

## Calling all Biker-Pilots!

October 14, 2008 by Thomas A. Home, Editor At Large

Are you like me? Do you ride a motorcycle and fly small airplanes? If so, you've heard a variant of the following question from the unanointed:

"Are you crazy, flying that dinky airplane/riding that motorcycle? Don't you know you can crack your skull open that way?"

Of course I know. And yet, I do it again and again. Why?

A new book, *Bodies in Motion: Evolution and Experience in Motorcycling*, by Steven L. Thompson, a good friend and former executive editor of *AOPA Pilot*, goes into the reasons why we pilots (and motorcycle drivers) are drawn to the kicks of our very special pursuits. And it's not because we're crazy. Rather, Thompson posits that our need for psychokinetic thrills is rooted in human evolution. In short, humans evolved from apes, which swung from trees and so became adapted to—and enjoyed the sensations that accompany—the g-forces, hand-eye coordination, and odd attitudes that attend this kind of body-motion.

Fast-forward to modern man. What kid doesn't like spinning around until he/she is so dizzy that he/she falls down? Or swinging on "monkey bars"? It's the same thing when we get older, have a bit more money, and still want to live on the edge. Admit it, you like steep turns—in the air and on the ground. And aerobatics? 'Nuff said.

Of course, social aspects also creep in, Thompson says. Just as some are drawn to Harleys, some to Suzukis, and some to BMWs, so are some pilots drawn to Bonanzas, Mooneys, Cessnas, or radial-engined classics. But Thompson makes an argument that pure physical sensations are at work, too. In *Bodies in Motion*, there's an appendix that quantifies the vibration levels at the handlebars, seats, and foot pegs of various motorcycles. You could do the same study for airplanes, I suspect.

Different strokes for different folks. Whether you like the buzz of a crotch rocket, the purr of a Goldwing, the rumble of a radial, or the shriek of an MU-2, you're bound to enjoy reading Thompson's intellectual musings on why we do what we do. They don't call them "ape-hangers" for nothing!

Check it out at [Amazon](#) or [Aerostich](#). \$19.95.

P.S. When I'm riding, I like to stick my head down so I can see past the fairing and watch the front wheel pump up and down as it takes the bumps. When flying, I like to look back and sneak a peek at the tail. Looks odd, in a leaving-things-behind kind of way. And takeoffs always give me a charge....