



When **GREG BROWN** and his wife, Jean, were dating they often flew into the grass strip at Indiana's Shades State Park (now closed) to picnic. www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com

2,300 feet is plenty for a Cessna Skylane, grass demands proper technique and lengthens the takeoff roll.

Thirty minutes out, Warren texted: "The wind favors Runway 18." Grass runways often blend in with their surroundings, but we easily spotted the Hoblit Farms building. After circling for a look I slowed to soft-field approach speed—or at least, I tried to. One disadvantage of operating mostly from long paved runways is we lose the confidence and feel for flying snail's-pace short- and soft-field approach speeds. There was room to float before touchdown, but a shorter strip might have required going around.

Melissa, Warren, and his stepfather, Larry, waved welcome as we crossed the threshold. Yep, like landing on a slightly bumpy cloud! I powered through the grass with the elevator held high, and parked between farm implements. Those weird soft-field techniques that seem nonsensical on pavement are intuitive on a real grass strip; every training pilot should experience one.

Melissa chauffeured us by ATV to the farmhouse, where over refreshments Warren's mother, Susan, shared history of the sixth-generation family farm. Warren and I often joke about living "on the same street." Both Atlanta and Flagstaff lie on historic Route 66, albeit 1,500 miles apart. After touring Atlanta's Route 66 attractions, we checked into the wonderfully restored Colaw Rooming House Victorian mansion.

Driving to the farm the next morning, I asked Jean if she'd noticed a windsock when we landed.

"There isn't one," she replied. "Warren tossed grass to check the wind." That became her pretakeoff duty. I felt the drag of longish grass on takeoff, and was mindful of two weeks of baggage behind us. But, light on fuel, our trusty *Flying Carpet* easily mustered the promised soft-field performance. We'd barely cleared the corn when Logan County Airport filled our windshield. Even pre-armed with winds and the active runway, it was a handful joining the pattern to an airport just six miles away. We topped tanks, and had just leveled for our next refueling stop in Liberal, Kansas, when my phone buzzed with a text from Warren.

"Bon voyage, Greg. Great to see you guys, have a safe trip!" **FT**

LAND ON A CLOUD

There's nothing like flying to escape the beaten path. Returning from Massachusetts to Arizona, Jean and I steered for Warren and Melissa Smith's private Atlanta, Illinois, farm strip. Landing on grass is like alighting on a cloud—but you must scout it first. Warren, an FAA aviation safety inspector, shared details.

"It rained the other night, so I drove the strip in my car," he said. "It's in great shape, plus I confirmed the 2,300-foot usable length with a wheel. Ideally, land from the south because there's a 300-foot overrun at the north end—touch down upon clearing the corn. From the north, land past the metal Hoblit Farms building. In case of concerns, of course, divert to nearby Logan County Airport."

We'd hoped to make Illinois nonstop, but headwinds dictated refueling at Logansport, Indiana. Despite bargain prices, I resisted topping the tanks because it's best to operate light on turf. During our final one-hour leg, I reviewed soft-field procedures and runway requirements. Although

