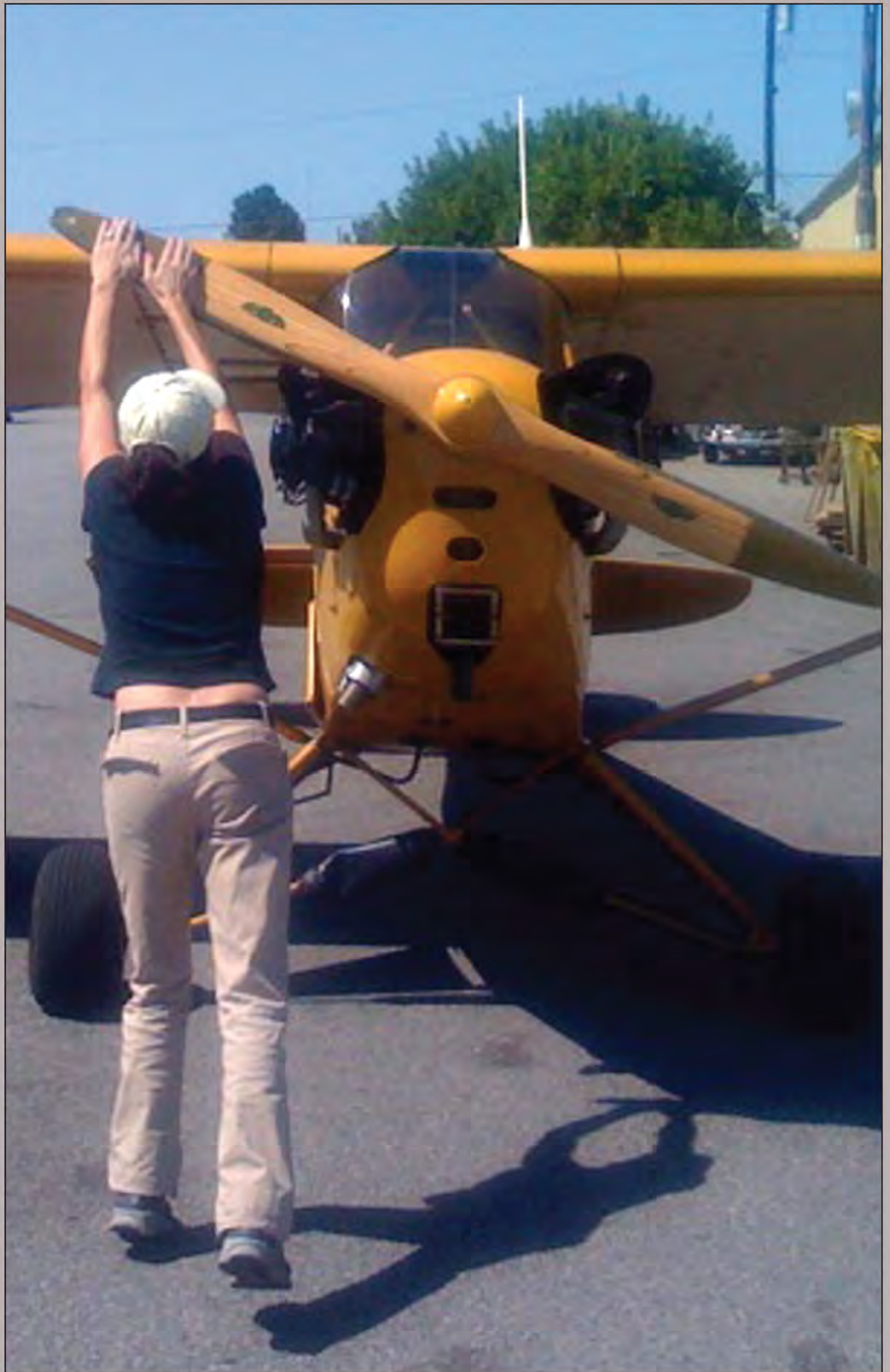


Getting Started

“The pilot reported that during engine start, he used small chocks around the tires and did not tie down the tail of the airplane. During his first attempt to hand-prop the engine, it did not start. He then advanced the throttle “very slightly.” The engine subsequently started and as the pilot was moving to the cockpit, the rpm increased. The airplane taxied out of the small chocks, began turning in circles, and the pilot grabbed the right horizontal stabilizer. The airplane continued to circle, dragging the pilot, and struck a parked airplane before coming to rest. Examination of the airplane by a Federal Aviation Administration inspector did not reveal any preimpact mechanical malfunctions, nor did the pilot report any. The inspector noted substantial damage to the empennage.”



So states the NTSB’s narrative of an accident involving a Taylorcraft BC12-D on June 30, 2012. The NTSB’s probable cause finding? “The pilot’s failure to properly secure the airplane before hand-propping the engine for startup.”

The Taylorcraft pilot is lucky—people are severely and fatally injured each year when attempting to hand-prop aircraft lacking electrical systems. As with anything involving airplanes, there’s a right way and a wrong way to hand-prop. We’ll explore this topic in greater detail in next month’s issue of *Aviation Safety*. For now, we’ll leave you with the words of Jim Lauerman, then-President of AVEMCO, the aviation insurance company, published in 2010:

“Grabbing the equivalent of a giant saw blade and sending it whirring at 1000 RPM poses an obvious hazard. Spinning propellers have many times proven dangerous—even deadly—to hand-proppers.

“To increase safety, most airplanes designed for hand-propping have tailwheels, which puts the prop disc at an angle that’s easy for the “propper” to avoid once the engine fires. However, the angle of the lower-mounted propeller on nosewheel airplanes is much harder to avoid.

“The other danger is that airplanes sometimes get away from hand-proppers, colliding with hangars or other airplanes. Passengers on board these planes have been injured and killed in these collisions. In a few freak cases, the airplane has actually taken off unpowered, which I’m sure quickly piqued the interest of passengers who got a ride worth telling their grandkids about.

“From an insurance perspective, Avemco’s policy does not exclude hand-propping, but a careless hand-propping claim does call into question the judgment of the person responsible. It’s best to leave this to the folks with birds that don’t have electric starters and who know how to safely hand prop their aircraft.”