



PLUS Meet Baldy Ivy in this video.

BALDY IVY with one of his project airplanes, a 1946 Taylorcraft.

COWBOY FLYING LESSON

PERILS OF AN OFF-AIRPORT TAKEOFF

They're always telling you how to make emergency landings," said my cowboy buddy Baldy Ivy, "but nobody ever explains how to take off again." Filmmaker Chris Gunn and I had flown from Flagstaff to visit Baldy in Seligman, Arizona, on old Route 66. Initially low-lying cumulus clouds threatened our trip; unattended Seligman Airport is 50 miles from the nearest weather reporting station and lacks an instrument approach. But when Baldy reported improvement, we launched into clearing skies.

After landing, we toured Baldy's latest aircraft projects and heard about his new girlfriend, Claudia, a tattoo and pin-up artist. Then we convened over lunch at Lilo's

Westside Lilo's Café. (Baldy prefers the Roadkill Café, but Lilo makes my favorite pie.)

As we settled in, I asked Baldy what

really happened on that emergency landing made a few years ago on a Hopi Reservation.

"Well, Greg, I was flying a Cessna 175 to Taos for my brother's birthday," he said. "Around Flagstaff I started noticing what looked like mist on the windshield. I remember thinking it was dust because I had my heater open and hadn't used it for awhile.

"By the time I got to Polacca, 30 minutes past Flagstaff, the mist seemed to be getting worse; I checked the gauges and discovered very low oil pressure but normal oil temperature. I was thinking, *I know there's an airport around here, but I can't find it. I'd better go ahead and land on the road before the engine seizes.* So I landed on the highway and taxied off into this Indian's yard. There I found oil covering the cowling and engine, and the oil cap was gone. So the mist—what I thought was dust—was actually oil."

Having seen oil on my own windshield, I know it's not a pretty sight.

"The Hopi Police showed up, asking what I wanted to do. Of course my plan was to fix things and take off again. I topped the sump with some extra oil I had, and called a friend in Flagstaff looking for a filler cap, which he didn't have. Not wanting to leave the airplane on the highway overnight, I rolled up a T-shirt and stuck it in the filler tube. Then I cut the lid off a 7UP can with my pocket-knife, safety-wired it on top, and sealed it with duct tape.

"When the cops asked how much room I needed to take off, I told them off the top of my head, about a half-mile. After we walked the highway together, I fired up the airplane, taxied onto the

highway, did my runup, and started my takeoff roll.

“While I’m doing this, another police officer hears there’s an airplane down, pulls up maybe 500 feet ahead of the traffic that’s stopped on the far end, and parks on the shoulder. Of course I don’t see this.

“So I’m doing 55 miles an hour and the airplane’s just rotated and I spot this cop car sitting there and think, *I’m going too fast to stop*. So I tried to hop the airplane...but it’s real hard to time that. So my left wing came down on top of the running lights on the cop car. That trashed the wing and there was a bunch of cars parked 500 feet behind him, so I slid the airplane to the right so I didn’t

“My immediate mistake was telling the police I only needed half a mile. They would have provided anything I asked for. Also, I later realized my takeoff run was slightly uphill; I should have told them I needed five miles and taken off in the other direction.

“Afterwards the FAA safety inspector raised a more important point: *The emergency was over when you landed the airplane. Why didn’t you take the wings off and tow it out? Or taxi five miles to Polacca Airport?* Of course he was right. The emergency was over and I created the problem. It never occurred to me that I might have trouble taking off. You’re on the ground, the airplane’s safe, and everyone’s safe at that point. So you need

"A T-SHIRT AND A 7UP CAN AREN'T LISTED ON THE AIRPLANE'S TYPE CERTIFICATE. IF IT HAD BEEN A DR. PEPPER CAN, I MIGHT HAVE BEEN OK."

hit any more cars, and that’s when I hit the ‘No Passing’ sign two feet in on the right wing, which spun the airplane 90 degrees and I went down a 10-foot embankment and flipped over.

“As I was going over, I turned off my engine. I remember the windshield breaking and thinking *This is gonna hurt*. But afterward I thought, *Well everything’s OK so far*, and over on her back she went. It went real gentle; the airplane was just about stopped so fortunately I wasn’t hurt. I remembered reading that if you’re upside down in a crashed airplane, to put your hands on the ceiling before unbuckling your seat-belt, because you’re gonna fall. So I did that. Then I kicked the door open and climbed out.”

I’d heard conflicting rumors about the T-shirt and the pop can. I can rest easy knowing he used both!

“Yeah, that’s one thing they eventually busted me for: taking off with illegal equipment. Because a T-shirt and a 7UP can aren’t listed on the airplane’s type certificate. If it had been a Dr. Pepper can, I might have been OK! Seriously, though, it’s only funny because nobody got hurt.

to consider what’s the right thing to do next; I didn’t take time to properly figure that out. All I could think of was getting out of there.

“The Hopi Police wanted me out of there safely. They offered to escort me wherever I wanted to go, but you could see 15 miles down the road so I said no, I can take off right here. The fire department paramedics were great, too—they even gave me a free pen. But sometimes we make poor decisions under the stress of the moment. Ultimately the feds suspended my license for operating the airplane in an unsafe manner without the proper equipment.”

Driving us to the airport, Baldy told of serving the suspension and reactivating his license through remedial training and an FAA checkride. He then boasted of going on afterward to earn his A&P mechanic’s certificate.

“It was a hard lesson, but I’m a lot better pilot for that experience, Greg,” he said as Chris and I boarded the *Flying Carpet*. 🛩️

Greg Brown is an aviation author, photographer, and former National Flight Instructor of the Year. Visit his website (www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com).