

SHOW SOME RESTRAINT

One of the crashes pictured below resulted in serious head trauma to the pilot. The other ended with three people walking away without injuries. Which of these engine failures do you think resulted in the “worst” accident?

Since I bothered to ask, you may have guessed correctly that the Baron mishap more seriously injured the pilot, who was hospitalized with head trauma. The Debonair was much more extensively damaged, but its pilot and passengers were unhurt.

What made the difference? We don't know definitively, but all bets are that the Debonair's occupants, at least the pilot and anyone in the other front seat, were wearing shoulder harnesses. It's virtually certain that the pilot of the Baron was not.

The NTSB has reported numerous occasions when severe head trauma and even death occurred in what appear to be otherwise fairly benign accidents. In these cases, either shoulder harnesses were not installed or they were available but not worn by the injured party. Often others on board escape injury when they are in rear seats or in the front but wearing a shoulder harness—demonstrating the lifesaving effectiveness of shoulder restraints, especially in the front seats.

If the airplane you fly has shoulder harnesses, wear them. FAR 91.107

requires that shoulder harnesses, if installed, must be worn for all ground movement, takeoff and landing...not only by the pilot, but by all persons aboard. Similar regulations likely apply in non-U.S. jurisdictions.

It's a great idea to wear your shoulder harness at all times, because you probably won't have time to put it on if an engine quits or the airplane lands hard for any other reason.

There is no regulation requiring owners to retrofit their aircraft if they are not equipped with shoulder harnesses. But as George Santayana warned, “Those who do not learn from

history are doomed to repeat it.” We have a lot of serious head-trauma history when shoulder harnesses were not installed and properly worn.

If you own an airplane that does not have shoulder harnesses, I strongly consider having them added. There are several options for aftermarket ones for ABS-type airplanes. If you rent or borrow a Beechcraft and have no direct say in how it is equipped, show these pictures to the airplane owner and suggest that shoulder harnesses be installed.



Safety Pilot takes a monthly look at issues that will make you a safer pilot. ABS Manager of Technical Services Thomas P. Turner holds a Masters Degree in Aviation Safety, has twice been accredited as a Master CFI, was the 2008 FAA Central Region Flight Instructor of the Year and has been selected the 2010 FAA Central Region FAA Safety Team Representative of the Year.

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