “The Frog Pond” that George and Bill Parsons used to hold at our conventions! After everyone got “politically correct,” they were discouraged to continue the party atmosphere, but I thought that it was a great way to have fellowship and camaraderie!

Then there was the great gathering at Bob Fitzpatrick’s farm in 1985 in Illinois! We all had finished up our activities at our annual PRA convention in Shelbyville, Illinois. All that were going to EAA Air Venture in Oshkosh following our convention decided to motor home convoy as a group, and we stopped over at Bob’s farm halfway to Oshkosh. There, we had an absolute blast! Along with the corn roast, we had gathered around the fire and most participated in sharing “slammers!” I won’t describe what that was, but those that were there know and it was super fun! Remember the song... “Don’t mess with my toooot tooot?” George and Betty Charlet were the center of the fun, fun, fun, party! George had an old greyhound bus that he converted into a motor coach and did Betty and George know how to PARA Y!

What a wonderful time we had with George and Betty Charlet!

And in closing on this tribute to George Charlet, “George, thanks for the memories!”

George with his Barnet two-place gyro.
Also pictured are Ken Brock, Willard Meyers, Don Farrington, Jim McCutchen, and others.

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The Ugliest Autogyro?

Bruce H. Charnov Ph.D J.D. FRAeS

PRA’s Popular Rotorcraft Flying and Rotorcraft, and non-PRA publications, regularly present Gyrocopters and gyroplanes renowned for the daring of their aeronautical vision and beauty of construction, much to the delight of all gyro-enthusiasts – but what about the opposite – the ‘ugly’ gyros? Being a popularly-based, home-grown, every-person-flying-by-the-seat-of-their-pants from the backyard movement (see some of the early Bensen advertisements!), it can be said that some truly strange and sometimes genuinely ugly machines have been produced. These aircraft did not, I believe, start out with the intention of being ugly – it just sort of happened. Here are two I nominate – and eagerly look forward to suggestions by Rotorcraft readers:

Fritz Wigal’s “Flying Freak”

Fritz Wigal, of Jackson, TN, developed a 1963 tractor-design that was sort of a “back to the future” approach and which, perhaps justifiably, has been lost to history. This was a very, very weird gyroplane, later dubbed a “flying freak.” Wigal, PRA #31, was featured in an article in the Spring 1964 Popular Rotorcraft entitled “Rotor Starter” which described the product of Wigal’s “inquisitive mind” and “constructive discontent,” as a unique tractor gyroplane that featured a ‘tilting engine-mount.’

Wigal was directing the prop wash (slipstream), as he titled the engine towards the ground, towards the two-bladed rotor, above which was a four-bladed ‘stub rotor’ located above the main rotor which caught the flow of air and caused the main rotor to rotate prior to takeoff.

Wigal claimed in the June/July issue of Air Progress that his 12’ long single-seat gyroplane had an empty weight of 320 lb, a gross weight of 570 lb., a top speed of 75-mph with a 72-hp McCulloch engine, a cruise speed of 60-mph, a takeoff run of 100-ft and landing at 15-mph with its 20’ rotor. In the Spring 1964 issue of Popular Rotorcraft Flying, Wigal stated that he had made “[n]umerous towed flights” (complete with a photograph), but noted that “I have not yet been granted an airworthiness certificate for powered flight” as “[d]uring initial powered lift-off trials for the FAA inspector there was evidence of insufficient directional control”. But the June/July issue of Air Progress claimed that “[a]t 4-hour flight trial point specs were: top speed 75-mph, cruise 60-mph.” So it does appear that the Wigal gyroplane did achieve powered flight,
but nothing was heard of it since the 1964 description repeated in the 1970 edition of the Lambermont/Pirie book *Helicopters and Autogiros of the World*. The 1966 British *Commando* comic (*Commando War Stories in Pictures*), in its distinctive 7 x 5 1/2 inch, 68 page format, dubbed the Wigal gyroplane a “flying freak” and the lack of subsequent history has done nothing to negate that description.

While Wigal’s solution to the problem of prerotation was not elegant, it was in many ways a “back to the future approach” as it was truly a case of “been there, done that.” Juan de la Cierva, the Spanish inventor of the Autogiro, had confronted the same problem of effective pre-rotation and had tried several methods to little or no avail. Initially the Cierva C.6 Autogiro was taxied up and down the runway until the rotor achieved the necessary rotational speed for take off. This was followed by several non-mechanical solutions, all of which proved unsuccessful and at least one which had potentially lethal results. These included an arrangement of wooden pegs on the bottom of the blades to allow for a starter rope to be used to ‘spin up’ or prerotate the blades at takeoff as evident in a photograph of the Cierva C.6A at its English demonstration at Farnborough in 1925 showing the men winding ropes attached to knobs around the rotor hub, much like a child’s spinning top. vi

That solution was inefficient, and still required lengthy taxi runs to bring the rotors up to speed. Additionally Cierva Pilot, Frank Courtney vii (6) had even attempted to achieve sufficient rotation by winding a cable around the C.6C’s rotor hub, staking the other end to the ground, and taxiing down the runway. While the blades did spin up as the staked cable rotated the rotor hub, the cable snapped off at the end and, just barely missing the pilot’s head, cut the rudder in two. Needless-to-say, that method was abandoned after a single trial!

