



RVator's Log

Newsletter of the Twin Cities RV Builder's Group

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Upcoming Events

January 11: - Member Appreciation Lunch with special guest speaker Mike Reid from LikeLink III

Noon at Key Air, Anoka County Airport.

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**Minnesota Wing
Van's Air Force**

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Shop Notes

The last few years of my airline career at NWA were about as good as it gets. I had about given up the idea of moving to a captain slot since quality of life was driving my "happiness quotient". Having weekends and holidays off and spending time with the family was becoming more important than chasing the bucks in the left seat of a DC-9. It would have been cool to be the boss, but moving back down to the bottom of the captain's list in MSP didn't hold a lot of interest for me. Being a senior first officer on the Boeing 757 was good duty. It was everyone's favorite airplane (maybe not for passengers but for pilots it was a powerful machine that was just fun to fly). It handled well, relatively easy to land, and had pretty good schedules. Enjoying my precious seniority, I flew a lot of west coast turns (day-trips) and avoided the hotel life. Flying across the western U.S. to cities like LA, San Fran, Portland, and Seattle, traffic was usually light and the scenery spectacular. At the top of my retirement bucket list was to build my RV-7 and someday fly it to California and back.



So this September, realizing that we were not getting any younger (strange how that works), Jean and I decided to make the trip. We had originally planned a big circle to Oregon, down through California, eastward through Arizona and back. But, since only one of us is retired, we had about a week to do this, so we modified the "big" trip and settled for a semi-big trip to northern California, south to the wine country and back.

One of our goals was to visit the Redwood forest north of Eureka, California and see some of the biggest trees in the world. So we picked the Arcata, California airport as our goal. I started doing a little research on this location and found out that Arcata is one of the foggiest airports in the country. It was used in WWII for low visibility landing research. Tracking the weather every morning before our trip, I discovered that a 500-foot ceiling is cause for rejoicing. RVRs hovering around 1200 feet seem to be the norm. Hmm... might have to have a plan B but we'll get to that in a minute.



This will be our longest light airplane trip ever. Plus we'll be going over some serious high terrain. In a 757, that doesn't warrant a second thought. But what about our "toy" airplane? First of all, even though we would file IFR for the entire trip, there was no way I was going to flying across the mountains in wind and weather. So... we were planning on good VFR or we'd stay on the ground. Second, I concluded that you just need to fly high out west. It looked like 12,000 and up might be needed quite often. Guess we needed some oxygen for that!

Fortunately, Jim Lenzmeier had his O2 system for sale, which he had only used a couple times. I bought it and installed the bottle right behind the seats. A couple weeks before our intended departure date, I topped the tank, untangled all the tubes, hung the little nose cannula thingy around my neck and headed out for a little altitude test. Climbing out north of New Richmond, I set the autopilot for a 800 fpm right of climb, kept the mixture full rich and throttle wide open to keep the motor cool and set sail for the RV "flight levels". 22DW motored its way up easy as pie and I leveled off at 16,500. A long line of oxygen molecules were flowing and I tooted around for 10 minutes marveling at the fact that the -7 was trueing out at 157 knots and burning 6 gph. I think this will work!

Our mountain flying experience was pretty limited. We did fly our first RV-4 to Jackson Hole, WY, which turned out to be a non-event (perfect weather does help). I got out an old sectional chart and looked for a route that avoided most of the super high stuff. We decided we'd break the trip west into a day and a half. We thought we'd spend the night in Ogden, Utah, which would be about 6 hours of flying. We planned a stop in Pierre, SD and Casper, WY (about 2 ½ hour legs seems about right... can't get up and stretch very easily). The next day we would cross the Nevada desert to Redding, CA.

RV travel champion Pete Howell loaned us his super-duper personal locator beacon (it's lonely out in the desert). I made up a simple survival and first aid kit plus we planned on taking a couple quarts of water as well.

Departure day dawned clear all the way to Utah. There was only about a 10-knot headwind. How can this be? We launched at sunup and enjoyed a smooth and routine flight to Pierre. This is a good stop. Mustang Aviation is a nice FBO and we refueled and were off again in less than 30 minutes. Motoring across the Badlands, the terrain was slowly beginning to rise. By the time we landed in Casper, it was beginning to warm up and the bumps were minor. The last leg to Ogden was best planed for 12,000 feet. We managed to untangle the oxygen tubes and soon we were getting used to having the nasal cannulas in place. A little uncomfortable at first but not all that bad.



