

HardisonInk.com

Hobbyist pilot flies over row crops *Row flights follow hayfield success*



Natalie Couey operates a John Deere tractor on a hayfield in Levy County in early June as The Dragonfly takes a picture.

Story, Photos and Videos

By Jeff M. Hardison © June 23, 2017 at 4:47 p.m.

LEVY COUNTY -- Having secured the permission of the farmer who owns land where he is growing row crops, a hobbyist drone pilot filmed those crops on Friday morning (June 23).

Jeff M. Hardison spoke with Vince Dean on Friday because the hobbyist pilot had filmed a particular hayfield and was ready to move to the next level of hobbyist aerial photography. Peanuts and watermelons were the target film harvest sought.

<https://youtu.be/MtTyDL3rNp4>

In this May 26 video, a very pleasant flight with no wind influence shows a hayfield complete with pocket gopher mounds. This is when there was no activity on the field either.

<https://youtu.be/UtlAReJJ9bE>

In this June 23 video, there are views of watermelons and peanuts growing in rows. This is a merge from 14 launches and landings, and it is not as smooth as the May 26 hayfield view.

HardisonInk.com



This high view of the hayfield shows the pocket gopher areas as little white spots.



The hobbyist pilot is seen on the hayfield.

HardisonInk.com



Here is the photo strived for on Friday (June 23) – row crops!



The pilot is on the left in this picture from Friday (June 23). The Jeep is next to him. A dirt mound is on the right. Peanuts are at the top of the photo and watermelon plants are below.

HardisonInk.com



This view of bee hives (white boxes on the left) from on high is interesting, and shows the drone needs to go somewhere else relatively quickly.



A close-up view of peanut plants is possible after the drone lands on them.

HardisonInk.com



This is a still shot from one flight, where the camera was tilted upward to see the props. This is also in part of the video clips.

The hobbyist had met the farmer in the past few years when he wrote about peanut harvesting, and Dean helped the journalist gather information and take photos, and a video.

"The Dragonfly successfully launched and landed on 14 occasions Friday morning (June 23)," Hardison said during a debriefing after the hobbyist flight mission. "I had a blast, thanks to Mr. Dean letting me film on his property."

Hardison previously had earned the FAA license required to fly the drone as a hobbyist, and he maintains that level of federal approval to use the airways. With that in mind, Hardison follows all of the rules of the air. On this particular mission, the machine never went above 100 feet, which is far below the limit of 500 feet.

The drone (unmanned aerial system) was always in sight when it was in the air, although it did disappear in both peanut and watermelon crops upon landing on the ground.

Once on the target property in Levy County, the pilot just about leapt out of his skin because this was exactly the scene he had sought to capture.

"I noticed bee hives too," he said, "so I knew to try and direct the drone away from that area. On my first launch, that slight summer breeze did not make me feel fine – as it may have made Darrell Crofts and Jimmy Seals feel fine blowing jasmine through their minds back in 1972."

The pilot said the machine flew over the bee hives and landed in peanuts, which were on the other side of a barbed wire fence from the launch point.

"I rolled on the ground to go under the barbed wire and gently walked between the rows of growing peanuts to pick up The Dragonfly," he said.

The wind was too strong, probably at 7 mph or so, which led to a relatively lesser-controlled flight that morning. However, the videographer obtained the shots he sought.

"I am living the American Dream," Hardison said. "Thanks to a friendly farmer, I was able to fly my relatively inexpensive drone and record some Florida agriculture."

Hardison said The Dragonfly flies on Friday, and other days. Friday flights are alright, he said.

"I would like to own a DJI Mavik," Hardison said. "But having a drone that flies in a breeze and is more under control – like the Mavik – might take some of the challenge out of what I accomplished with The Dragonfly today. What I did with the machine I own gives me more bragging rights than if I had a fancy-schmancy drone."

Hardison said he is thankful to all of the farmers like Vince Dean who put in the work required to feed Americans. He knows farmers work long hours, and endure stressful situations.

HardisonInk.com

“I appreciate Mr. Dean and all of the farmers in Florida, and elsewhere,” Hardison said. “I eat my share of peanuts, watermelon, cantaloupe, corn, green beans and other things grown on Florida farms. The next flight I want to try will be with cattle, sheep or goats.”

Hardison said he knows some cattle, sheep and goat ranchers. There are some questions he has about flying over them.

“The thing about cows versus peanut plants,” he said, “is that I can’t really fly my drone against even the slightest breeze. I was pushing the envelope at 7 mph this morning, and I had to let it go to the ground several times to get my shots.

“I eat beef,” he continued, “but I don’t want to bother a cow by landing a drone on it. Of course, I don’t want to bug sheep or goats either, but I think the ranchers will help me know how to best create the next film I seek.”

Hardison shared a story about a couple of other living creatures whose paths he crossed on Friday morning.

“There was one bee that came out from the hive and buzzed me repeatedly,” Hardison said. “This was a standard Florida bee. He was not an Africanized attack bee. I know he was just letting me know that I was getting a bit too close to the hive. So I got in the Jeep and moved a few feet away. The bee did not follow the Jeep. That little bee is a good worker. He did his job.”

Another encounter was not recognized until after the film was downloaded.

“I bring my drone in for relatively rough landings,” Hardison said. “That’s part of my style with this machine. On one landing, the unmanned aerial system was in the grass. I watched the film that showed a large red ant walk along a stick on the ground. So, I thought about the times I needed to roll under barbed wire to retrieve the flying machine that went off course a little bit. Well, no ants bit me, but I know they were in the area, because I saw one on film.”

With this machine, the film cannot be viewed until it is downloaded to a computer – after the flight. The hobbyist pilot said he advises all flyers to always get permission before operating over an area.

“The Florida Highway Patrol sent a note about covering a funeral event it was having in Lake City,” Hardison said. “FHP Master Sergeant William T. Bishop was a great trooper. The FHP sent me a note to not fly a drone for any filming of the funeral procession.

“That was very thoughtful of the FHP leadership to let UAS operators know not to be rude during a funeral procession,” he continued. “If I had a DJI Mavic, then I might have been inclined to consider it. So, it is good that the FHP noted not to do that as a matter of courtesy.”

Hardison spoke about another news opportunity he let go by the wayside on Friday.

There were 12 members of the United States House of Representatives who were in Gainesville today (Friday, June 23). There was a potential opportunity for the media to briefly ask a couple of questions.

“I thought about two hours of driving and dealing with traffic in Gainesville on a Friday to possibly ask a question,” Hardison said. “Weighing it all, I chose against going with the herd of other journalists on that one. Instead, I let The Dragonfly fly on Friday. Some people don’t get some things I note. ‘That eagle flies on Friday,’ is one of the lines in the lyrics of the song Stormy Monday by T-Bone Walker. It means Friday is payday.

“There are two things my late brother Jim taught me back in the 1970s when we were putting pipe in the ground to earn a living,” Hardison continued. “Water (he used another word) does not flow uphill and payday is on Friday. That is all that matters... Of course, Jim taught me lots of other things, including that the influence of gravity on water (or the waste material that water can carry to the sewer plant), and paydays being on Friday are not really all that matters.”