A Visit With The Amish
Bensen Days 2012
I Flew A Gyroplane!
El Mirage 2011
From The Editor:

Hello, rotorcraft community! Another month has gone by, and as we reach the dead of winter, it’s getting cold in some parts of the country. Here in North Carolina, unless you are lucky enough to own an enclosed aircraft, it’s quite cold for flying. Many of our gyroplane pilots here take this time to do maintenance and upgrades on their machines.

With it being cold outside, my husband and I are certainly looking forward to traveling to Florida for the Bensen Days celebration set for March 21-25.

If you haven’t experienced Bensen Days before, it is certainly a treat. Gyroplane enthusiasts from all over come to fly, compete, learn, and to just hang out and have a good time. Each event is like a big reunion. Pilots, potential pilots, and those wanting to learn more are all invited to come take it all in.

This issue has further detailed information on Bensen Days and how to register. Also included are articles from Stan Foster, Albert Dyer, and a few memories from El Mirage written by Terry Smith, Paul Plack and Carl Matter.

Stan writes about his very interesting visit with an Amish community. Of course, the Amish restrict themselves from such modern machines as aircraft, but they were very interested to see Stan and his kit-built Helicycle.

Albert submitted a good story for those interested in gyroplane instruction. He details his experience as he began training sessions and learned that gyroplanes are not as dangerous as some would have you believe.

I hope you enjoy this very informative issue!

Looking forward to Bensen Days!

Editor, Rotorcraft magazine

On The Cover:
Stan Foster’s visit to Amish country.
By Stan Foster

I own and operate a curved stairway business, and one of my suppliers for materials are two Amish brothers, Williard and Howard Miller near Arthur, Illinois. They are aware of my helicopter that I fly, and one day I was invited to fly it down to their annual hogroast that they hold for their employees and customers. It was an honor which I quickly accepted, but also a situation that I found very interesting. The Amish are very religious and by choice keep some distance from the ways of the world. I totally respect their ways, yet I kept finding this flight down into the Amish community very enticing.

The day didn’t come fast enough for me. My helicopter is a kit-built Helicycle powered by a turbine engine. In talking with Williard and Howard, it seems the fact that I built it intrigued them a lot. They love trades that work with their hands, and I can surely speak from loving my trade of building curved stairways with my own hands. So in a way I could see where they were coming from.

The week of the flight down to the Amish homestead, I had checked over my Helicycle very thoroughly, even polishing the rotor blades and waxing the cabin. This was to impress myself, not the Amish. It was my opinion that they would be more impressed if it were less shiny. I just like a clean ship that looks as good as the day I first flew it -- so I got it all pristine.

The day of the flight, I decided to leave an hour early so I could visit more with Williard and Howard. I departed at 3 p.m. and did a high speed, low-level pass over my home letting my wife Barbara know I was enroute to the Amish country. It was a very nice sunny day. Combines were creating plumes of dust as far as you could see, in any direction you turned your head. The thought went through my head, “What a vantage point I have from up here!” I had a nice tail wind going down, and my GPS was showing around 105 mph with an indicated speed around 90 mph. Of course, I would have a headwind on the return trip. My Helicycle can cruise at 110 mph so even into a 20 mph headwind I can
I felt like Neil Armstrong when he was piloting the lunar lander on the first landing on the moon.

I felt like Neil Armstrong when he was piloting the lunar lander on the first landing on the moon. I had entered the last time I visited their cabinet shop. I had a handheld GPS where I recorded the longitude and latitude of their business and entered those numbers into my GPS in the helicopter. The screen silently relayed to me how many feet off course I was as I made my flight. How easy can navigation get, I thought? Soon I was descending down from 1500 feet to 500 feet. There on que was the business, so I did a high recon and then a low recon checking for any obstacles around the landing area. Williard had kindly mowed some pasture ground for me to set down in, but as I was approaching to land there was quite a bit of hay being blown around. So I decided on something different. I felt like Neil Armstrong when he was piloting the lunar lander on the first landing on the moon. At the last minute he decided to land in a different place, and he hovered over to one more to his liking. The same happened to me. I saw Williard’s pristine yard and hovered over to it and set down in the corner. I was greeted by Williard and his nice family. They looked enthusiastic as I spooled down the turbine. My first half of my mission was complete -- landing my helicopter on Amish soil. It was an honor, yet I was fairly shy about doing so without fully knowing what their real thoughts were about this. Later, I was to finally realize that though this is something they would not do, they do not look down their noses at people like myself enjoying such a machine.

