

# Swish-Swish And Away They Go...

## Gyroplane Pilots Gather For International Fly-In

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**GOING UP:** This self-powered gyrocopter is executing a steep pull-out in front of the spectator stands along an unused runway at Raleigh-Durham Airport, site of the annual Fly-In. —Photo by Ernest Robl.

Less than 10 inches below my feet the runway rushed by. I was sitting on the left-hand side of a machine resembling a lawn chair equipped with wheels and an overhead rotor.

Sitting beside me was Igor Benson, president of Benson Aircraft Co. Some 100 feet ahead of us a red and white Benson Co. station wagon sped along, towing us down an unused runway at Raleigh-Durham Airport.

As our speed increased and the swish-swish of the overhead rotor became louder, Benson pulled the control stick back. First the nose wheel lifted, a second later the entire craft rose and we were airborne.

It was a strange feeling—sitting in a lawn chair, strapped in with a seat belt, watching the ground drop away and feeling the air rush by.

Skillfully Benson took us up almost the full length of the towline. Below us the people looked up and waved and Benson waved back. Almost too soon the end of the runway came nearer and nearer; the driver of the station wagon signaled and Benson set the craft back down on the runway without the slightest bump or jolt.

The scene was Saturday afternoon at the Third International Fly-In of the Popular Rotocraft Association at Raleigh-Durham Airport. More than 50 odd-looking aircraft, most resembling oversized dragon flies, had arrived Friday morning for the meeting.

All day Friday and Saturday these craft buzzed around the runway set aside especially for these gyroplanes. Unpowered models were towed along behind cars, while powered models zig-zagged back and forth of their own volition.

Many of the participants were aircraft salesmen, but others were gyrocopter and gyroglider enthusiasts. Models ranged from the simplest glid-



**ALL KINDS:** A variety of home-built gyroplanes set down at the airport for last week's activities. Several of them are lined up on the runway as spectators take a close look at the strange craft.—Photo by Ernest Robl.

ers, which owners claimed to have built for less than \$200 to completely equipped copters which had cost the owners several thousand dollars.

There was a similar range in the dress of the pilots: some wore jeans and a sports shirt, others wore business suits; most of the professional pilots wore full-length flying suits, complete with their many zipper-closed pockets.

One fly-in official created a sensation by arriving in coat and tails and top hat. Removing only his top hat and replacing it with a football helmet, Dick Dickinson climbed into his craft, cranked up the motor, and took off — still wearing his fancy attire.

Clad in a bright red flying suit, big Bob Farrington of radio station WPTF in Raleigh did tripple duty at the meet. In addition to serving as master of ceremonies for

the event, Farrington acted as press co-ordinator, also covering the convention for the radio station.

Participants for the fly-in came from as far as California, Canada, and even Spain. Benson Aircraft Co., which is only a short distance from the Raleigh-Durham Airport, served as host for the event.

Activity at the convention took place under stringent safety regulations. All aircraft were inspected by Federal Aviation Agency officials. Several radio-equipped cars stationed along the flight line kept in constant contact with the airport tower.

Fly-In officials used walky-talky units and the flight director had a "light gun" with which he could signal aircraft in flight and tow vehicles on the ground by shining powerful red or green lights.

## Tragedy Mars Event

Three almost perfect days of demonstration flights and exhibits by the Popular Rotocraft Association at the Raleigh - Durham Airport ended at 12:15 p.m. Sunday with the crash of a modified, home-built gyroplane.

According to an official statement released by the PRA, the pilot, B. A. Whaley of Trenton, Ontario, Canada, was killed instantly when his craft failed to execute a high-speed maneuver attempted at an altitude of less than 20 feet.

Preliminary investigations by the PRA and airport officials revealed no mechanical malfunction.

The craft had been modified with oversize landing gear and other special equipment. The official statement notes that this extra weight and the drag on the airframe may have been responsible for the pilot's failure to complete his maneuver

before the machine struck the ground.

There was also speculation that the pilot may have blacked out.

A Raleigh man who emphasized that he was not speaking officially said that the craft flipped over, experiencing a phenomena known as an "inverted cone." The craft struck the ground with its rotor shaft, its wheels pointing straight up.

Federal Aviation Authority men, who arrived at the scene almost immediately, cleared the area and allowed no one, including newsmen to approach the crash site.

Whaley's 15-year-old son was honored only the previous night for being the youngest glider pilot to participate in the third annual international fly-in at the Raleigh - Durham Airport. He had flown the ill fated machine only 30 minutes before the mishap.



**A LONG WAY DOWN:** This is what you see sitting in a small gyrocopter being launched via towline from a speeding automobile. A gyroglider (photo at right) is towed behind another car just prior to take-off in front of the spectator stand at the third annual international Fly-In of the Popular Rotocraft

Association. Flyers from the United States, Canada and Spain attended the three-day meeting to get in some sport flying and compare notes.

—Photos by Ernest Robl.