



The wedding is over and the honeymoon has just begun. That's how I described the first flight of my Osprey 2 ZK-RJT in my last letter. Since that writing, I have learned a great deal about my 'lovely lady'. She was well mannered with a gentle uncomplicated stall - although she would never give any advance warning of her intention to stall. She was fast, and in still air would fly for long periods without any guidance from her partner. At certain airspeeds and power settings would love to "wobble" her backside as the slipstream broke away behind her, and on that sunny, calm winter's afternoon of 17 May, in a stricken condition, transported me safely back to earth, and in the final seconds of that tragic flight - through a slight error of judgment by her partner, was dashed to pieces in a soul rending explosion of shattering wood, steel and fabric. Yes, indeed, she was every inch a lady.

The first 3 1/2 hours of flying were devoted to systems checking, control response, general aircraft familiarization with emphasis on investigating stall characteristics, and engine ring bedding. Following each flight the engine cowls would be removed for inspection of all engine functions. In the early stages some adjustments were made to relieve areas where chafing against the cowling occurred. A trim tab was added to the rudder to provide balanced flight under high power settings. A stronger spring was added to the nosewheel door, as sometimes it would fail to close if the airspeed got too high before the gear was raised, and this would result in the door banging shut during a stall routine when the airspeed was low, and frightening the life out of me, and I add that it took some tracking down.

At this point I was satisfied with the performance of the aircraft, so decided to proceed into the more demanding stage which in our country is the 10 page Ground & Flight Test Report for Amateur Built Aircraft. I had worked my way steadily through the programme, and to my delight, every aspect of the aircraft was checking out to a high standard. On the morning of 17 May I completed an hour long session, returning to base in time to refuel and return home for lunch. After lunch I decided to take advantage of the fine still air and proceed with the tests. After writing out an exercise that would take about 1 hour's flying, onto my knee pad, I preflighted the aircraft and took

off, climbing out into the training area. At 4500' I set the aircraft up and completed Part (i) of 4.7 - Directional & Lateral Stability, without problem, and then set up for Part (ii) and upon releasing the stick the aircraft rolled sharply back into a wings level attitude. At the same instant there was a frightful bang and thereafter the brain numbing vibration of what could only be a broken propeller. It occurred when the aeroplane was in a very nose high attitude - 1.2 VSI (58 its) and the engine at full power. It took, but a second or so to get into a more favourable flight attitude and shut down the engine, but even with mag switches off the engine kept windmilling, so further time and valuable height was lost in bringing the airspeed back to just above the stall and keeping it there until the prop and that terrible vibration ceased. The country behind and below I knew to be very hilly and inhospitable, but directly ahead was a previously cultivated ridgetop which looked long enough and smooth enough, and the only suitable area for a forced landing within what I estimated to be my safe gliding distance. This selected area ran at about 100 degrees to the right of my glidepath which necessitated a sharp right hand turn into a narrow entrance about 2 chain wide and guarded by a concrete post and wire fence running up and over the ridgetop. Entering the right hand turn in the final stages of the flight I reached the point where I had to decide whether to lower the wheels or try a belly landing. Now, ever since I started building an amphib I have pondered this question a thousand times, and had decided that should I have the misfortune to be put to the test would make the decision based upon conditions prevailing at the time, and so it was, because the sheep were as thick as the fleas on a dog's back, grazing on the selected landing site, so to land amongst them with wheels up would certainly result in much damage to the aircraft, and inevitably the destruction of goodness knows how many sheep. About halfway through the turn the wheels were lowered, master switch turned off, fuel cock turned off, inertia reel locked on the shoulder harness, and then - too late - I realised that the high energy turn coupled to the gear down drag had robbed the vital airspeed needed to clear the fence. A final desperate effort was made to 'lift' her over the fence, but her energy was spent and 6" of the starboard wingtip hit a 9" x 9" reinforced concrete gatepost 10" down from the top, the starboard main wheel caught on the top fence wire and the aircraft was cartwheeled into the field ending up 50 metres from the fence and facing the way we had come from. I clearly recall sitting for a few seconds, looking first along the starboard wing, or what remained of it and cringing at what I saw, and then along the port wing and thinking maybe that is repairable. I do not recall vacating the aircraft, but I do remember clearly standing behind the engine looking first at the propeller with one shattered blade with about 12" smashed off the

end, and then at the charred hole in the top of the engine cowl, starboard side, where there should have been an exhaust stack protruding through, and it was all too clear as to the cause of prop-strike. It was only then that I suddenly realised - My God!! - your legs and arms and fingers and toes and eyes and ears are all working, and you are able to think, so it can't all be bad.

Within half an hour I had contacted the landowner farmer, phoned CAD MOT and reported the accident, and the most difficult part of all, phoned Leigh - my wife - to come and collect me. That night the Inspector of Air Accidents released the aircraft for removal.

Although I had come through physically OK I knew that there was going to be a great deal of mental strain in the days and nights to come, so decided to keep as busy as possible. The day following the crash was devoted to recovering the wreck and transporting it back to my workshop. The next day was spent in removing the engine from the fuselage and assessing the extent of the damage. Starboard wing demolished with also a complete fracture of the main spar immediately inboard of the inner wing attachment straps. (That's the worst part). The port wing is damaged extensively, but repairable. Both main gear legs damaged and requiring extensive work. Nosegear also badly damaged. The hull however, remains in remarkably good condition, and the engine mounts look in perfect condition. To give me a day or so to gather my thoughts, Leigh and I then hitched up the caravan and took off up country to do some serious trout fishing. Whilst this was a good therapy and kept my mind from wandering back to the "if you had done so & so this would never have happened" syndrome, but alas has not solved the question of whether I am going to rebuild her.

You see, I have another "lovely lady" too - the one who unselfishly and almost without complaint has given up 10 years of her married life to become an aeroplane widow, while I built first a Jodel DII then the Osprey. What, I ask myself, gives me the right to ask her for another year - not to mention the odd thousand dollars of our retirement savings? Unfortunately, however one of my few creditable attributes is that I have never been a quitter, and if I were to simply sell the salvageable parts for what I could get, then to me that would be as good as quitting. Anyway, what's the use of a broken aeroplane to anyone?

In conclusion, may I suggest that you all give great attention to the security of your exhaust stubs that go up through the cowling. The clamp on my engine is still done up tight, and have found it quite impossible to force a piece of tubing back down the empty hole. It would seem that additional bracing back to the engine would possibly be the answer. Also I suggest that suitable screen mesh be installed over the engine cooling air exhausting slots at the bottom of the cowls