

DISTRACTION CAUSES GEAR INCIDENT

by TTCF Member (Anonymous)

Editor's Note: *This article is being published as submitted to me. It is a pilot's confession that holds lessons for all of us. While it is tempting to judge the pilot for his mistakes, I urge you to read the article and think how it might be possible for you to find yourself in the same situation some day. How can you prevent it? If you did find your props contacting the runway, what would you do? I have more to say on this in my From the Editor column. Note that the pilot does not recommend anything he did to others. He's just honestly recounting his experience. Please read this article in that light.*

That will NEVER happen to me! There's an old pilot saying: "There are those that have and those that will." I recently moved into the latter side of that statement, and I'm hoping that others can learn from my painful and expensive mistake.

It was a beautiful August morning, and I was only going up for a short ride in my twin engine Cessna to take a video of my gear retraction to confirm everything was working correctly. I mounted the Go-Pro camera on the belly of the plane and off I went. I left the airport traffic pattern and flew to a remote area a few miles away. I cycled the gear at least four times and everything was working just fine.

While heading back to the airport, I heard and saw several other aircraft in the pattern. Since they were all smaller aircraft, I elected to extend my downwind about five miles to give way

to the slower moving traffic. Here's when things started to go seriously wrong.

Normally, my practice is to drop the gear when abeam with my landing spot on the runway. Because I was extending my downwind, I didn't drop the gear. I did extend the first notch of flaps on downwind and the second notch as I turned left base. For some reason, my normal "Three green and one in the mirror" verbal statement to myself never came out of my mouth, as it has in hundreds of previous landings. Pumps on low, mixture full, props forward... what happened to undercarriage?

Everything looked just perfect coming in over the numbers. I told myself that this was going to be one of those great landings where you don't even feel the tires hit the ground... well, they didn't because they were still safely up in the wheel-wells. There is no sound that compares to hearing your prop tips clicking off the runway.

My reflexes were quick, and instinctively I pushed in full power and pulled the plane back into the sky. The engines and props were running good and the plane was climbing pretty well with no vibrations. Should I have just landed straight ahead on the runway and bellied it in? Honestly, that option didn't even pop into my head... I was going to save the plane.

I climbed up to about 1,700 feet AGL as I turned downwind for a tight pattern. Once reaching that altitude, I was confident that I could make it back to

the runway, even if I had to shut down both engines. I announced my intentions on the radio and proceeded to make another perfect landing with my new "Q" tip propellers.



Gear up landings are the #1 preventable contributing factor to high insurance premiums.

While taxiing back to the hangar, my heart was up in my throat. I thought, "How could I have done something so stupid?" The simple answer is distractions. All it takes is one simple thing to get us out of our normal routine and bad things can happen. Have a routine for each phase of flight and do your best to eliminate any and all distractions. I was flying by myself and still got distracted by an abnormal traffic pattern. Lastly, take your plane up a few thousand feet and perform a simulated gear-up landing scenario and confirm that your landing gear warning system alarms are working properly. Mine weren't! No horn at all.

Luckily for me, the extent of my incident was three months without my plane, and a considerable dent in my bank account. The Go-Pro video of the entire traumatic episode kept playing in a continuous loop in my head for over a week.

As for the plane, the belly never touched the runway. The flaps were damaged a bit, which Airframe Components in Indiana did a fantastic job repairing, skinning, and painting. Obviously the engines had to be removed and shipped in for prop strike inspections. I found freshly overhauled props in Florida and went ahead with having the engines completely overhauled to zero time by Poplar Grove Airmotive in Illinois.

I'm back up and flying again... Never say never! It can happen to you.



This is the Go-Pro image of the airplane and runway just before the propellers contacted the pavement.

