



WaterFlying

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HOW TO AVOID DOCK RASH
SWAPPING ENGINES IN THE BUSH
HOMEWARD BOUND, FINALLY

A white and green Seamax M-22 seaplane is shown on a body of water. The aircraft is viewed from a low angle, highlighting its hull and wings. The background shows a line of trees under a clear sky.

**SEAMAX M-22:
FLYING BOAT LITE**

THE SCRAMBLE

By Lyle Panepinto

In the environment we fly in here in southern Louisiana—shallow water, shipping canals, narrow bayous, and plenty of wind—we often have to nose into our docking spots.

That's because we tie up to high pilings and other prickly objects including inland oil rigs, tugboats, and barges where it is impossible for our high-wing Cessnas and deHavilland Beaver floatplanes to pull up alongside. If the wind is blowing, approaching the dock or pushing off can be a real challenge. A balked attempt can end with a bent wingtip or crumpled tail feather.

Damage in the field is a real problem. Not only is the airplane now out of service, the repair may have to be done on

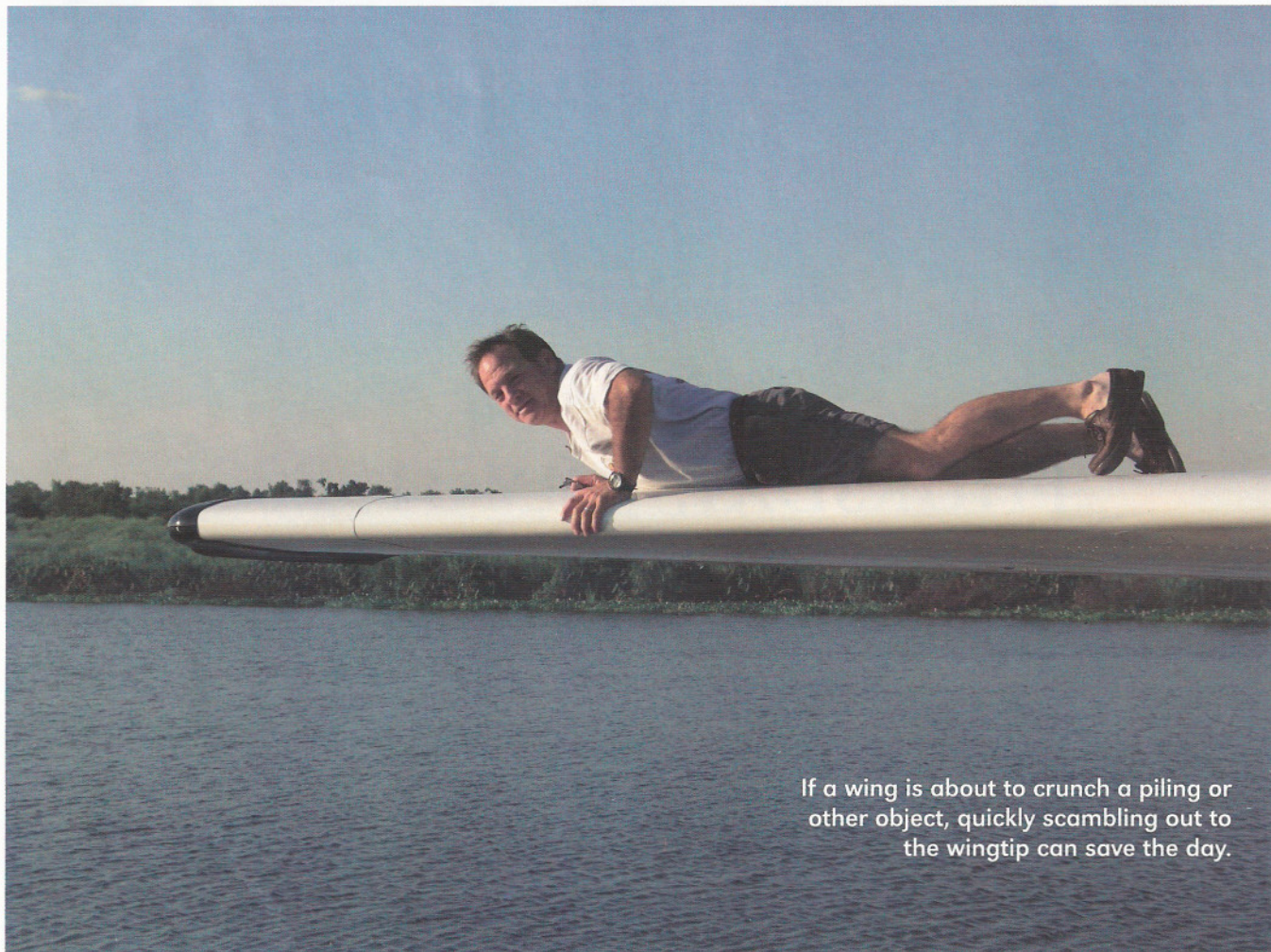
site, which is highly inconvenient. So, we try our best to avoid such “hangar rash” in the field.

Sometimes, however, stuff happens. When approaching into the wind, a

slight misjudgment in when to kill the engine may leave the airplane just short of reaching the dock. If a quartering wind or crosswind then starts to weathervane the airplane, a wing could swing around and pop into a piling or structure. Or, you could push off from the tie-up spot and have trouble starting the engine. While you work to get it going, the wind is sailing the airplane toward the opposite tree-lined shore. What to do?

One of the first things we teach our new-hire commercial seaplane pilots is “the scramble,” a last-ditch effort to prevent a wingtip, horizontal stabilizer, or rudder from banging into something hard and immovable and suffering damage. It's really pretty simple. If all else fails, jump out onto the float and, using whatever handholds and steps that are available, get up on top of the wing. From there, carefully make your way out to the wingtip that is in danger of being damaged, or back along the

Crawling or walking on hands and feet distributes your weight and lessens the strain on the structure.



If a wing is about to crunch a piling or other object, quickly scrambling out to the wingtip can save the day.



Be careful when walking on the airframe to stay on top of rivet lines.

fuselage to the tail to protect it.

Once there, push off from the piling or object that otherwise would hit and damage the airplane. Keep pushing off until the airplane is clear of the object or, if possible, jump onto the dock, barge, or boat, grab the wingtip or tail, and walk the airplane around to a safe position. Depending on the circumstances, you could also ask someone on the dock to help walk the airplane.

When scrambling along the wing or fuselage, be sure to stay on top of rivet lines. This is the area of greatest strength. Crawling or walking on hands

and feet distributes your weight and lessens the strain on the structure.

If it's a Cessna, avoid the area on top of the cabin because there is little structure to support a person. That said, in the heat of moment, when you see metal about to be crinkled or bent, you'll step anywhere necessary to get to where you need to go.

The scramble works on airplanes with at least 3,000 pounds of flotation such as a Cessna 180, 185, and 206. Lighter aircraft such as a Cessna 172 do not have the flotation to support the weight of a person perched on the out-

board end of a wing. The weight could submerge the float and possibly even cause the airplane to tip over. The best bet for a light airplane in a tight situation is to use a paddle to maneuver away from an obstruction. The same goes for a fabric-covered airplane—you don't want to walk on fabric.

The scramble works. We know because we use it. Practice it a couple of times to get the hang of it, and it could save your bacon, too. ■

Lyle Panepinto owns and operates Southern Seaplane in New Orleans.