I was greeted by Williard and a few of his kids. One cute little girl was just standing in the doorway of the helicopter, and I asked her if she wanted to sit in it. She just turned her eyes to her dad’s, and you could see she wanted to. Soon she was inside and all smiles. I felt a little guilty, like I had made a bad impression on these kids, so I didn’t want to exceed my limits and really tell them how much I love flying this machine.

Williard told me I could go look his cabinet shop over as he prepared for the cookout. So I took myself on a self-guided tour and was simply amazed at how clean the place was. There were nice handmade cabinets holding very nice handtools, probably as sharp as a razor, but then I noticed very nice modern table saws, dust collecting equipment, a lacquer spray room, hinge boring machines, and on and on and on. It was a role reversal for me! Here I am, Mr. Modern-day stairway man, and I felt like my shop was put back 50 years. Now I was the one who looked like I didn’t want to move as fast as the world does.

Williard and Howard do amazing work, and I was nothing but impressed with their work, their morals, and just how happy they are with life. There is no doubt that they are enjoying life more than the average person from my side of the fence.

The spot where I had landed the helicopter happened to be right where the Amish were going to set up their volleyball net. My
The helicopter was going to have to be moved, but that was no problem! I would have just started it up and hovered it over out of the way, except I was asked to demonstrate what it could do. I could certainly provide a nice demonstration flight. I lit off the turbine, and oh, that heavenly whining sound as it was idling at 48,000 rpm. I checked over the instruments, and then rolled on the throttle to flight rpm of 61,500 rpm. The collective lever was slowly raised. I felt the landing gear becoming light as I positioned the pedals for a nice vertical lift off to about 3-4 feet. I hovered there a little bit, then flew backwards, sideways, then did a slow pirouette as I departed out through translational lift. Soon I was up to 100 mph, made a 180 degree turn and did a high speed pass with the wind. My airspeed was 110 mph, but my groundspeed was more like 125 mph. The blades were popping with delight as I turned the last 180, came in and made a quick stop, hovered and landed. The Amish people looked very interested, and I felt more comfortable doing such maneuvers since I was asked to demonstrate it. Soon the turbine was spooling down, going through several of its reverberation cycles as the harmonics of the turbine let it be known that this thing was a different animal.

Before the food was served, Williard came out and hitched his horse up to the buggy for the helicopter/horse and buggy photo session. I was watching him thread the reins through eyelets and was comparing his controls with my cyclic controls on my helicopter. His reins control the horses head; my control rods control my rotorhead. When Williard was finished, he was standing up from looking under his horse and said “She is all pre-flighted!” Now I thought that was very humorous on his part, and I got a big chuckle out of that. He obviously has picked up some aviation terminology. I could not come up with a thing to impress him with my knowledge of horses, except to show my ignorance with my questions I was asking him. One question was brought on by me watching his horse grind the hay he was eating. I never really had been that close to a horse while they were eating. It was amazing to see the side-to-side jaw movement as their teeth shredded the alfalfa. I had to ask about how long the horses can go before any dental work is needed. Amazing animals to say the least.

Next, it was time to move the horse and buggy over to the chopper for a picture that they promised I could take. Williard was walking alongside the horse and was about 100 feet from my helicopter when the horse began bobbing his head and kind of rearing up a little. He was spooked from my helicopter and probably that fresh airshow he had a front-row stall position to watch from!

Williard climbed into the buggy and grabbed the reins trying to settle the horse down. He moved the buggy about 30 feet

[The horse] was spooked from my helicopter and probably that fresh airshow he had a front-row stall position to watch from!
away from my Helicycle and thought that was about as close as he could get. It was fine with me, as I sure wouldn’t want the horse scratching his hooves on my windshield. I took a few pictures and was really grateful for them allowing me to do so. I totally respected their wishes of not filming them. Next, Williard asked if I wanted to hop in the buggy, and I said “sure!” In I went and took some more pictures of the horse and the helicopter from the buggy’s vantage point.

The sun was setting fast, and with the headwinds that I would have on the return flight, I made certain that my skids should be off the ground no later than 6:15 p.m. I was given an early treat to the roast hog, and it was ever delicious! Marv Miller cooked the hog over at his place and did an excellent job.