Cierva had also attempted unsuccessfully to develop a mechanical pre-rotation device. In 1930 Cierva built an Autogiro at Hamble with a rotor spin-up drive from the engine. That drive, attributed to engine designer Major Frank Bernard Halford viii did not prove successful. Demonstrated on January 8, 1930, it proved too heavy at 165 lb. Cierva had also patented, in January 1929, a rotor starting device based on compressed air, steam or water pressure which would accelerate the blades from nozzles attached to some or all of the blade tips. The idea had been briefly tested and rejected as impractical given the current

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**C.6 Cable Winding**

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**While Wigal’s solution to the problem of prerotation was not elegant, it was in many ways a “back to the future approach” as it was truly a case of “been there, done that.”**
One early British rotorcraft attempt to design a two-place aircraft was the ill-fated “Thruxton Gadfly.”

Cierva C.19 with “Scorpion” ‘deflector (box) tail’

It was initially capable of spinning-up the rotor blades to 80/90 rpm in 30-40 seconds, enabling the aircraft to take off with only a short taxi run to accelerate the rotor to takeoff speed, and later achieved the 125 rpm necessary for takeoff.

One early British rotorcraft attempt to design a two-place aircraft was the ill-fated “Thruxton Gadfly.” Announced in 1964 as the E.S. 101, reflecting the name of its designer Eric Smith, it was originally to be produced by the Wiltshire School of Flying, but the Thruxton Aviation and Engineering Company Ltd was later formed to manufacture this ambitious two-place gyroplane. The announced design featured a futuristic fully-enclosed bubble-shaped
perspex cabin,\textsuperscript{xii} but the prototype did not come close to achieving the proposed production values. After almost three years of turbulent development, Smith left the project, presumably disheartened with the evolution of the prototype, which then passed to the dubious design talents of Ray Hillbourne, a former physics teacher, for a redesign that was to produce an incredibly ugly machine. The prototype was taken to Blackbushe for flight tests in May of 1968, but was returned to Thruxton in January of 1973, apparently never having flown.\textsuperscript{xii}

And while one can assert that there is an achievement of ugliness that reaches a certain level of beauty, the Gadfly may be described as having almost-but-not-quite achieved that level. Even today, its appearance and foreboding is so off-putting that the viewer is not surprised to learn of its earth-bound fate.

So, these are my two initial suggestions for the ‘ugliest gyro’ – let’s hear yours.

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\textsuperscript{i} “Flying Freaks – Wigal Autogyro” Commando. No. 227 p. 2
\textsuperscript{ii} “Rotor Starter” Popular Rotorcraft Flying. Vol. 2 No. 2 Spring 1964 p. 14
\textsuperscript{iv} “One-Man Rotary Wing Craft” Air Progress. Vol. 16 No. 3 June/July 1964 pp. 77 – 79
\textsuperscript{vi} See also the photo in Almond, Almond, Peter Aviation: The Early Years (The Hulton Getty Picture Collection). Germany: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH 1997 on p. 343 showing a Frank Courtney demonstration flight at Farnborough in 1925 clearly shows the line of four men holding the rope on the left side of the image preparing to spin up the rotor.
\textsuperscript{ix} See “Exhibit Spotlight: Pitcairn PCA-1A” Vertika. Vol. 7 Issue 2 October 2000 p. 5
\textsuperscript{xi} Lambermont, Paul M., and Anthony Pirie Helicopters and Autogyros of the World. pp. 135 – 136
\textsuperscript{xii} Ellis, Ken British Home Built Aircraft Since 1920. Liverpool, England: Merseyside Aviation Society Publication 1979. p. 177
Rotorcraft recently presented a question to our CFIs. “What was your first exposure to gyroplanes and what spurred your desire to fly?”

Their responses are posted below.

Paul Patterson
Edmond, OK

Being an old Army swing-wing aviator, I was naturally attracted to anything with rotors; however, helos are expensive to purchase and even more expensive to maintain. So, for a long while I putted around the country in my Taylorcraft, allowing myself no more flights of fancy about delving into the world of private helicopter ownership.

Then late one evening, about 10 years ago, I was doing some lesson prep for a remedial science class that I was teaching at a local high school. I thought that a gyroscope would make an interesting introduction to centripital force and how it acts on a rotating body.

