

Immelman turn

A flight mechanics study

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This brief project aims to take a look at the flight mechanics involved in the Immelmann turn maneuver while analysing its performance in a realistic context.

For this, a first set of computations have been performed in order to obtain the models of the physic phenomena occurring, and a later sutdy with aircraft values has been carried out to evaluate the previously obtained results. All the coding has been done with MATLAB¹ version R2021b (September 2021). The git repository of this project, including the \LaTeX files, can be found in [this link](#).

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Contents

Introduction	1
Maneouver Computations	1
Maneouver Computations	2
Maneouver Computations	2
Maneouver Computations	2
Maneouver Computations	2
Maneouver Computations	2
Maneouver study	2
0.0.1 Evolution throughout time	3
0.0.2 Trajectory analysis	3
Introduction	4
 Bibliography	 5
 List of Figures	 5
 List of Tables	 5

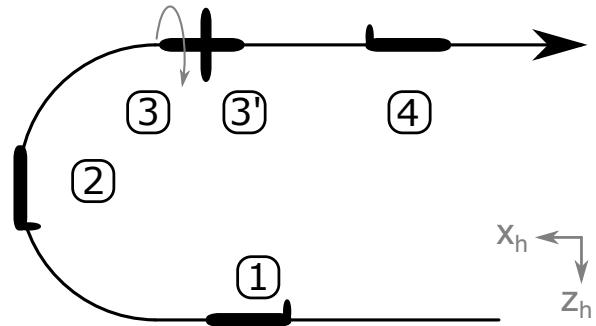


Figure 1 Immelman turn overview. Own elaboration.

The aircraft initiates this maneuver in straight levelled flight, and describes an upwards semicircle contained in its symmetry plane. This increases the flight altitude while changing the trajectory's to the original's opposite direction and leaves the plane turned upside down. It then rolls while still flying in a straigh line, and returns to the initial condition of levelled flight.

This maneuver can be performed for various velocities and radius, but there are some dependencies and limitiations to be taken into account, such as the maximum deflections or forces the control surfaces can provide or support, respectively.

In order to cover all these variables, a first approach through the dynamic and kinetic equations follows.

Maneouver Computations

Let us assume symmetric flight (no lateral aerodynamic force $Q = 0$ nor lateral thrust force as $\nu = 0$), the thrust generated by the engines is parallel to the x wind axis (thus $\epsilon = 0$), and that the maneuver takes place flawlessly, this is in the vertical plane too; $\xi = \dot{\xi} = 0$.

As the maneuver is a rather short, we will also as-

Introduction

The Immelman turn, named after German World War I flying ace Max Immelmann, is an an aerobatic maneuver that results in level-flight of the aircraft in the opposite direction and higher altitude.

¹MATrix LABoratory, language developed by The MathWorks Inc.

sume that the fuel consumed is negligible and no mass fraction is lost; $\dot{m} = 0$.

The motion equations follow:

$$\begin{cases} T \cos(\epsilon) \cos(\nu) - D - mg \sin \gamma - m\dot{V} = 0 \\ T \cos(\epsilon) \sin(\nu) - Q + mg \cos \gamma \sin \mu + mV(\dot{\gamma} \sin \mu - \dot{\Xi} \cos \gamma \cos \mu) = 0 \\ -T \sin \epsilon - L + mg \cos \gamma \cos \mu + mV(\dot{\gamma} \cos \mu - \dot{\Xi} \cos \gamma \sin \mu) = 0 \\ \dot{x}_e = V \cos \gamma \cos \Xi \\ \dot{y}_e = V \cos \gamma \sin \Xi \\ \dot{z}_e = -V \sin \gamma \end{cases}$$

And for each of the phases that compose the maneuver, they can be simplified by substituting the flight conditions.