Soon it was time to depart and I was welcomed with a nice group of Amish people with hats and bonnets on as I prepared the turbine for its startup. Just like when I arrived, here I was feeling like Neil Armstrong again as I pushed the start button on my turbine. I said “God bless” to everyone, and now I needed that turbine to light up I was going to be stranded for the night. Of course this is nothing in comparison to Neil Armstrong’s need for his engine to start -- that would have been death for him and Buzz Aldrin, but just an inconvenience for me. Probably would have ended up staying and having more Amish cooked food and breakfast the next day. But I pressed the starter button, followed by the start fuel button, and that heavenly whoooommmphhh sound tickled my ears as the kerosene lit off in the burner can. This caused the fiery inferno that drives the turbine faster and faster until the pitch goes above your hearing, and I have 100 horses under control. I waved to everyone, and soon I was in a hover, then departed to the north as I pressed for home to beat the oncoming darkness. I maintained a 90 mph groundspeed as I flew at an indicated 110 mph. Helicycles really fly like a scalded cat, and I soon ate up the quiltwork of fields as I flew home. I made it with not too much light, but for the first time actually used my landing lights as I flew through a narrow channel that leads to my stairshop.

The helicopter was put away with a most satisfying “mission accomplished” feeling. Best news is that I was invited back!

What a most memorable contrast of two cultures this was for myself and I am sure the fine Amish brothers who invited me down. I know we both have respect for each other and a little more understanding of our different ways.
Bensen Days 2012
for the Kid in All of Us

Remember the first time you saw one?

Way in the back of Popular Mechanics magazine, was an aircraft you could build in your garage, and tow behind your car. The dream of flight, alive in your 10 year old mind. This is the year you honor that dream.

Wauchula Florida - Bensen Days, the premier gyroplane gathering in the US will again take place at the Wauchula Municipal Airport in Wauchula, Florida.

Beginning Wednesday, March 21st, through Sunday, March 25th rotor-heads from around the country will congregate at CHN for fun, fellowship and most of all, flying.

Unlike other fly-ins where pilots fly in and spend the rest of the time talking, gyroplane pilots fly. The airport campground will be full to capacity, and the fun will start at dawn and continue into the evening.

The event is open to all types of aircraft and pilots, including powered rotor, powered parachutes, trikes, fixed wings and ppgs.

Originated by Sunstate Wing and Rotor Club, the festival honors the memory of a pioneer of home built flight, Igor Bensen. This year the Popular Rotorcraft Association will embrace the fly-in as an official association fly-in, which will only make it better.

If history is any guide, you will have the opportunity to see gyroplanes of every imaginable style and model, from basic home built machines to exotic enclosed multi passenger models. Instructors will be available to do both training and introductory flights. Visit for the day or immerse yourself for the whole event. Come alone or bring the family.

Help us celebrate this aviation marvel.

39th Annual Bensen Days Fly In

For more information visit our website at WWW.BensenDays.com and WWW.PRA.org
Since reading about the Bensen gyrocopters in the mid-sixties, I have always been fascinated with these little machines. It seems that about once every decade I get bitten by the curiosity bug and the urge to learn more about gyroplanes and a strong presence of wanting to fly one really presses in on me. Over the decades, I have seen videos of them flying, read articles about people flying them, and have heard the stories about accidents and how unsafe they are from my peers.

Well, this being the fourth decade of this, I decided to finally act and go to a gyroplane club meeting and ask questions. I was invited to the Greater Midwest Rotorcraft Club, which is also a chapter of the Popular Rotorcraft Association, Chapter 18. At the hangars in Lansing, Illinois, I saw many different types of gyroplanes and asked all the questions I could think of to ease my mind about what I had heard about gyroplanes over the past 40 years. The first thing I learned was the FAA now considers these little aircraft “gyroplanes” and not “gyrocopters.” Sorry to all those who were tolerant of my ignorance, and thankful to those who took the time to answer all my questions and ease the fears I had grown up with. Feeling satisfied, I decided take a lesson or two and judge for myself if flying a gyroplane is as safe and exciting as everyone in the club has told me.

A two-place training gyroplane was unheard of in the mid-50’s and 60’s, much less was finding a gyroplane instructor. It was only you. You built the gyroplane from plans. You taught yourself to fly the gyroplane from a manual. I now understand the high accident rate that people spoke of. It would be pretty difficult and risky to teach yourself to fly successfully without bending some metal at a minimum. As I mentioned, I now understand the high accident/injury rate in those early days of gyroplane flying.

