



THE SANTA CRUZ RIVER irrigates farm fields near Tucson's Marana Regional Airport.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

FIT TO FLY, AND SO IS MY ENGINE

Aren't you going overboard, Greg?" said my wife, Jean. "This is your seventh straight day cross-country skiing." "My eighth day, actually. I'm shaping up for my flight physical." Throughout the fall I'd biked daily. When snow arrived, I'd switched to skis.

"You're already in shape. What could they possibly find wrong with you?"

"Who knows, but why take chances? Just as preventive maintenance keeps the *Flying Carpet* healthy, I'm optimizing my own fitness to ensure passing. Which reminds me, I want to lose a few pounds so let's skip dessert tonight, OK? Oh, and avoid stress for the next few days." Jean rolled her eyes.

"Speaking of flying, Greg, would you drop me in Tucson Wednesday for tennis regionals? And pick me up on Sunday?"

"Sure; we can land at Scottsdale for my flight physical on the way down." I'd hardly made the offer when it struck me:

What if I fail and can't get Jean to Tucson? So much for avoiding stress...

Next we learned that the president was to visit Tucson the day of our journey. By the time details of the associated temporary flight restriction were finally released just 24 hours in advance, even Jean was concerned. Fortunately the TFR was to activate after her drop-off time. Still, our destination lay in the TFR's outer ring, so I filed the requisite instrument flight plan in case the effective time changed.

"Greg, I just heard it's supposed to snow tomorrow! What if we can't get out?" *Arrggh!* We awoke to gloomy skies, but

thankfully, no snow. What's more, ceilings were high and forecast to remain that way. We ascended through magical shafts of sunlight hurled upon snow-capped buttes from between the clouds.

"What a beautiful morning, after all that worrying!" said Jean.

"Indeed it is," I replied. "Now if I can just pass my physical, life will be golden."

"I'm ready to be done with it, too."

"Remember suffering tennis elbow, Jean? You know the feeling when your passion is threatened."

Most second and third class flight physicals include little more than blood pressure, urine, and vision checks. The bigger issue is your recent medical history. Happily, most pilot health concerns can be resolved by researching and addressing them ahead of time. Since I had nothing new to report, there was little to fear. But, still, the stakes seemed so high.

Tying down at Scottsdale Municipal Airport, we crossed the ramp to Dr. David Bryman's office. Dr. Bryman had just arrived in his Piper Warrior following emergency-room duty in San Carlos, Arizona. Immediately he put me at ease. "Just trying to get the most out of my medical license," he quipped, describing his latest travels. "I'm invited to speak in China!" This guy loves doctoring as much as flying. I emerged 15 minutes later, suppressing a smile.

"Surprise, surprise; you passed," said Jean, checking her watch. "Let's go. My friend Jan is picking me up in Tucson." We idled on the ramp awaiting our clearance, then departed on radar vectors in the wrong direction. But today I savored every delay and deviation; I'd passed my medical!

"Does the engine seem slightly rough to you?" I asked Jean over Phoenix.

"No, it sounds the same as always."

"Good. Must be my imagination." Jan met us in the Sky Rider Coffee Shop at Tucson's Marana Regional Airport.

TRAVEL LOG: MARANA REGIONAL AIRPORT (AVQ)

Runways: 12/30, 6,901 by 100 feet; 3/21, 3,892 by 75 feet

Location: 15 miles northwest of Tucson
Elevation: 2,031 feet

On the field: Marana Skydiving Center no longer offers civilian parachuting lessons, but you can still get your chute rigged.

"Don't order anything too healthy, Greg," said Jean. "You deserve to splurge." Buoyed by the new scrap of paper in my wallet, I succumbed to a sinfully delicious barbeque sandwich.

Steering homeward after lunch, I admired jagged Picacho Peak, site of the westernmost Civil War battle, and the sapphire mountain reservoirs east of Phoenix. But still my subconscious nagged that the engine could be smoother. Approaching home, I did some half-hearted troubleshooting.

Changing rpm had no ill effect, nor did applying carburetor heat. My true airspeed suggested that the engine was producing normal power. The engine purred like a kitten on the right magneto. Then to the left mag, and... *b-boom! b-b-b-boom!* I retested after aggressively leaning the mixture, but roughness again shook the airplane. *Ah, the blessing of dual ignition*, I thought, upon reclaiming relative smoothness on both magnetos. Otherwise, this problem would have been more than annoying. I radioed ahead to Flagstaff for service upon landing. To my relief, the problem was just a fouled spark plug. The *Flying Carpet* soon returned to her berth, healthy for my wife's retrieval on Sunday.

"Thanks for being so supportive over the past few weeks," I told Jean by phone that evening.

"Weeks?" said Jean, chuckling. "More like six months!"

"Well, we're done worrying about my flight physical for two years—er, 18 months by your math. Anyway, it helps keep me in shape."

"Goody. Are you skiing tonight?"

"Nope, I'm cranking up the music and pouring some wine." Jean can kid me all she wants. But she's fit for tennis, I'm fit to fly, and so is our *Flying Carpet*. What more could anyone ask? 🧢

Visit **Greg Brown's** website (www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com).



Plus — See a photo slide show of Brown's flight.



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