

AN ALL-TOO-COMMON BREED

By Budd Davisson Illustration by Steve Voita

HE WAS LEANING against the nose of the Cessna 172, doing what we all do best: hangar flying. One hand rested casually on the cowling, while the other was graphically describing a rapid attitude change. His carefully choreographed position and movements should have telegraphed what came next.

"The smoke in the cockpit wasn't that big a deal, but it did get my attention," he said, causing my ears to perk up. "Even though all the instruments—the ones I could see, anyway—were out, I didn't see any real reason to call for an emergency..."

At this point, I joined the small crowd gathered around, eager to hear the conclusion of the incident. After all, you never know what you'll learn from another's mistakes/adventures/solutions.

"Yeah, I spun out of the clouds intentionally and had to fly under a set of wires and between a couple of buildings. It all happened so fast, I just instinctively did what had to be done. It seemed like the smart thing to do..."

Then he made his mistake.

"Let me tell you, at 160 mph, this ol' 172 was making telephone poles look like a picket fence..."

I kind of half-laughed to myself and turned to leave, knowing I was watching another BS artist at work, but then I noticed I was the only one who was smirking. Everyone else appeared mesmerized by the tale, the artful way it was told and the underplayed humility of the storyteller. That's when I realized that I was the only pilot in the group. The rest of the audience was composed entirely of a mom and pop and a couple of kids. They were on their first visit to the airport and had found a hero-pilot right off the bat. Weren't they lucky!

The scenario is fairly commonplace: The visitors had been cornered by the breed "Poser Selfimportantosaurus," a

kind of bird that seems strangely attracted to airports. For some reason, the Poser is driven to mimic others that they admire, even though they have very little—least of all, skill, experience or backbone—in common with the subject of their admiration. So, they flap their imaginary wings in front of any audience that will applaud.

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POSERS COME in four different types because they do their posing for different reasons. The most common Poser just wants to be part of the gang. The second type wants the gang they already belong to to know they are there. The third type wants everyone within earshot to know why they're so much better than the rest. The final type is the pathological Super-Poser who doesn't know fact from fiction and probably runs his entire life the same way he acts at the airport.

If you analyze it, the difference between the four types of Posers is primarily a matter of degree. The level-one and level-two Posers, the ones who just want to be part of the gang, carry on their aerial conversations just like everyone else, but artfully manage to leave out whether they actually fly or not. They don't really lie, but because they don't

want to be left out, they create the impression that they fly or that they fly more than they really do.

These are the troops we should probably reach out to and bring into the fold. All they need is a little confidence to realize that they don't actually have to fly to be part of the gang, and if they do fly, they don't need to have 1000 hours in a Mustang to prove it. As it is, they stand around the door talking loudly, when they only need to be asked in to become welcome additions to the family.

The level-three Poser is a bigger problem. They hang around the airport for one basic reason: to build their image bigger than the next guy's. They don't have a problem with stretching the truth. They often do fly, but their 100 hours almost always gets an additional zero (or two), and their logbooks are often full of pages made out in exactly the same kind of pen. The Cessna 152 they fly occasionally is forgotten as they offhandedly comment, "Yeah, a friend gave me the keys to his (insert name of exotic aircraft type here—usually a Pitts or P-51), but I really don't have the time to fly it much. Last year, I barely put 100 hours on it!"

Level-three Posers aren't a real danger to anyone except themselves, unless, of course, they start believing their own stories, which isn't usually the case. Once in a while, one will step over the line and actually get into an airplane they know they aren't qualified to fly; but because they've heard themselves say they can fly it so often, they actually believe it. Sometimes these guys get hurt. The tragedy is, they sometimes hurt other people, too.

The most enjoyable but also the most dangerous of the breed are the level-four Super-Posers. These guys are hysterically pathological and wildly, if irritatingly, entertaining. For some reason, they assume the rest of the world is populated by total idiots, so they tell tales so tall they should have clearance beacons on



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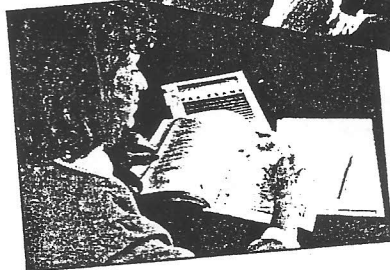


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top of them. They are convinced that everyone within earshot believes every word they say.

For instance, there's the guy who arrived at the airport all out of breath because he'd come upon a traffic accident on the way out and saved a person's life by splitting his chest open to massage his heart. (No kidding, he really said this!)

Beware the young guy who, at the tender age of 29, boasts of 10,000 hours in the air. I once showed one of them that to accrue that kind of flying time meant he would have had to fly 2.1 hours a day, every day of his life since he was 16 years old. He just nodded his head and said, "Yeah, that's about what I fly," and toddled off. Amazing!

Picking a Poser out of a crowd isn't difficult. In the first place, they almost always wear some sort of offbeat uniform that they think has "the look." It may be a crispy flight jacket with lots of patches, or one that is overly worn, courtesy of a sanding block and some saddle soap. Some of them show up at EAA meetings or walk the flightline at a fly-in wearing a military flight suit and combat boots. Lots of guys can do that and it's real, but there's something about the way a Poser does it that just looks wrong. It's like they're playing dress-up in daddy's clothes.

A level-three Poser is loaded with tales that too conveniently one-up the last real story told, and the language they use to tell these tall tales is sprinkled with buzzwords that don't quite fit together. If you pay close attention, you will notice that certain words and phrases absolutely refuse to come out of a Poser's mouth. These include phrases like "I don't know" and "Wow, that's really interesting!" In addition, all of their conversation is carefully constructed to direct the spotlight onto themselves.

Of course, the first clue that a Poser Selfimportantosaurus is in the strike mode is when they swoop down on a bunch of unsuspecting gophers and proudly proclaim themselves to be the finest bird of all. They crow and strut and feel safe in that environment because they know their selected audience can't challenge their statements. After all, they're gophers, what do they know about birds?

But fortunately, people aren't gophers, and if nothing else, we have a nose for BS, which just happens to be the favorite cologne of the Poser—*Eau de Cow Pie*. You can smell it coming half a ramp away.

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