	μ	$\gamma = \dot{\gamma}$	$\xi = \dot{\xi} = \nu = \epsilon = Q$
Cruise	0	0	0
Semicircle	0	f(t)	0
Inversion	f(t)	0	0

First phases - cruise

$$\begin{cases} T - D - m\dot{V} = 0 \\ 0 = 0 \\ -L + mg = 0 \\ \dot{x}_e = V \\ \dot{y}_e = 0 \\ \dot{z}_e = 0 \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

There are three equations and four variables; α , π and V . Total degrees of freedom are:

Second phase - semicircle

$$\begin{cases} T - D - mg \sin \gamma - m\dot{V} = 0 \\ 0 = 0 \\ -L + mg \cos \gamma + mV\dot{\gamma} = 0 \\ \dot{x}_e = V \cos \gamma \\ \dot{y}_e = 0 \\ \dot{z}_e = -V \sin \gamma \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

There are four equations and four variables: α , π , V and γ . Timón de profundidad (elevator), palanca de gases (gas control lever or throttle). Total degrees of freedom are:

Third phase - inversion

$$\begin{cases} T - D - m\dot{V} = 0 \\ mg \sin \mu = 0 \\ -L - mg \cos \mu = 0 \\ \dot{x}_e = V \\ \dot{y}_e = 0 \\ \dot{z}_e = 0 \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

There are three equations and five variables; α , π , V and μ . Total degrees of freedom are:

Forth phase - cruise

$$\begin{cases} T - D - m\dot{V} = 0 \\ 0 = 0 \\ -L + mg = 0 \\ \dot{x}_e = V \\ \dot{y}_e = 0 \\ \dot{z}_e = 0 \end{cases} \quad (4)$$

There are three equations and four variables; α , π and V . Total degrees of freedom are:

Maneuver study

The higher the velocity is, the bigger the radius - this is, the greater the increase of altitude - given that the wing's flaps cannot deflect enough nor can support as much force to reduce the radius as to the same maneuver for a lower velocity.

Note that the centripetal force follows:

$$F = \frac{mV^2}{R}$$

Where m , V and R are the aircraft's mass (in kg), velocity (in m/s) and radius (in m) respectively.

The only angles affected are gamma γ and mu μ if performed flawlessly. The former is the angle formed between the x axis of the horizontal set and the x axis of the wind set, while the latter is the one formed between the y axis of the same sets. Note that for the whole maneuver the body set remains consistent with the wind set.

Figure 2 shows how these change in the different phases of the Immelmann turn

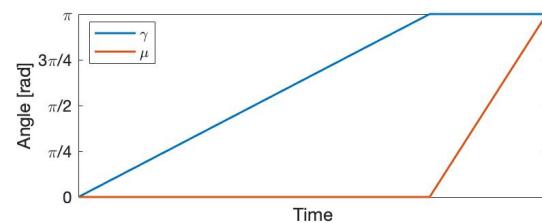


Figure 2 Angles evolution over time

Note that for γ the evolution is perfectly defined, as the increment of said angle needs to be positive in order to increase the flight altitude. Conversely, for μ the pilot could choose to rotate in the opposite direction thus changing μ from 0 to $-\pi$ instead - note that π and $-\pi$ are equivalent -, and the result would be virtually the same.

Furthermore, in order to describe a perfect semicircle the angular speed $\dot{\gamma}$ needs to remain constant. This results in the necessary condition of gamma's evolution to be a straight slope. For μ , however, the pilot could also perform the roll at non-constant rotating speed without this having an impact on the maneuver performance. This would be reflected as a curve on mu's temporal evolution, instead of a straight line.

For the following computations, some values will be needed in order to numerically solve the Ordinal Differential Equation systems. The ENAERT T-35 Pillán, a Chilean military small aircraft and its data [2] as reference values.



Figure 3 ENAERT T-35 Pillán. Extracted from [1]

0.0.1 Evolution throughout time

Evaluate L , D , V , γ , z , x

Taking the first equation of each of the phases' systems we can operate to integrate the velocity through time. For the most generic case:

$$\begin{cases} \frac{\partial V}{\partial t} = \frac{1}{m} (T - D - mg \sin \gamma) \\ \frac{\partial \gamma}{\partial t} = \frac{1}{mV} (L - mg \cos \gamma) \end{cases}$$

$$dt = \frac{m}{T - D - mg \sin \gamma} dV$$

$$\int dt = \int \frac{m}{T - D - mg \sin \gamma} dV$$

Substituting drag's definition,

$$= \int \frac{m}{T - \frac{1}{2}\rho SV^2(C_{D_0} + kC_L^2) - mg \sin \gamma} dV$$

0.0.2 Trajectory analysis

The three force configurations during the maneuver correspond to the free body diagrams at stages 1, 2 and 3 (see Figure 1).