Just one of many amazing pieces of art at the Kemp Jet Center

About 50 miles east of the Wasatch Mountains we started to get hammered in the heat of the thermals. The scattered to broken clouds were well above us so we just had to gut it out. Still only about 10 knots of head wind but it was not much fun. It was about 1 pm local and the Ogden airport was a welcome sight. Time to call it a day.

We planned to stay at Kemp Jet Center, which I just chose at random. This was probably the fanciest FBO I had ever seen. Three monstrous hangars, a beautiful terminal with cool artwork everywhere. We rolled the RV into a huge hangar, which we shared with one other biz-jet. Lot's of vacant space. We generally like to get the RV inside when we are traveling. It's worth the peace of mind to have it out of the sun and potential rain. When we landed I noticed a pretty long streak of oil on the belly, which had me worried. Never had any oil leaks before so I took off the top cowl to check things out. I really couldn't find anything major except for some drips coming out of one of the oil cooler fittings. I decided I'd keep a watch on it and live with the streaks until we got home.

Our master plan was to leave at sunrise in the morning to get across the desert before it got hot and rough. The day dawned clear again and very little wind. We launched about 0730 again on an IFR flight plan filed for 12,000. Our rest stop was planned to be Winnemucca, NV, about 2:15 down the way. We had settled in nicely about an hour after takeoff with a 155-knot ground speed and smooth as glass. I was looking at something on my iPad when Jean yelled "Lookout!" I looked up to see something silver 12 o'clock ahead, grabbed the stick to do some sort of evasive maneuver and recognized a small Mylar helium balloon zip under the right wing. Wow.. so what is the chance of hitting a toy balloon at 12,000 feet over the middle of no-where Nevada? Hopefully this would be the last of any excitement for the trip.

We were 30 minutes out of Winnemucca when we flew into the smoke drifting northeast from the Yosemite wildfire, which was the big news of the week. The airport was giving 10 miles visibility, but we couldn't see the ground at all. I decided to ask for the GPS approach landing south so we could at least find the airport. Oddly when we were about 5 miles out, we descended under the smoke and broke out in the clear.

A quick turn at Winnemucca and we were airborne again climbing through the smoke westward to Redding, CA. About 30 more minutes of flight time and we broke out of the smoke into clear and a million conditions. My kind of flying! ATC asked if we could make 14,000 for radar coverage. By now I was convinced 22DW was happy as a clam at high altitude so we dialed in a little higher flow rate on the O2 bottle and motored up another 2000 feet.

Soon the ancient volcanoes of Lassen National Park were in view and we crossed the last ridgeline about 20 miles east of Redding at 14,000. "Cleared for the visual runway 36" came the words from Redding approach. With a field elevation of 150 msl, we were WAY high so I swung far to the south and zigzagged our way down trying not to shock cool the engine. Finally, touchdown in California after 9:45 of flight time and 1345 nm. And we didn't see one TSA agent!

We stayed a couple days at a nice B&B in Redding and toured around the town. The owner of the B&B said that Redding is second only to Yuma, AZ as the sunniest city in the U.S. And it gets hot. Even in mid September it was 103-105 in the afternoon. As I said, our final destination was Trinidad, CA, about 10 miles north of the Arcata airport. During summer and early fall, the marine layer hangs along the California coast making for some serious fog conditions. Looking at the satellite photos each day, it generally only extends inland about a mile and usually breaks up by noon. So the morning of our departure we drive back to the airport and I check the weather to find a ceiling of 100 feet and 1/8 of a mile. Hmm... KACA has an ILS and LPV GPS approach down to 200 feet and 1/2 mile, but I had decided to limit myself to a 500-foot ceiling (I know I have all sorts of cool goodies in the -7, but it's still a toy airplane). We hang out until about 2 pm and it is still below ILS minimums. Well, let's just drive. So we secured the airplane with the FBO for 3 more days and hit the road.



Ever hear of the "Burning Man Art Festival"? Here it is from 14,000' over the Black Rock Desert in western Nevada. 60,000 "artists" expressing themselves in the middle of nowhere!



