



November 2009

## Commentary

### Flying Carpet

#### Far from home

"Flagstaff, eh?" observed the Chicago weather briefer. "You're far from home! I once worked at the Prescott Automated Flight Service Station." Other briefers on this two-week journey would offer a different welcome: "I see you're based at Fox-Lima-Golf. Where's that?"

Following our marathon trip from Arizona, today's weather was perfect for flying from Aurora, Illinois, to Indianapolis. Disarmed by the happy forecast, I flipped the master switch--but nothing happened. My pulse rising, I flipped it again.

"That's a relief," said Jean, when the panel came alive.

"Yes, but intermittent electrical problems always get worse. Hopefully this won't bite us elsewhere on the trip." With no further symptoms, we took off.

"Now that we're east of the Mississippi, there are so many places to go and friends to see," said Jean,

as we cruised this once-familiar route. Two firm destinations remained on our journey: Jean's board meeting in Alexandria, Virginia, and our son and daughter-in-law's South Carolina home. In between, we were just cruisin'.

"There's Lafayette!" said Jean. While living there years ago, we'd met Jan and Bernie Stanich, whom we now headed to visit in Indianapolis (see ["Flying Carpet: Bit of an Expert,"](#) September 2001 *AOPA Flight Training*). Just 90 minutes after takeoff, we joined our treasured friends to revisit old haunts and reminisce over pizza.

I couldn't believe our good fortune when the next morning's forecast was again rosy--clear skies and 30-knot tailwinds to our next stop at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. "Just take off before the afternoon heating begins, and your trip should be pleasant," offered the briefer.

At Indianapolis Metropolitan Airport, however, I flipped the master switch half a dozen times before getting power. With afternoon thunderstorms predicted along our route, that posed a dilemma. Should we depart now while assured of good weather? Or address the electrical anomaly first, and risk getting stranded? Graciously, mechanics Shane and Rick of Indianapolis Aviation offered to have a look; they sent us on our way after installing a new battery contactor.

By now, however, thunderstorms blossomed southward from Cleveland. Dayton Approach offered a heading through the precipitation, but instead we elected to sail clear skies southeastward over Wilmington, Ohio. Even with the detour, we made Harrisburg's Capital City Airport in three hours.

That night we dined with Kevin Weddle of the Army War College, and his wife and daughter, Jeanie and Anne (see ["Just Because We're Pilots,"](#) April 2005 *AOPA Flight Training*). Afterwards, Kevin insisted on driving to the airport to see the airplane. "But it's just a Cessna 182," I said.

"It's the Flying Carpet!" he replied. Not to be deterred, our hosts examined the airplane's darkened cockpit with a flashlight.

"It was great seeing you two, and being a stop on the Flying Carpet tour!" Jeanie Weddle e-mailed that evening. "What good is a flying carpet without special people to visit?" I replied.

On past D.C.-area trips we'd landed at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, but since 9/11 that's virtually impossible. So after taking the FAA's required online D.C. Special Flight Rules Area course, I selected AOPA's home airport as convenient to Jean's Alexandria meeting. Dodging our first rainshowers of the trip, we hopped 45 minutes to Frederick, Maryland.

This being the Flying Carpet's first visit to AOPA headquarters, I parked on the association's ramp to take pictures. I'd hardly retrieved my camera when President Craig Fuller emerged. Introducing ourselves, we posed for photos before securing the airplane. Jean and I swapped flying stories with AOPA's Editor in Chief Tom Haines and his wife, Brenda, over dinner, and drove to Alexandria the next morning.

Severe weather warnings were posted that night, so I ordered the airplane into a hangar. There it stayed for three



expensive days--but still a bargain compared to repairing storm damage, or the inconvenience of getting stranded. Of equal concern was whether we'd get out on Saturday morning. Our son Austin had only the weekend off and we wanted to spend as much time as possible with him and Desi.

While Jean attended meetings, I went sightseeing in the rain--what a kick to discover my buddy Bill Kershner's Cessna 152 in the National Air and Space Museum! And oh, the culinary delights. Thursday night Jean and I toasted our anniversary over caviar, bouillabaisse, and strawberry-rhubarb sorbet. Friday, we savored a shower-dampened clambake on the banks of the Potomac: cold beer, chowder, baked clams and mussels, and all the lobster anyone could eat. Treats like these we don't get at home!

Amazingly, Saturday morning dawned dry, with cobalt cracks in the clouds. We filed an instrument flight plan at 6,000 feet and burst briskly through gray mist into warm sunshine. After days of rain, nothing's sweeter than surfing sapphire skies over a golden blanket of clouds.

"Funny to think that we're 1,000 feet below ground level at Flagstaff," I chuckled.

"Yeah, and that we'll traverse five states in one morning," added Jean. "Everything's so close here by airplane!" Through broken clouds we photographed jade mountains at Shenandoah National Park, and North Carolina's Great Pee Dee River.

"It's so lush compared to home," said my wife as we broke out of the clouds over the South Carolina countryside. A young pilot named Matt greeted our airplane at Sumter Airport.

"Best grass strip in the whole Southeast!" he boasted of the crosswind runway. If only I'd thought to land on it--treading grass is like kissing a cloud compared to Arizona's rocky dirt backcountry runways.

"Austin! Desi!" shouted Jean from behind me.

"Nice to see the ol' Flying Carpet!" said our son, patting the cowl after hugs all around, "and yet kinda crazy, so far from Arizona! I'll always have a soft spot for this airplane, even after flying fighters." We bundled into Desi's car to the happy chatter of family. Ah, three more blissful days to enjoy before the long journey home.

*Greg Brown was the 2000 National Flight Instructor of the Year. His books include Flying Carpet, The Savvy Flight Instructor, The Turbine Pilot's Flight Manual, Job Hunting for Pilots, and You Can Fly!. [Visit his Web site and see more photos.](#)*

**By Greg Brown**

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