

## The Pilot-In-The-Back-Seat Jinx

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**The moral to this story: Though we're quick to look at personal technique when our flying doesn't seem to be coming together – and that's always the best place to start – look past technique for other causes if the answer's still out of reach. It might be right in front (or behind) you.**

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Damn It! The Birddog's nose was darting toward the left ditch alongside the runway just as the power was really beginning to come up. Full right rudder pressure and it was still going left - time for right brake. A quick stab, it's straightened out, ground and air speed building, now tracking OK, off we go. Not a good way to begin my biennial flight review. "It fought you a little, huh?" came over the intercom from Craig, my CFI and backseater for the day. I didn't even answer.

Most of the time I fly alone and all my takeoffs track the centerline perfectly (*allow me some leeway here*), the landings and rollouts are right down the middle (*same courtesy, please*). And when my passenger is a non-pilot, takeoffs and landings are (*sometimes*) things of beauty. But it was often embarrassing when I had a pilot in the rear seat. Takeoffs and landings sometimes required heavy stabs of brake to keep the Birddog tracking somewhere, anywhere, on the pavement.

Craig broke through my black mood: "You ever noticed that your right rudder pedal back here hits the bottom of the fire extinguisher as the pedal moves forward?" Always sharp, I replied, "Huh?" He explained: "The bottom of the extinguisher sticks out to the right, into the path of the rudder pedal. That stops the pedal about halfway through its travel."



That was it: Only when there's a pilot that I know well in the rear seat do I bring the pedals up into the operating position and mount the rear stick. Alone or with non-pilots,

the pedals stay stowed flat on the floor with no chance for interference with the extinguisher.

Earlier that year, I'd found the odd-looking little European fire bottle was empty. So I mounted my 2.5 lb capacity Halon extinguisher. A bit smaller diameter, but it fit in the existing mount. If a little one-pound bottle is good, a 2.5 pound bottle is more than twice as good, right? Wrong! I created interference between the fire bottle and the rear rudder pedals when they were pulled to the up-for-operation position.

So, to correct the interference, I: 1) Moved the fire bottle mount to the left on the front seat's frame, positioning the extinguisher for plenty of clearance when the rudder pedals are positioned "Up"; 2) Added silicone baffle material on the inside of the clamp and mount to prevent the bottle from sliding; 3) Index-marked the extinguisher at its proper position in the mount, and; 4) Added a check of those index marks as a part of my pre-flight routine.



Since then, I've had absolutely no problems tracking the centerline on takeoffs or landings, with or without a pilot in the rear seat. (*You're still allowing me that leeway, right?*)

My 'Dog was used by the Italian Light Army as a checkride aircraft. So, it's equipped with the small rear instrument panel, a rear-seat magneto kill switch, a rear flap switch that overrides the front (student) flap switch, and the standard rear pedals that can overpower the front pedals.

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**P.S.** Since the extinguisher incident, I found another source of rudder pedal interference in my particular plane - up front. The heater/defroster duct fitting at the base of the firewall, just forward of the right rudder pedal, was preventing the last inch of travel for the right pedal. The crown nut and cotter pin, when installed on the inboard end of the pedal / brake piston shaft bolt as shown in Fig. 115 of the -34P-1 (Dec '70) Parts Manual, hits the adjacent duct and Breeze clamp. That interference prevents the pedal from moving full forward and also prevents full right brake activation.



Reversing the AN3H37 bolt so the *head* is adjacent to the duct fitting, as shown in Fig. 159 of the same parts manual, provides the necessary clearance for full pedal travel. Conflicting info in a Birddog manual? Who'd believe that?



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