When I looked up at the all-glass attitude indicator, for a moment I wasn’t quite sure what I was staring at. Instead of a nice horizon line separating a blue sky and brown terrain, the instrument was showing all brown. A few seconds ago the airspeed indicator on this highly modified L-39 Albatross was nudging 300 knots, but now the numbers were winding up on the digital display, indicating we are likely heading downhill to terra firma. Finally, I realized I was inverted and pitched almost straight down, leaving me just a matter of seconds to figure out what to do.

“Watch the airspeed,” came the voice over my intercom. It was high-performance zeitgeist Lee Lauderback, the inspiration behind Stallion 51 of Kissimee, Fla., and its team of P-51 Mustangs. He began talking me through a recovery that included a power reduction and a split-S back to the upright. Within a few seconds, the emergency was over, and the jet was happy again, plowing along straight and level. Whew! Very glad to have had Lee along on this flight.

Stallion 51’s new UAT (unusual attitude training) program is the result of nearly 20 years of training, most of it in the company’s shiny P-51s. But when Lauderback decided he wanted to move forward with the most realistic training in the world, he and his team began searching the collection of civilian jets. For a number of reasons, they selected the Czech L-39 turbojet and immediately upgraded the advanced trainer’s instrument panel to all-glass, simulating the equipment now found in most corporate jets and airliners. After five years of preparing both aircraft and instructor teams, Lauderback’s UAT program is now operational. Stallion’s UAT program trains everyone from individual pilots to entire corporate flight departments. The training has received emphatic endorsements from both the FAA and NTSB.
Today, a lot of aviation training is relegated to the simulator. “We do all kinds of things you can’t reproduce in a simulator,” Lauderback said. “How can you show a pilot what three Gs feels like if they’re sitting in a simulator? How can you learn to pull the stick without also pulling the wings off? G-calibration is an important part of our UAT training.”

“Put 10 corporate guys in the room, and eight have never done aerobatics,” Lauderback stated matter-of-factly. Recently he flew with a 29,000-hour airline captain who had never been upside down in an airplane.

“Most pilots are trained to operate within only a small box of the larger envelope that represents what the aircraft is capable of. They live in a world where they are expected to restrict themselves to, say, 30-degree banks and maybe 10 degrees of pitch. What we do in our UAT program is to expand each pilot’s personal envelope.”

The UAT program is divided into four phases, the first being a fascinating look at aero medical physiology. Candidates interact with a staff physician, a senior airman’s medical examiner who instructs them on how, when, where and why their bodies can influence their decision-making.

Next comes an in-depth look at aerodynamics and a detailed examination of what forces act upon the aircraft in any number of configurations. Techniques of recovery are then matched to the situation. Every phase of this “ground school” is supported with first-class multimedia illustrations and real life video, followed by some lively discussions with the instructors.

“Our UAT training is the best talent I’ve ever put together,” Lauderback said. “We have more than 50,000 hours of combined flight time.”

Instructors bring skills from a wide variety of aviation backgrounds, from corporate to military, from bush pilot to private pilot. “Our UAT training is the best talent I’ve ever put together,” Lauderback said. “We have more than 50,000 hours of combined flight time.”

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