

MERE MORTALS

Back in those days there were a lot of superheroes and, naturally, better pilots than most of us who were mere mortals. Of course, there were some mortals who excelled but were not regarded in the same light.

I was often criticised for being too conservative in my flying. An FAA inspector offered me a ground-up aerobatic approval but I stuck to 500 ft. CASA would only issue approvals down to 500 ft but the overseas pilots were allowed lower so the rulemakers ignored theirs and CASA rules by saying that superheroes could disregard their CASA approval and fly down to 100 m. We'd see really exciting 4 minutes free sequences. We'd hear about or maybe occasionally see things like snap rolls immediately after take-off, inverted flat spins down to tree-top height and sight-gauges being knocked off wing-tips.

The superheroes also made us feel humble about our normal flying. They'd get much more range and endurance than us mere mortals. I could never get a Pitts from Moorabbin to Griffith non-stop. Again I was criticised for pointing out the apparent errors in the refuelling bill upon arrival back at Moorabbin – surely a Pitts tank doesn't hold that much gas?

Weight is, of course, critical in aerobatic contests so they flew with minimum reserves and one even threatened to fly naked. I helped one superhero push his aeroplane back from the runway after aborting his sequence. He accused one of the mere mortals of stealing fuel from his aeroplane while it was in the hangar “that sequence uses 11 litres and I swear it had 12 litres in the tank last night”.

It was hard to get information back in the days before the internet so I don't know the full story. Something about a Pitts coming down in a suburban area. Pilot commended for landing it in some-one's driveway without injuring anyone. Next thing we see is an urgent AD requiring us all to modify fuel tank caps – the reason given that if the cap is lost then all the fuel will siphon out of the tank. True that poorly adjusted caps were known to pop out during inverted loops with a resultant splash of avgas onto the windscreen. If you stayed inverted the avgas will pour out. Upright there's no way any fuel will be lost. Later a rumour about a Pitts fuel tank cap being found unexpectedly under the seat of some-one's car.

Reminds me I once got a bill for \$500 from a LAME for adjustment of one of these caps. I once bought handful of them for \$5 each. I didn't say anything at first to the LAME, just demonstrated how a quick turn of the knob makes it nice and tight.

Finally, how does one distinguish between a superhero and a mere mortal – there is really only one way and unfortunately some superheroes discovered too late that they were only mere mortals.