To make a long story short, I inadvertently typed in “gyrocopter.” One thing led to another, and the rest is history.

Funny how things happen.

Ron Menzie
Searcy, AR

I was taking my wife for a Sunday drive in Rhode Island when we noticed a loud noise. Looking up to the sky, I noticed a small helicopter-type flying machine. I followed it to the Westerly State airport where we watched it taxi and park on the ramp. The pilot, Jack Gordon, had built this Benson gyrocopter from a kit. He owned a dealership called Eastern Benson Gyro Sales at Richmond Airpark in Richmond, R.I.

I was excited and decided to build my own Benson gyrocopter. I had just been discharged from the Air Force and had no interest in flying until I saw this machine. I continued to complete my gyrocopter. I taught myself how to fly it, as there was no such person as a CFI gyroplane at that time.

When Jack Gordon decided to join the peace corps, I took over his Eastern Benson Gyrocopter sales business.

Michael Burton
Spanish Fork, UT

As a child, I flew a small Piper Tripacer with my dad. I was hooked.

In the mid 1980s, I saw a video of a little Sport Copter flying around the fields and trees. My co-workers and I watched the video over and over. Then we decided to buy one.

I called Sport Copter and set out the plan. Jim at Sport Copter gave me the news that the machine would not fly at our altitude. So, the dream of flight went dormant.

In 2006, when I was a CFI for airplanes, I met Nate Oldham. At our first meeting, Nate told me of his plan to sell gyroplanes in Utah. At the time, I had forgotten all about gyros.

I agreed to become a gyro CFI, and we spent several months camped out in...
Buckeye, AZ, building the gyro and getting training. This time we let nothing stand in the way! Soon we had a gyro school in Utah and the only flying gyro in the state!

**Chris Burgess**

**Frederick, MD**

I saw the Bensen in Popular Mechanics magazine back in the mid 1960’s and was “hooked.” I even tried to get my junior high school shop teacher to let me build a set of wooden rotors. This looked like the perfect (cheapest) way to fly and the simplest way to do it.

I got my fixed-wing pilot’s license in 1966 by pumping gas at the airport. From there, I went to Army helicopter school and flew helicopters in Vietnam 1968-69. I was the youngest aircraft commander in our unit.

That sealed my love for rotorcraft, and of course, the only thing I could ever hope to afford was a Bensen. I found one in a hangar at my local airport in 1971. Someone built it, but it had never been flown. The price was right, so I bought it. Within a week I had it flying, and of course, I couldn’t get enough!

Around 1987, I was approached by an outfit that said they would purchase a Parsons tandem for me if I would instruct in it. So we did it! I was the most experienced in the area, and there were no two-place trainers here.

I was later selected by PRA as the most qualified to send to CFI training at Paducah, KY. To this point, I was only rated as a commercial helicopter and gyroplane pilot. Training to CFI was under the instruction of John Potter in the Air and Space 18A.

On my 40th birthday (1989), I achieved my goal of CFI Gyroplane. I have been instructing ever since.

**Tim O’Connor**

**Batavia, OH**

I have wanted to fly since I was a child. The need for affordable flight sent me looking for an ultralight fixed wing.

One day, while working on a client’s computer network, I ran across a gentleman who had some flying memorabilia in his office. When I came in to add a network card to his computer, I told him I wanted to buy an ultralight fixed wing. He recommended gyros and handed me a PRA flyer of some kind (I no longer have it). He told me that they could handle winds very well and that

**Desmon Butts**

**Tomball, TX**

I have been around aircraft from a very young age. My father had three Cessnas to use in a club in Ogden, Utah. We spent many hours in the deserts west by the Great Salt Lake. One day he talked about gyroplanes. I later saw one in James Bond and thought “Wow, that’s cool,” but we never did anything about it.

I could have gotten my license for free, but didn’t until I turned 40. I was living in Alaska, north of Anchorage, and flew my 172 over glaciers and Prince William Sound.

In 2009, my wife and I went to Costa Rica for our anniversary. We stayed at the Flying Crocodile ultralight port. Guido, the owner, had five MTO Autogyros. I thought “Wow, looks like fun,” but I had also heard of all the stories of people getting killed. I did not fly a gyro at that time. Now I know that many of these bad situations were due to lack of proper training.

Three months later, after selling a company in Alaska, I moved my family to Costa Rica where my wife wanted to be a massage therapist. We stayed in a large house at the Flying Crocodile for 4 months. Our front door was 30 feet from the runway. Gyros were flying everyday. It took me six weeks of observation before getting into one. Then the addiction began!

I was licensed in Costa Rica and came back to America where I picked up my Sport CFI Gyro in 2010, Commercial Gyro in 2011, and now I am finishing Full Gyro CFI. I hope to be done very soon.

