



Hammerhead turns

[Robert McCurdy](#) [In My Opinion](#)

We all know of some ag pilots who make hammerhead turns, and maybe you are one of those who do make these hammerhead turns. It is my contention that those ag pilots who continue to make turns like this, will one day not be able to pull out of the dive in time and the ground will rise up and smite them a fatal blow. Too bad. But these ag pilots who make turns like this are not my primary concern. My beef is that they set a horrible example for rookie ag pilots. Under the correct circumstances, as in a severe skidding turn while attempting a hammerhead turn, the airplane will suddenly and without warning snap-roll to the inverted position. When this happens at 600-700' agl, there is very little chance of recovering control of the airplane. I do know of one case where the pilot was able to get the airplane right-side-up by stomping a rudder pedal a split second before the airplane slammed into the ground. He hit so hard that the airplane did not slide 20 feet from the initial point of contact with the ground. The fuselage broke in half and both wings broke at the fuselage and hit the ground. The pilot survived, but sustained very serious injuries.

Recently I overheard two of our students talking and using hand gestures about an ag pilot that one of them knows who continuously pulls his AT-502 nearly vertical, kicks a rudder and falls right back onto his next swath. The student's obvious admiration for this seasoned ag pilot really bothered me. In Wayne Handley's excellent film, Turn Smart, he demonstrates a hammerhead turn. In my opinion, he should not have included this in an otherwise, outstanding training film. Still, I do have all of my students watch this film. It's my opinion that making hammerhead turns all day is like playing Russian Roulette. The odds are in your favor (one in six), that you will make a successful hammerhead turn, just like the odds are in your favor the live cartridge will not line up with the firing pin of your revolver. But, just keep on spinning the cylinder. BANG!

And so as per always and in the correct order, be safe, have fun, and make money,