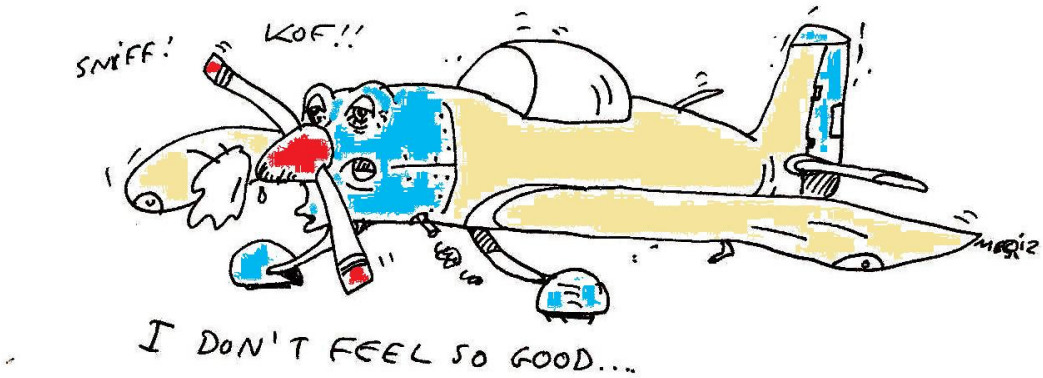
'My friend learned about flying from that'

A friend recently sent me this; while the specifics might not apply to everyone, the underlying message does; intermittent snags rarely go away by themselves and can develop into an unexpected emergency. Just like with the human body, it's a good idea to act early to prevent long-term consequences!

'Aeroplanes talk to you'



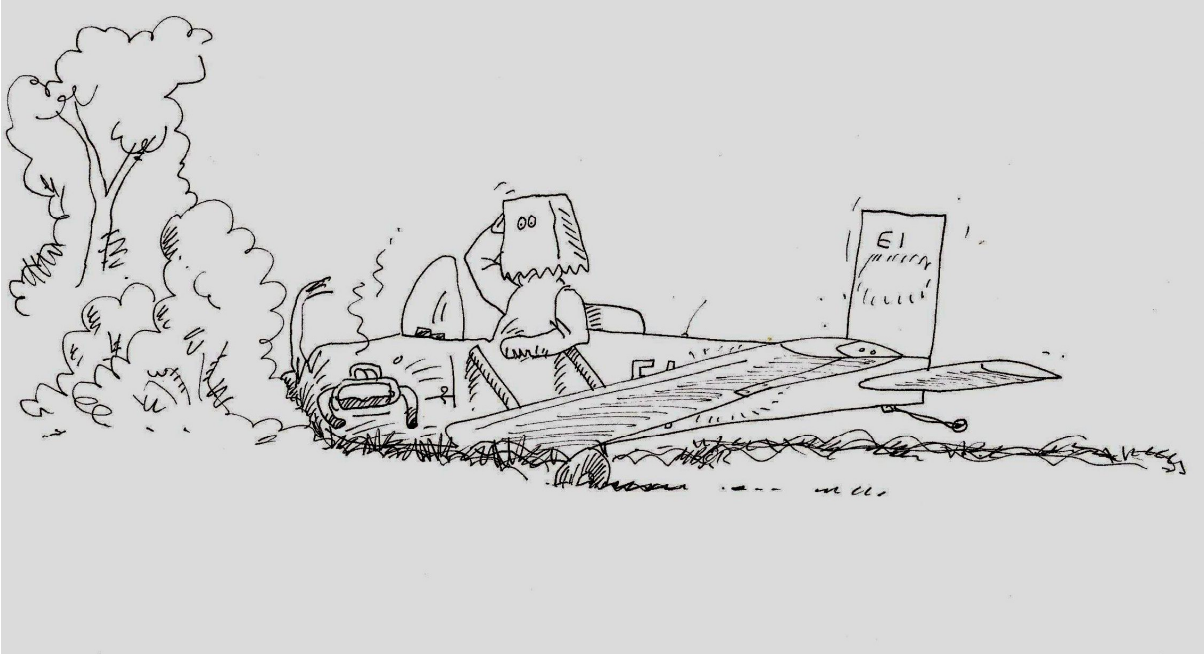
I *thought* I had a momentary slight power loss just as I went to 'back off' on the throttle after climb-out in a small open-cockpit single-seater. Nothing major, just a feeling... Everything looked normal, felt normal, and sounded normal. Still, there was something, it was as if someone other than me had reduced the power a split second before I did. A few minutes later, I had convinced myself that it was 'one of those things' maybe carburettor ice, maybe a momentary vapour lock or maybe I had just imagined it... I carried on soaking up the scenery on one of those great warm blue-sky days with no wind. By the time I landed I was convinced it was nothing to worry about, in the hangar I had a quick look around at the usual suspects, fuel, Ignition & filters, but nothing seemed amiss.

A few weeks later, I was chatting with the other pilot that shared our little machine. He was just back from a cross-country land-away and mentioned he'd had to divert around some showers over high ground on the way home. *'Oh that reminds me, I had 'scary moment there'* he said. It turned out he had applied full power to climb over the hills when the engine 'faltered' for a moment. It recovered when he reduced power and seemed to be OK for the rest of the flight. Alarm bells went off in my mind - the aircraft obviously had a snag and was telling us, I had ignored it first time around... I was grateful for a second chance.

Ground running it seemed normal. We got experts involved and examined and changed everything we could think of that might have caused this mysterious snag. The fuel was tested for contamination. We fitted new spark plugs, new flexible hose fuel lines, a new fuel filter, a new fuel pump; the carburettors were thoroughly checked and cleaned, The Cylinders, pistons and heads were checked for internal damage; we found nothing obvious, but thought we had surely fixed whatever it was.

Another ground run was perfectly normal. A full power, high speed, acceleration and stop was done

with no problem. I decided to fly it. At around 300 ft the engine faltered. I reduced the throttle, the engine picked up, I turned downwind & the engine stopped. Fortunately I was by now in a position to make a safe landing across the field without any damage and came to a halt without any further drama.



The cause was eventually traced to a small amount of dirt in the rarely operated fuel 'on-off' valve which was *upstream* of the fuel filter (it is now downstream). The big lesson? LISTEN..... Aeroplanes tell you when they are not feeling well!!