I now live in Tomball, Texas north of Houston. I have my own MTO and have flown over 450 hours in gyros in 10 months, including flying from Houston to Oshkosh last Summer.

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PRA Chapters

I am happy to bring to you some of the most important news on the topic of regulations and safety we have had for some time.

As you may have seen from the E-Alert emailed out using the PRA digital messaging system, the PRA Webinar “Radio Use in the Pattern by Light Sport Aircraft” received acceptance from the FAA to be eligible for FAA WINGS education credit.

I now have some even better additional news to bring to you. The FAA regional manager of the FAAS Team program has accepted the presentation and started a formal FAA review to have it added to the official WINGS and FAAS Team program. The regional manager had some great feedback on the PRA presentation such as “Wow, I am very impressed, indeed. Excellent work” and “I’m confident that it will pass muster.” While this is no form of a guarantee that the presentation will be approved and unchanged by the process, it is certainly a very good sign.

So, what does all of this mean?
The PRA has been working with the FAA since the PRA’s inception. Many people do not realize it, but in the past the PRA has contributed more to the inception of rules for ultralights and experimental aircraft than even the EAA. However, since this time the PRA’s dealings with the FAA have been primarily reactionary, such as making sure that gyros are included in Sport Pilot rules and working with issuance of LODAs for instruction.

What is significant about this new relationship between the PRA and the FAA is that for the first time in 15 years or more, a proactive process is taking place to educate the FAA and all pilots (not just rotorcraft pilots) on gyroplanes and light helicopters.

If the PRA presentation is approved, it will be the first and only gyroplane and light helicopter specific information included in the FAA safety and education program, outside of the year 2000 FAA Rotorcraft Handbook. The presentation will be available nationwide as a program any FAAS Team Representative can give at an event and all attendees will automatically be eligible for WINGS credit.

Once this process is concluded, the PRA Regulatory Committee is still far from done. The next step is to create a formal agreement...
and communication process with the FAA at the conclusion of which the PRA will be a formal Safety Partner Organization.

The results of this third step are expected to be profound, as we hope to have much greater PROACTIVE input on not only personal rotorcraft safety education but also training, regulations, FAA Advisors and more.

Although you cannot receive WINGS credit for attending the recorded event, you can watch the complete presentation in the Members-Only section of the PRA website.

Speaking of webinars, Stan Foster’s Helicycle webinar is also now available to view online. A new piece of software has allowed us to present the recorded webinars in two formats. The first format works best for PC computers with Java enabled browsers like IE, Firefox, Chrome and Safari, and the second format is compatible with iPads and iPhones!

By mid-April the PRA expects to have a total of four new recorded webinars on the Members-Only page.

In other news...

It has come to our attention that Jack Tiffany, restorer of the Pitcairn PA-18 has suffered a stroke. We all wish him a swift recovery. The PA-18, currently at Grimes Airport Museum in Ohio, is soon moving to a new home in Florida.

Duane Hunn, gyroplane CFI and PRA Board Member, is undergoing hip surgery. Please keep him in your thoughts as well.

Roy T. Hanan is a new gyroplane instructor who has been added to the PRA’s verified instructors list. To contact and learn more about Roy, go to the TRAINING section of the PRA website.

PRA member and supporter Norman Surplus is resuming his around the world gyro trip in May when the weather over the Bearing Sea is expected to become favorable.

Lastly, the next PRA Board of Directors meeting will be held at the Bensen Days event in just a few weeks (March 21st).

If you have any issues you would like to have the BOD address please contact a director soon. You can contact me at gyro.pilot@yahoo.com.

Remember that work put into the safety programs, relationships with the FAA, webinars, events, programs, web page public archives, this digital magazine, chapter newsletter redistribution, CFI listings, the LODA program and more are all possible only through MEMBERSHIP DUES.

Just because you are receiving this FREE copy of the digital magazine Rotorcraft does not mean you are a DUES paying member or that your PRA membership is current. You can check your membership status by logging on to the PRA Members-Only section of the web page. If you need help doing this, email: praglobalsupportteam@gmail.com.

I would like to personally thank all of the PRA members who have made the great success of new programs possible. Do not forget to help everyone promote and attend the 50th PRA Convention this year: July 31-August 4th 2012.

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March 2012 • Rotorcraft 13
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Please contact David Holmes at 251-680-7731 after 3:00 CST or email holmesbrent@yahoo.com

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By Bert Wichers

Now on the California PMA scene, this Walter Continental engine powered the late Don Manger of Pico Rivera, California. The Walter is a V6, 200-horsepower engine with a six-blade, 62-inch, metal propeller. The propeller was a PA-28-type, manufactured by Hamilton Standard.

The engine was installed in the late Mr. Manger’s Cessna 172. The plane was sold to a buyer in another state.

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