At the time of this writing, I have logged about three hours of dual instruction in a two-place gyroplane. In those three hours, this is what I have learned. It’s a pretty simple machine as far as construction goes. The training gyroplane I fly has a 150 hp Lycoming engine for power with dual magnetos. Engine start is the same as any fixed wing aircraft. To taxi, there are rudder pedals that function in the same manner as an aircraft. Brakes can be fashioned in one of four ways: disk brakes on the main wheels, drum brakes on the main wheels, a disk brake on the nose wheel or a scuff pad which is pressed against the nose tire itself. The cyclic operates the same as a control yoke or control stick on an airplane. There is a throttle control, basic flight and engine instruments. A communications radio provides two-way communication between instructor and student and also the airport environment.

Once the pre-start check list is complete, you can start the rotor blades spinning by just a counter-clockwise push or two with your hand. Or, if your gyroplane has a prerotator, it can be engaged to begin the rotor blades spinning. If you are going to have the rotor blades turning during taxi, the blades should rotate at least a 100 rpm to prevent blade flap.

At around 100 rpm, the rotor blades are not as flexible; they “stiffen” due in part to centrifugal force. Taxi speed is usually enough to maintain the rotor blade rotation.
rpm and prevent blade flap, yet slow enough to be safe while moving toward the runway.

Blade flaps are when the rotor blades are turning too slow (under 100 rpm) and ground speed is too fast, causing the advancing blade to produce much more lift than the retreating blade, which causes the blades to flap up and down until the blades hit the ground or your rudder if not corrected immediately. In my experience, there was a jerking, thumping motion of the cyclic as it hit the stop to let you know that the rotor blades are flapping.

Another method a pilot can choose is to taxi with the rotor blades fixed in place. There is a rotor brake which can be engaged, which allows the pilot to stop the rotor blades in any position. Most pilots position the rotor blades with a blade in the forward position while the gyroplane is moving. This lets the pilot see the forward blade to minimize the hazard of running a blade into something, but it also prevents rotor blade flap while the gyroplane is moving on the ground.

With the pre-takeoff check list completed and just before taking the active runway, you can engage the prerotator and allow the rotor blades to spin up to a little over 150 rpm. Taking the active runway, cyclic all the way back into your lap, you want to accelerate slowly being careful not to reach flight airspeed before the rotor blades have enough lift to fly (blade flap!). As forward speed builds, rotor blade rpm increases because you have the rotor blades taking the biggest bite out of the air. When the rotor blades reach about 270 rpm, there is enough lift being generated that the gyroplane will rotate from the nose wheel onto the tail wheel. The gyroplane will also slow down because of the added drag from the increased angle of attack. Slowly advance the throttle and push a little forward on the stick, raising the tail wheel off the ground. The objective here is to balance the gyroplane on the main wheels only, not on the nose wheel or tail wheel. Keep advancing the throttle until rotor blades are spinning at about 330 rpm and airspeed is 40 mph. This technique is similar to taking off in a conventional gear airplane.

At 40 mph and 330 rpm, rotate the nose up as you continue to advance the throttle to the forward limit. As soon as the gyro breaks ground, because of engine prop
torque, it will want to roll a little to the right. Correct for this and any drift to maintain runway heading. You will also be climbing at an incredible rate and airspeed will be increasing. Reduce the throttle and angle of attack to maintain 45 mph. For me, at this airspeed, I feel pretty comfortable with respect to wind blast and eyes tearing up, despite wearing a helmet. Control response is solid, responsive.

To climb, increase the throttle. To descend without gaining airspeed, reduce the throttle. Push the stick in any direction and the flight forces feel the same as an airplane. The gyroplane is pretty nimble and it’s easy to over control, or at least right now it is because of my minimal time. Cross winds in flight don’t really have an adverse effect on a gyroplane.

Landing is pretty straightforward. Line up with the runway center line, reduce the throttle and let the gyro descend, landing into the wind if possible. The key is to maintain 40–45 mph in the descent. The rotor speed will maintain its lifting capabilities. At about 7" from the ground begin the round-out flare. Completing the round-out, you are now about one foot off the ground. Reducing the throttle all the way back as you also bring the cyclic into your lap gives you a very soft touch down and a near zero forward speed. The landing rollout is about 15 feet or less. During the roll out gently lower the nose wheel to the runway, always maintaining alignment into the wind. As forward motion stops, push the cyclic forward to unload the lift from the rotor blades. You can now safely taxi without risk of tipping from a gust of wind getting under the rotor blades or taxiing too fast. If you leave the rotor blades spinning, taxi the gyroplane like you would a conventional gear airplane with respect to the direction of wind while it is moving on the ground.