The drive was about 3 hours and even as much as I hate driving, this is probably one of the more spectacular roads in the country. Beautiful mountains and valleys following the Trinity River, famous for white-water rafting and serious trout fishing. Just as we finally got to the coast, the fog was breaking up but all in all, the drive was fun.

We spent 3 days and 2 nights at the Lost Whale Inn, by far the nicest B&B we have stayed in. A beautiful place right on the ocean, great food, whales and sea lions out in the bay, and great conversation with fellow travelers. We spent a day tracking down the largest trees in the world, which are about 20 miles north of the inn. Somewhere in this area is the tallest Redwood on the planet at 376 feet!! The location is a secret but the "little" ones you can visit are still pretty impressive at 300 feet plus

Volcanic cinder cone at Lassen National Park

and 20 feet in diameter!

Two days later, we departed the Lost Whale (in the fog of course) and drove back to Redding. After packing up the RV we departed around noon for the one-hour flight south to Santa Rosa, CA in the heart of the wine country. Still perfect weather, warm and sunny although there were showers off over the mountains to the east. At Santa Rosa, we hangared the bird with Kaiser Aviation, got the car and headed north to Healdsburg, CA, home of a zillion wineries, fancy restaurants and delightful old California hippies with WAY too much money!

After years of flying all over the country and living in hundred of hotels, I hope to never see the inside of a Sheraton or Hilton again. Our B&B outside of Healdsburg was perfect. Owned by a friendly couple that bought the property before the area became trendy, today it is probably worth millions. We spent one afternoon checking out a couple wineries in the Sonoma Valley. Buy a glass of wine, walk down to the river, kick back under a tree and pass the afternoon. Heaven on earth!!

The downside is sooner or later; it's time to head for home. Santa Rosa often has fog in the morning so again we were amazed to drive into the airport before dawn to find it clear. The airplane was fueled and ready (this is a REALLY high class FBO and yet it only cost \$20 a night for the hangar!) The original plan was to spend a day at Lake Tahoe (Truckee, CA) but that would depend on the smoke from the Yosemite fire. We filed direct Reno and then to Battle Mountain, NV. If the smoke was gone we'd land in Truckee for another day. We'll wait and see.

I did a careful weight and balance as we had a LOT of stuff on the back (5 bottles of wine didn't help!). Still about an inch forward of the aft CG, but it was pretty pitch sensitive on climb out. Santa Rosa is only 127 feet above sea level and I filed for 13,000 to cross the Sierra Nevada. I dialed in a slow 600 fpm rate of climb, kept full throttle and full rich mixture (a Tom Berge-ism that keeps the engine cool) and we slowly started the long climb. Crossing above the Donner Pass, I kept I-80 in sight off to our left as we flew over some seriously rough terrain. Truckee was engulfed in smoke and we could barely see Lake Tahoe. We decided to press on. Smooth as glass with a quartering tailwind of about 30 kts, I worried about turbulence but the ride was perfect. Once past the Reno airport, I breathed easier... lot's of dirt roads in the desert to land on.

A quick stop in Battle Mountain and we pressed on for our overnight stop in Logan, UT. The smoke further east was just about gone and we were asked to climb to 15,000 again for radar coverage. 22DW was truing out at 157 knots and burning 6.5 gph. Jean was now a true believer in going high. She hates bumps and so to I.



Eastbound across the Sierras at 13,000. A smoky Lake Tahoe to the south.

The last day again dawned clear and we departed at sunup for Hot Springs, SD

(home of Larry Vetterman). Got to talk with Larry a bit as we got fuel. He was busy preparing for the Badlands RV fly-in, which was to start the next day. The last leg of the day was direct to Sioux Falls where we planned to visit #2 son Dale and his wife Kendra. Here we encountered the only weather of the trip having to deviate around some showers but a non-event with the XM weather display. A great visit with the kids overnight and then back home in the morning.

All told, we had a great time and we logged over 18 hours of flying time. Other than our minor oil leak, the airplane ran perfect. Yep, the RV is a great traveling machine. The west coast is just a day and a half away. Don't push the weather and winds, have oxygen on board, take your time and enjoy the capability of these wonderful flying machine. Next summer, we're planning a trip to Maine. Can't wait!!