Fatal Distractions Relative to Steve Drybread's Accident

...: - The following were contributed by Dave Ronneberg, designer and developer of the Berkut and by Wayne Walker, president Republic Aerospace Corporation.

Dave Ronneberg (CA) - For any of you that knew Steve Drybread well, you understand the loss that we have all suffered. Simply put, he was a very, very nice man. It does not seem to matter how many friends and associates we lose to aviation accidents, when you are intimately and technically involved it hurts all that much more.

Bread was a close friend and a superbly skilled craftsman. Somehow he managed to produce the fastest Berkuts ever built and, on occasion, he liked to rib me about it. This proves no matter how much we think we know, improvements can always be made by someone else. I will miss ...ead tremendously, both as a friend and a colleague.

I am sure all of you involved in the canard community are more than a little curious about the technical nature of this accident. A couple of years ago, Steve suggested and initiated a very practical and safe modification to the canard fairing forward deck that is now standard procedure. The original Long-EZ had a structure just ahead of the instrument panel that was bonded in place, abutting the backside of the canard fairing. We supplied the canard fairing and the instrument panel cover as a single piece with a scribe line between the two. When mounting the canard fairing and forward deck, we would bond the two in place at the same time to ensure a perfect fit between canopy and the nose sections.

Steve proposed that the canard fair...ng and forward deck be one piece bonded to the canard and go all the way to the instrument panel. From the trailing edge of the canard to the instrument panel, this forward deck is held in place by four screws on each side and four at the instrument panel. None of these screws are designed to carry the lift loads of the canard but do a great job of handling torsion and providing access to all instrumentation and wiring when removed. All lift loads are borne on 1/4" thick lift tabs and 5/16" bolts that pass through them and into the CNL bushings in the F10 bulkhead (F22 on a Long-EZ).

In Steve's case, those bolts had been left out and the screws were bearing the lift loads that they were not designed to carry. The mod required attachments around the perimeter where it had previously been bonded. Apparently, these screws provided sufficient strength to keep the canard in place for flight but were not sufficient to maintain the flight loads the canard was capable of generating.

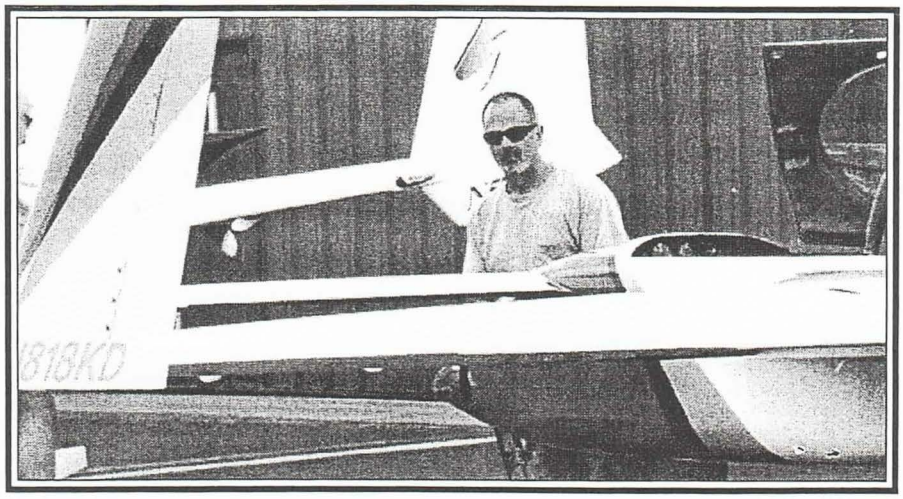
Initial reports indicate the two 5/16" diameter bolt required retaining bolts were neither through the lift tabs nor in the aircraft at all. We do not know what precipitated this oversight.

Our hearts go out to Bread's family, including his wife Kathy and dog Mickey.

Wayne Walker - There was a major distraction that may have led to the accident. The day before, or the day of, the accident (not sure which), the canard was off. A friend came to see Steve. The friend wanted to sit in the cockpit. The friend got in. Steve kept the bolts in the seat of the cockpit when the canard was off. The phone rang and Steve answered it. The guest got out of the cockpit. The plane fell on its tail, breaking the propeller. Steve had to swap propellers to run the test flight...

One can only imagine the next set of facts and Steve's preoccupation and emotions. The bottom line is that distractions are dangerous. Check and double-check maintenance. Use a second pair of eyes to verify, etc.

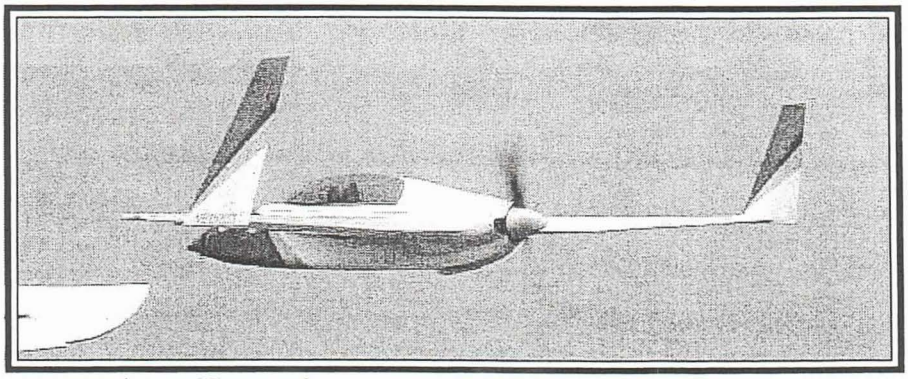
photo by Charles Bracken



Steve with his EZ-RG, N818KG

photo by Alex Becker

Steve's EZ-RG frequently led the pack



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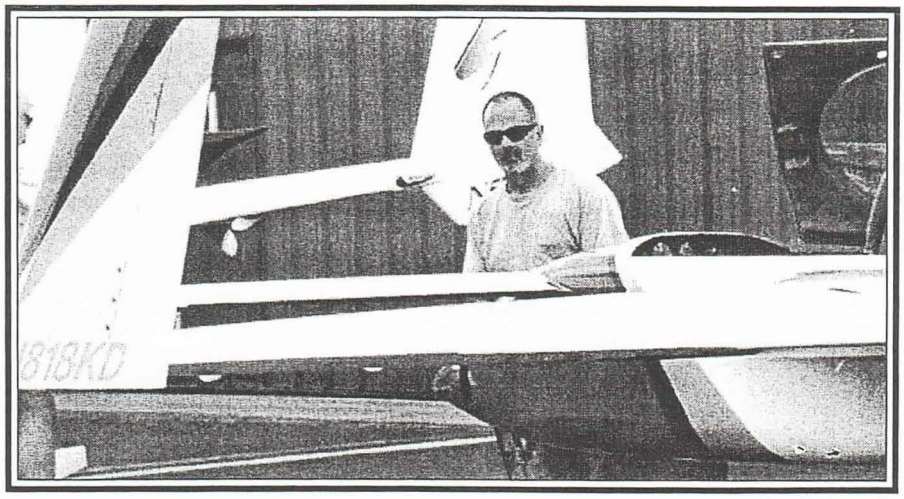

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