If you’re finished flying, keep the cyclic forward to prevent air from spinning the rotor blades. As the blades slow, using the rotor brake, stop the forward blade so that it is pointing forward and keep it there until shutdown.

My impression of flying a gyroplane is that if you have a fear of heights this will either cure that fear or scare 10 years out of your life. Imagine making a turn and nothing holding you in your seat except the lap belt and gravity. Your first thought is that you’re going to slide right out of your seat and fall hundreds of feet to the ground. There is nothing to hold you in your seat except that little lap belt! Also, there is no structure around you, just openness!!! Weather permitting, I’m going to continue my training. The next phase will be engine-out autorotation landings. I have been told to expect descents approaching a 45 degree angle to maintain the required airspeed and rotor blade rpm.

My instructor feels that with my prior flight experience in aircraft, I should be comfortable flying a gyroplane solo around the pattern in about another 4 hours of training. I think I can agree with him(?).

I feel that with proper instruction, flying a gyroplane is safe, fun and exciting to fly. It’s probably the best kept secret in light aircraft flying!

(Editors note: Each trainee’s personal experience is different, as are the aspects of each gyroplane. Please rely on certified instruction and guidance in learning to fly.)
Recollections from

El Mirage 2011

Terry Smith, President
Ken Brock Rotorcraft Association, PRA Chapter 1

El Mirage 2011, The Ken Brock Freedom Fly-In, took place September 23-25, 2011. What a GREAT time! There was some concern earlier in the week due to the lake being closed for standing water, but it was “business as usual” by the time the fly in rolled around.

The weather was perfect for flying! The mornings were calm, and there were trikes, powered parachutes, and of course, gyros getting in some early morning air. The breeze picked up a fair bit around noon, but didn’t keep the gyros from flying. Vance Breese flew more than 50 introductory rides over the three-day gathering. There were a LOT of smiling faces getting out of the Predator!

The wind really picked up on Friday, and one of the canopies set up for the event didn’t survive the gusts. Everyone in the immediate area pitched in and held onto the canopies to make sure they didn’t do a “Mary Poppins.” The winds died down by dinnertime, and we were treated to Brandon Evans’ masterful grilling of steaks, with veggies, potatoes and salad. And, Brandon was presented with a beautiful birthday cake later that evening. The gyros went up again for a short time until sundown, after which many people gathered back under the canopies to relax and talk.

Saturday started out just as Friday did, with plenty of morning flying. The crowd picked up, and we saw many new visitors, as well as familiar faces. Nathan’s Polish Hot Dogs were the fare for lunch, with Brandon again volunteering his skills on the grill. (Thank you, Brandon!) The afternoon wind stayed with us much longer than in the past, which made for a breezy dinnertime. It was BYOB (Bring Your Own Beef) night, with beans and corn on the cob. It was great to see everyone gathering together around the fire pit to grill their food!

Dr. Bruce Charnov gave a wonderful presentation on the History of the Autogyro. It was a bit of a challenge prior to the presentation to set up the projection screen with the wind being stronger than usual, but we used a camper as a back stop to the screen. Following the presentation were the awards and raffle. Vance Breese won two awards that night – Distance Farthest Flown in a Gyro to the event, and Pilot and Machine. Kevin Ritchie was awarded for trailering his Gyro the Farthest Distance to the event.

The raffle followed, and thanks to all of the generous contributions from our wonderful gyro community, it was an extremely fun evening. There were two silent bid items – a Sportcopter Instrument panel, and a Benson Gyrocopter Weathervane. These two special items were won by Dave Wilson and Brandon Evans, respectively.

Sunday morning once again gave us calm air, with gyros chasing each other in a “dogfight” and some powered parachutes getting some final moments in.

The event started winding down around noon, with the majority of the flyers packing up for the trip home. The last to finish flying were Teddy Udala (back over the fence to his hangar) and Kevin Ritchie – who saw a

Legendary CFI Marion Springer received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Chapter 31.
pair of glasses lost by a fellow pilot the day prior from the air, and subsequently found them after driving around the lakebed. Way to go Kevin!

