

# Gyrocopter fly-in held at Outland Airport

*Public welcome to see the small aircraft again today beginning 8 a.m.*

**BY TIM JOHNSON**

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — David McCutchen has been hooked on gyrocopters for the better part of 20 years, and in that time he's had his fair share of near-disasters in his tiny open-air machine.

But the Dixon, Tenn., resident said the enjoyment of flying his low-speed and highly maneuver-



Sentinel Photo/TIM JOHNSON

**LAWNCHAIR IN THE AIR** — David McCutchen of Dixon, Tenn., shows off his Benson-design gyrocopter that he built himself. McCutchen joined members of the St. Louis Rotorcraft Club Chapter 35 at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport for the group's annual fly-in, held in Mt. Vernon for the first time.

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able homemade aircraft is unmatched by anything else in the air.

"I took my first ride in 1994, and I was hooked," he said at the St. Louis Rotorcraft Club Chapter fly-in on Saturday at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. "To just go out and bore a hole in the sky is just the funnest thing there is."

A gyrocopter is a type of rotorcraft that uses an unpowered rotor to develop lift while a rear-mounted engine and propeller provide thrust. It looks much like a cross between a helicopter and an ultralight aircraft, and its temperamental nature can make it a dangerous machine for an unskilled pilot.

McCutchen can take his 90-horsepower machine to a

maximum speed of between 80 and 90 mph, but he said he avoids testing its limits for fear of taking a deadly "tumble" from the sky. Adjusting the rotor too far forward can cause the aircraft to pitch itself down so far the pilot cannot recover, leading to a spin to the ground.

"You tumble, you die," he said.

But the machines are intended for slow flights, where the pilot can toss them around the sky with an unencumbered view of the surroundings. McCutchen's model can cruise between 35 and 60 mph comfortably.

He uses a two-stroke engine and said he can build a model similar to his for about \$5,000, including the cost of the rotor assembly, the only part of his gyrocopter besides the engine that he didn't put together himself. Another machine parked next to his used an engine from a Volkswagen Beetle.

Gyrocopters can fly as high as 10,000 feet, though McCutchen said his limit has been about a mile high.

"It's really a thrill to be at 5,000 feet in a lawn chair," he said.

The fly-in moved to Mt. Vernon after 28 years in Shelbyville, due to members looking for a new place to stay after being given the cold shoulder at their former meeting place. They brought about a dozen gyrocopters to the airport from around the area, which will be on display on the ground and in the air to the public again today beginning at 8 a.m.

"Being here has been great," McCutchen said. "The people are very hospitable." [tjohnson@morningsentinel.com](mailto:tjohnson@morningsentinel.com)