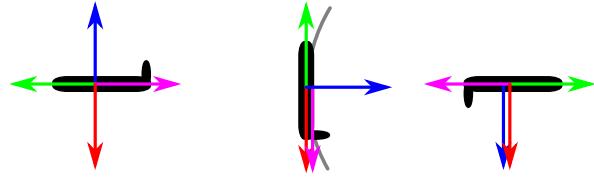


Figure 4 Free body diagrams during the semiloop. Own elaboration.

Note that at all times the lift behaves as the centripetal force, thus indicating that both the velocity and radius limitations to perform the Immelmann turn are inherent to the wing design and its maximum and minimum lift generation.

As the motion will be circular, the normal and tangential accelerations will follow:

$$a_n = \frac{V^2}{R} = V\dot{\gamma} = \dot{\gamma}^2 R \quad a_t = V^2 R$$

As a result, the radius can be written as a function of the angle of attack. By operating with the third equation of system number 2, which is in wind system of reference, very convenient as is also polar system:

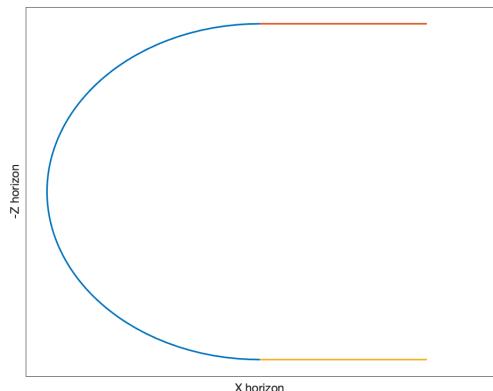
$$\begin{aligned} L &= m \left(\frac{V^2}{R} + g \cos(\gamma) \right) \\ \frac{1}{2} \rho S V^2 C_L(\alpha) &= m \left(\frac{V^2}{R} + g \cos(\gamma) \right) \\ R &= \frac{2mV^2}{2W \cos(\gamma) + \rho S V^2 C_L(\alpha)} \end{aligned}$$

As the plane must describe a semicircle, the radius must be constant.

Plot x , z with time y después en plano (ver trayectoria). We can consider the maneuver coordinates:

$$\begin{aligned} \dot{x}_e &= V \cos \gamma & x_e &= Vt \cos \gamma \\ \dot{y}_e &= 0 & y_e &= 0 \\ \dot{z}_e &= -V \sin \gamma & z_e &= -Vt \sin \gamma \end{aligned}$$

If we take both control by the gas lever (controlled and γ)



Other data

this is a biblatex test [3]

Bibliography

- [1] Cristian Marambio Defensa.com. Proyecto t-35 pillán ii: Nueva vida para el pillán, Apr 2018.
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- [3] Miguel Ángel Gómez Tierno, Manuel Pérez Cortés, and César Puentes Márquez. *Mecánica del vuelo*. Ibergaceta, 2012.

List of Figures

1	Immelman turn overview. Own elaboration.	1
2	Angles evolution over time	2
3	ENAERT T-35 Pillán. Extracted from [1]	3
4	Free body diagrams during the semiloop. Own elaboration.	3

List of Tables

Appendix: Curve fitting

In order to plot the evolution of both Lift and Drag for each phase, the computed velocity - solved from each respective ODE system - has been fitted from the resultant set of data points into a curve.

For this, the native `polyfit` and `poly2sym` MATLAB functions have been employed.

To correctly fit a set of points into a curve and avoid overfitting the polynomial (thus dealing with excessive oscillations and Runge's phenomenon among others), the linear Least Squares Method (LLS) has been used. The following plots show the square root sum and the norm of the squared regression value for each phase's velocity fit.