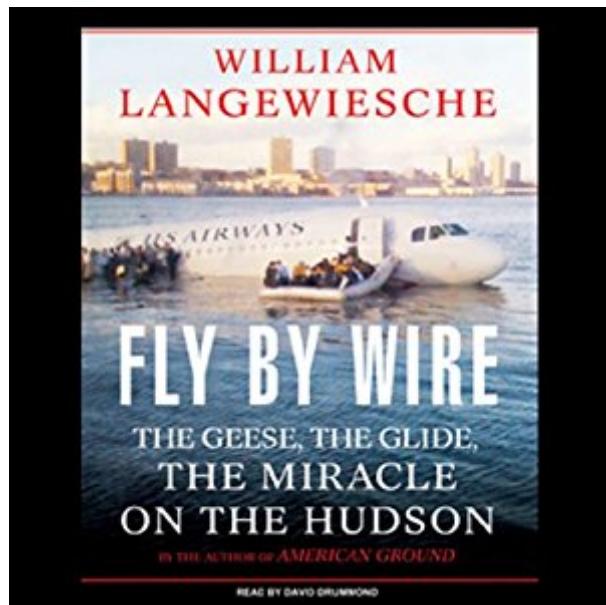


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Fly By Wire: The Geese, The Glide, The Miracle On The Hudson



Synopsis

On January 15, 2009, a US Airways Airbus A320 had just taken off from LaGuardia Airport in New York when a flock of Canada Geese collided with it, destroying both of its engines. Over the next three minutes, the plane's pilot, Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, managed to glide it to a safe landing in the Hudson River. It was an instant media sensation---the "Miracle on the Hudson"---and Captain Sully was the hero. But how much of the success of this dramatic landing can actually be credited to the genius of the pilot? To what extent is the "miracle" on the Hudson the result of extraordinary---but not widely known, and in some cases quite controversial---advances in aviation and computer technology over the past 20 years? In *Fly by Wire*, journalist William Langewiesche takes us on a strange and unexpected journey into the fascinating world of advanced aviation. From the testing laboratories where engineers struggle to build a jet engine that can systematically resist bird attacks, through the creation of the A320 in France, to the political and social forces that have sought to minimize the impact of the revolutionary fly-by-wire technology, William Langewiesche assembles the untold stories necessary to truly understand the "miracle" on the Hudson, and makes us question our assumptions about human beings in modern aviation.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 6 hoursÂ andÂ 1 minute

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: December 14, 2009

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B0030V51CS

Best Sellers Rank: #48 inÂ Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Transportation #167 inÂ Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > Aviation > History #242 inÂ Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science > Technology & Engineering

Customer Reviews

William Langewiesche's analysis of all the factors which contributed to the "Miracle on the Hudson" is a story that matches the events themselves in terms of excitement. Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, pilot of the Airbus A320 which hit a flock of geese, lost both engines, and landed in the Hudson

River with no loss of life on January 15, 2009, has rightly been lauded for his performance and has become a popular hero. But he was not alone in the making of this miracle. The plane itself contributed mightily to the successful outcome and the saving of the lives of all one hundred fifty passengers and five crew. Designed to remain stable under the most extraordinary conditions, the European-made Airbus is controlled by computerized systems which can not be over-ridden by pilots as they make split second moves during emergencies. "This marriage between electrical control circuits and digital computer [has become known] as fly-by-wire." Langewiesche, an award-winning journalist and pilot, is at home with his subject, and he has interviewed virtually everyone who could give input into this story, creating a vibrant, lively, and thoughtful analysis of all the individual elements--including luck--which contributed to this happy ending. At the same time, he also analyzes some of the elements which may have led to the accident, including the issue of bird strikes throughout aviation history and why they happen. In his attempt to give the complete picture, Langewiesche also considers the financial problems of the airlines, the power of the pilots' unions, the comfortable relationship between the NTSB and the airlines and unions, and the competition between Airbus and Boeing.

After reading "Fly By Wire" on a recent trip, I find it interesting to visit .com and see a recapitulation of the passionate debate that Langewiesche describes in his book. On the one hand, there are those who feel that "fly by wire" technology is overrated and perhaps even dangerous--these reviewers tend to give the book low marks and hard reviews, some of which strike me as a bit unfair. Other reviewers--admirers of Langewiesche's journalistic style or the cogent explanations that he offers--give him high grades. On balance, I enjoyed "Fly by Wire," but I can understand how it will hit some raw nerves. For the record, Langewiesche has nothing but high praise for Captain Sullenberger and his crew. He agrees that they did a superb job under incredibly difficult conditions, and the fact that they did it in an Airbus A320 takes nothing away from their accomplishment. As near as I can tell, the crew of US Airways Flight 1549 are real heroes and deserve the praise they have received. "Fly by wire" technology combines electrical control circuits and digital computers to replace traditional hydraulic and mechanical flight control systems. Langewiesche really "pokes the bear" and elicits a strong emotional response from many of his readers when he suggests that "fly by wire" was a major contributor to the Miracle on the Hudson. Readers who want their heroes to be like Beowulf, brave and omnisciently skilled, dislike the suggestion that Captain Sullenberger and his team may have been helped by the revolutionary design of the A320.

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