

# Cornell Alumni Magazine

May-June 2011

## *Sky Captain*

**John Zayac '82**



**W**hen John Zayac races, he can finish a five-mile course—complete with turns and turbulence—in about a minute and seventeen seconds. For more than a decade, Zayac has been a devotee of air racing, in which half a dozen planes fly a route including three turns at about 240 miles per hour. Zayac says the whole experience offers an adrenaline rush, but that the scariest moments come at the start of each event. "Everybody is headed to the same point, but you can't bump in airplanes like in NASCAR," Zayac says. "It's not forgiving."

When Zayac is not competing at the races (held in Reno, Nevada), he is the CEO of Denver-based IBG Business Services, a mergers and acquisitions advisory firm; he also flies for leisure, travel, business, and occasional air shows. His flying career has not been without some close calls. Zayac made an emergency landing on a road en route to his first air race in Reno due to engine trouble, and a couple of years ago he was forced to do a controlled crash-landing after his engine blew up over the Rocky Mountains. "I was able to drive it between some rocks in the peaks of the mountains and rip the wings off," Zayac recalls, "and at that same time slow the aircraft down and lose all the excess fuel."

Both times, Zayac walked away without a scratch.

— *Laura Gallup*