

# Sundays Are For Heavenly Ventures

by Bob Kirkby © 1994

Even though the early morning sunbeams, slithering their way between the curtains, were writing "Go Flying!" across the bedroom ceiling, I ignored the call to wings and reached to my night table for the techno-thriller I was currently reading. Spectacles in place, I snuggled my back up to my mate, who was still sleeping soundly, and opened to where I had last been reading "Sky Masters" by Dale Brown.

An hour later I was deep into a dogfight over the South China Sea when I heard a car drive past the house heading toward the hangars. For several minutes I struggled over the decision to continue the dogfight or satisfy my curiosity. Capitulating to my inquisitiveness I left the F-14 and MIG-21 fighters hanging in mid-air and crawled out of bed to see who the early morning aviator was. Through the kitchen window I saw one of my hangar tenants, Andy Gustaufson, hauling his Challenger out of its hangar. Feeling somewhat inspired by the sight I checked the outside thermometer only to find that the sun had been playing games with my head and the temperature was actually minus 2 degrees. A snap decision sent me back to bed to continue the dogfight and leave the real flying until at least noon.

It took me half an hour to read through a 10 minute F-14 sortie - such is the descriptive detail of Dale Brown. I was riding the back seat, eyes fixed to the radar, searching for those two MIG-21's out there in the dark, when suddenly our wingman called, "Missile launch at 7 o'clock". While I spun my head around to get a visual confirmation, my front seater slammed the stick hard left hurtling us into a 2-G death spiral. I caught sight of the orange glow from the missile just as my pilot punch afterburners to try and decoy the heat-seeking warhead with a half-mile of burning fuel trailing from the pipes. The next thing I remember is debris flying all around, I was being tossed about like a kite in a hurricane, and that explosive ringing in my ears - had we been hit? Back in the bedroom, blankets went flying, my book went sailing across the room and I bounced off the bed as Louise made a mad dash to answer the telephone. Relief swept over me as I picked myself and my book up off the floor. This time, at least, I wasn't going down in flames into the icy waters of the South China Sea.

That was enough excitement for one morning. I showered, dressed and prepared for the day while Louise waded through her Sunday morning roster of family phone calls to bring sisters, brothers, sons and daughters up to date on the week's happenings. After consuming a hearty breakfast I walked out on the deck just in time to see Andy return from his morning flight. As he rolled to a stop a car which I did not recognize crept past the house and stopped in the parking area. I donned my jacket and went out to investigate.

The stranger was getting out of his car as Andy de-planed in front of the hangars. He immediately launched into a monologue, "I was driving along and saw this here toy airplane land and as it looked pretty big for a toy airplane I had better stop and check it out. Sure 'nough, it is a toy airplane, least it's built like one, only this is big enough to carry a man. Ain't seen anythin' like this since that Fleet Canuck

back when I was a kid in Saskatchewan - covered with cloth just like this thing."

Andy recoiled at his beautiful Challenger Ultralight being called a toy airplane, but graciously greeted the stranger. I walked up and said good morning. The stranger ignored me and began rattling on about the inadequacies of the Challenger's design. "Why don't you use pins to hold them wings on instead bolts? That way when you land in a field you can take the wings off real quick, before the thing blows away. And that's a bad place for the gas tank, behind the seat like that. When you light up a smoke you're liable to blow yourself up. And why don't ya put bicycle wheels on this thing. They'd be a lot better on these rough fields".

That last remark raise bristles on the back of my neck since I was very pleased with the way my new runway had turned out. Andy jumped in and pointed out that the runway was as smooth as a golf course and his wheels were real aircraft wheels and plenty good enough, thank you. With his attention now drawn to the runway, the stranger spotted my new windsock. "Does your windsock have a light in it?", he asked. When I replied in the negative he asked "Why not?" I explained that it was unnecessary since my runway was not lighted and, anyway, it wasn't legal to fly ultralight airplanes at night. "Huh, toy airplanes!" he replied.

After a few more barbs, Andy had had enough. He jumped back in his airplane and announced he was going flying again. As Andy took off north the stranger once again chimed, "Sure looks like a big toy airplane to me".

As I walked him back to his car he asked if I had one of these airplanes. Foolishly, I admitted that I had a bi-plane locked away in the big hangar. "A toy bi-plane!", he exclaimed. "Can I have a look at it?". Normally I enjoy showing off my Renegade, but this time I unlocked the hangar door with trepidation. It turned out to be well founded.

He immediately spotted the smoke stains on my right landing gear caused by the engine exhaust flowing past it. "If I were you I'd weld an exhaust pipe onto that and run it back to the end of the plane", he advised. Imagining a 15-foot length of Midas exhaust pipe running the length of my fuselage, I cautioned myself to be friendly and replied, "Not a bad idea, I'll give it some thought."

Walking around to the front he admiringly said, "That's a nice 3-blade wooden prop".

"Actually, it's a carbon-fiber composite material," I pointed out.

"That's what I said - a wooden prop", he snorted.

After twenty minutes of listening to the stranger rebuild my airplane to look like a combine, I announced that I had better get in the house for lunch, and eased him out of the hangar. Getting into his car he said, "I'll drop back again sometime and talk some more about these toy planes".

"Great", I said, as I memorized his car so as to make myself scarce if I ever saw it again.

After lunch I rolled the Renegade out of its hangar and flew south to the Indus airport, a local hangout for ultralight pilots, about 30 miles from Calgary. As I flew over the airport I spotted lots of activity on the ground, so decided to land and do some hangar flying. On the ground I ran into Chris Kirkman building hangars as usual; Ron Axelson working on his newly acquired Chinook; Buzz Mawdsley preparing to go flying in his Cherokee; Wayne Winters bouncing down the runway with a student up front; and Don Rogers and his wife Elinore returning from a leisurely flight along the Bow river.

I hung around for a couple of hours renewing acquaintances and talking about flying, then took off for home. As I overflowed my field I noticed that Andy had beaten me back and left already.

Although I had lots of chores to do on the ground, I didn't really feel like quitting yet, so I decided to fly a few circuits and hone my landing skill on my new (smooth) runway. A slight cross wind gave me the opportunity to practice cross wind landings. With each circuit, however, the pressure of waiting chores increased. Eventually succumbing, I made one final landing and rolled up to my hangar and shut down.



*The Renegade doing circuits*

I had just climbed out of the cockpit when another strange car drove in and stopped. A man, woman and boy slowly emerged from the car and introduced themselves. They explained that they were from Montana and were on their way home from Three Hills when they saw me doing circuits. Fascinated, they stopped on the highway and watched until I finally landed.

It turned out that the woman learned to fly when she was young, since her father was a bush pilot up in Alaska. She hadn't flown in years but was still keen and just had to come have a look. We had a very enjoyable chat about flying machines and things aeronautical before they had to continue on their way. I thanked them for stopping and waved as they drove away. Quite a contrast to the first visitor of the day.

Reluctantly, I put the Renegade away and headed for the house with an elated spirit for having spent the better part of this Sunday, doing what I love best. Isn't that what Sundays were made for?