I would like to take a moment to thank everyone who took the time to attend the fly-in this year. It was a pleasure to see all of you and get the opportunity to spend time together. I especially want to thank everyone who helped make the KBFFI happen – my fellow chapter members, as well as the rest of the gyro community who made this such a success.

I hope all of you had as much fun this year as I did, and I look forward to doing this again with you in 2012!

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Paul Plack, Secretary
PRA Chapter 2

I’m jotting down a few random thoughts as I process my weekend at El Mirage. After having their group almost disappear after the death of founder Ken Brock, and having had a little political turmoil since officially rebounding, the members of Chapter 1 turned out enough committed volunteers in the days before, during, and no doubt after the meet. They always do. Kudos to those who make this event happen every year.

A recurring story among attendees was dramatic weight loss to meet aviation goals. Kevin Richey and Vance Breese both looked to have lost 50-60 pounds from last year, Jeff Jones maybe half that. Chapter 1 President Terry Smith lost even more a couple years ago. At the same time, I talked to attendees facing excess weight and its related issues who appear to have given up on regaining their health and flying again. I’m hoping I can remain motivated enough to win that fight with my own body.

Kevin Richey has shared his Sport Copter “Lightning” with several friends currently without machines of their own. On Saturday, I noted to Kevin that his Hobbs meter had just passed 100 hours. He told me that only about 65 of those hours were his! A Chapter 2 member who got that chance at Rotors Over The Rockies back in June, Glenn Kerr, was so excited by that opportunity that he has since bought his own gyro, and missed KBFFI in order to pick it up in Texas. Kevin’s contribution to growing the sport may take years to fully appreciate.

Next year, Chapter 2 carpool participants are just going to ask Rose Pearson to bring enough of her marinated elk steaks for our whole group Saturday night. They were sensational!

Final note to Chapter 1: The porta-potties with built-in sinks, soap and water get a thumbs up!

The chance to meet the folks through Western Rotorcraft and the Rotary Wing Forum and return to hang out with them for the last weekend of summer, is a priority on my calendar again in 2012. Thanks to all who make this possible.
This was my third trip to the lakebed but my first with a gyro. Chapter 1 did an excellent job hosting the event. Everything seemed to go smoothly. There was always someone around to answer a question or handle any small detail that arose. They also set up a very nice tent area for shade in the daytime, and it was even lit up at night. I missed seeing the Brock family, but I am thankful we get to keep meeting on the dry lakebed to celebrate gyro freedom.

President Terry Smith greeted visitors and showed them around the gyro world. One early bird was a nice young woman named Tracy who got a ride in the Predator with Vance. That made her day and firmly set the hook for her love of gyroplanes. Vance went on to give rides to lucky passengers all day long, and he was recognized later for his generosity.

Bruce Charnov gave a very interesting presentation on gyros through the ages based on magazine covers. Being a fanciful flying machine, the gyro makes great cover art to inspire the readers of Popular Science-type publications. Bruce covered the gyroplane timeline of birth, decline and re-birth as witnessed by the newsstand temptations.

It is always nice to see Marion Springer, this time accompanied by her lovely daughter and granddaughter. Even though she doesn’t fly a tandem trainer anymore she is still a teacher. And one of her fledglings left the nest over the weekend. She grabbed some scissors and cut the tail off Jeff Jones’ shirt to celebrate his smooth, solo flight across the lakebed. Congratulations Jeff! I met you when you were interested in flying, then you found a gyro, then you practiced slowly and carefully, and now you are a pilot. You are my hero.

Mark Rhoads brought his gyro “Woodstock 2.” He was experiencing rotor hop and was eager to try out the new towers he had just made. I talked to the machinist in Tucson hired to drill matching holes as accurately as possible. He referred to the

“machined surface” on the edge of the new towers, and I had to point out that Mark was just really good with a flat file. Every surface on his gyro is finished like it was made by a boy scout crossed with a shop class teacher. Oh wait, that’s Mark. El Mirage is a great place to get input and ideas from other builders.

It was nice to see some other Arizona people there. Two of them just became our newest members. Mike and Al are training on an old Bensen and building new Hornets. I love the enthusiasm of people interested in gyroplanes. Ben from Yuma and Cal from Casa Grande were also there flying their machines.

There were helicopters, too. We camped near a beautiful orange Mosquito and the lucky owner who is free to go where the wind blows him. He lives in the RV that tows the helicopter trailer. Then I spent some time talking with Hong. He is building a Mini 500. You think it might be hard to fly? Try
doing it all with just hand controls. Imagine your left hand busy on the collective, your right hand on the joystick doing what it needs to do, and at the same time, one finger on your right hand is controlling the tail rotor. That’s multi-tasking!

I saw powered parachutes and ultralights, including the white biplane that lives along the lake, swooping, diving and climbing with all the power of a little Rotax 532. At one time I looked over and there were three factory-built Cessna type airplanes down at the end of the flightline. The freedom fly-in really is open to all aircraft.

Thank you to everyone from Chapter 1. I really enjoyed being out on the lake and hope to see you all again next year.

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**My Experience in the Sport Copter**

Terry Smith, President  
*Ken Brock Rotorcraft Association, PRA Chapter 1*

At the end of the event, I was given the opportunity (one that means a lot to me!) to get my first experience in the seat of a Sport Copter! Kevin Ritchie asked me if I would like to taxi his gyro on the lakebed to get a feel for what it’s like to be in command of a gyro. Well, that took about as much time to decide as it takes to blink an eye!

While I’ve seen the Sportcopter many times in the past (and even sat in one briefly), those moments did not prepare me for what was to follow. Kevin explained the mechanics of the gyro to me (a pre-flight without the flight) so I would not be too unaware of what was happening. With the wind gusting fairly strongly that day, we made sure the rotorhead brake was engaged. I certainly did not want this to become an airborne experience. (Well, maybe I did just a little, but only in my dreams!)

The first thing I noticed was how comfortable – really comfortable! – I felt sitting in the Sport Copter. And not just because of the “Cyberseat” that the gyro has which, by the way was more comfortable than many cars I’ve driven in. The entire layout of the gyro made me feel one with it. It was easy to get into, and you almost feel you’re in a sports car.

I did hold the stick farther forward than normal for flight, as with the rotors not spinning, we did not want to have them making contact with the prop. Kevin cleared prop, and pulled the cord to start the 503. That’s the one thing I’d have to change for me (electric start needed!) as I have a bad shoulder. I advanced the throttle slightly and began a total of 30 minutes taxiing at different speeds up and down the lakebed. Upwind I gave it more throttle so I could try out some steering with the rudder, and downwind kept the throttle at idle. There was PLENTY of wind to push me. I was nervous at first. I did not want to have any mishaps with Kevin’s baby, but it didn’t take long to feel more at ease with the gyro.

While I never left terra firma, I could now see what it must be like to skim low over the ground, feeling the wind on your body, giving you clues to its change. It’s certainly like the description Paul Bergen Abbott described in the book, “The Gyroplane Flight Manual,” of sitting in a lawn chair with a magic wand in your hand.

It was also great to experience the toe-operated brakes on the Sport Copter. It did not take much of an effort to get used to using them. To be fair, I’ve not yet experienced nosewheel steering with the rudder pedals as on other gyros, but the differential braking on this gyro worked just great for me.

Even now, eight hours later, I can still feel the sensations I had during my short “flight” in Kevin’s gyro. I’d certainly have to say that all in all, the Sport Copter gyro fit me like a glove. It’s a weekend like this that continues to motivate me to get my own gyro, and training, as soon as I can make it happen. And after today, the Sport Copter is certainly a gyro I’d consider getting for my own. Time will tell! My thanks goes out again to Kevin. He’s a generous friend, and he has made my own dream of getting a gyro that much closer.
The 39th Annual  
**Bensen Days Fly-in**


Wauchula Municipal Airport (CHN)  
1202 Maurice Sonny Clavel Road  
Wauchula, Florida 33873

Hosted By Sunstate Wing and Rotor Club  
Presented by The Popular Rotorcraft Association

Bensen Days is one of the oldest and largest gyroplane fly-ins in the world. Each Spring, enthusiasts gather in Florida to rekindle our bond with each other and drill holes in the sky in a celebration of aviation unlike any other.

Most participants camp right on the airport, but there is a fine hotel and bed and breakfast a short drive away. Visitors are welcome, and a day pass is available at the registration tent. Participants are invited to register in advance and make on-site camping reservations on our website, www.bensendays.com. We hope to see you there!