



JEAN BROWN (left) and Molly Palley prepare to take off in the *Flying Carpet* for a tennis match.

GAME PLAN

PILOTS AND TENNIS PLAYERS MUST BE QUICK

Among the pleasures of piloting is delivering people we care about to places they want to go. For me, that includes chauffeuring Jean to distant tennis events; she loves boasting of her “personal pilot.” My latest opportunity arose when Jean’s team qualified for regional competition in Albuquerque.

Play was scheduled for a long weekend, meaning most team members would drive five hours from Flagstaff Thursday night after work, and then hurry home after Sunday’s final match in hopes of a brief pre-workweek rest. Jean, however, had long ago tagged my calendar for this possibility. Her teammates Sally Lynch and Molly Palley asked to join us.

“All four of us are small so weight shouldn’t be a problem, right, Greg?” asked Jean. She knew that warm spring temperatures at Flagstaff’s 7,000-foot elevation would raise density altitude concerns. Yet all of us were indeed well below average adult weight.

“Could your driving teammates take some of your luggage?” I asked after pre-

liminary calculations. “If so, careful fuel planning and an early morning takeoff should do the trick.” Then there was the question of Molly’s comfort. Sally had once taken flying lessons, but Molly was new to light airplanes. “Believe me, Molly can take anything,” said Jean, laughing.

Next up was to collect everyone’s actual weights so I could precisely set fuel and luggage limits. Sally got the first call. After demanding secrecy she demurely shared her weight, and then surprised me with a question.

“Honestly, Greg, can you assure me the airplane can safely carry four of us, fuel, and gear on a trip of that distance?” Impressed, I described my preliminary calculations. Then she told me a story.

“As a student pilot, I once asked my flight instructor if we could take my friend along in the Cessna 172. He said ‘sure,’ but when we arrived at the airport on a hot summer day, I noticed the fuel tanks were full. Now my friend was a fairly big guy, and so was my instructor, so the first thing I asked was whether the airplane could handle all three of us with full fuel. ‘Sure it will,’ said the instructor, but I insisted that he compute a written weight and balance. Well, guess what—the calculations showed that with all of us on board, we’d be overweight. So we didn’t go.”

I promised to share my final written weight and balance before takeoff. “Once you’re satisfied we’re within limits, Sally, please join me flying up front. Clearly you’re already a terrific pilot!”

While Jean as tennis captain researched the competition and assigned her players to courts, I formulated my own game plan. Albuquerque is two hours from Flagstaff by *Flying Carpet*. With four hours of fuel onboard to allow for headwinds, weather deviations, and reserve, the airplane could accommodate everyone plus 100 pounds of luggage and still be 160 pounds under maximum weight. That’s entirely reasonable for a cool early morning departure from Flagstaff’s long runway in a Cessna 182.

“I’ve arranged for our suitcases to go by car, and told the girls they could carry 25 pounds each,” said Jean that evening. “Oh, and Molly asked to take off at 9:30 instead of 7; she has an important meeting that morning.”

“Unfortunately, she may need to drive,” I replied. “By then it’ll be 20 degrees warmer, reducing our takeoff performance, plus it’ll be turbulent.” For-

TRAVEL LOG: DOUBLE EAGLE II (AEG)

Runways: 4/22: 7,398 by 100 feet; 17/35: 5,993 by 100 feet

Tower: 0600-2200
Location: Seven miles northwest of Albuquerque

Elevation: 5,837 feet

tunately, Molly postponed her meeting. But in the meantime Sally got sick and had to cancel.

After Jean and I thoroughly briefed Molly to ensure her comfort, we launched Thursday morning with bags and tennis gear. Immediately our passenger was enthralled. "Meteor Crater is far more dramatic from the air than the ground," Molly exclaimed. "And as often as we've driven this route, I've never seen the Painted Desert's colors before!"

After a smooth start, the ride got bumpy over New Mexico's Zuni Mountains, and downright rough approaching Albuquerque's Double Eagle Airport. I landed on one wheel in a howling crosswind. But happily, Molly was all smiles. Flying home, I landed in Gallup to lunch with my buddy Adriel. So far, my mission had gone well.

But then, gusty 40-knot winds were forecast for Sunday afternoon. Clearly, the earlier we got home, the better. I canceled my hoped-for Sunday brunch with another friend in Santa Fe, and phoned Jean.

"Our last match starts at 9:30, Greg. After showering at the hotel we could meet you at the airport by 12:30," she explained.

"Skip the shower," I half-joked, "we'll just open the vents." So the girls checked out early, and drove straight to the airport following their match. En route, Molly asked Jean if she was worried about the windy flight home. "No, we won't take any chances," said Jean.

"Fine," said Molly, "If you're not nervous, neither am I." No wonder they make great tennis partners! We were aloft by 11:45, and despite some turbulence, we beat the worst of the winds to Flagstaff.

Elated at getting home by early afternoon, Molly commented on the seemingly routine nature of our flights. One objective of good piloting is to convey normalcy while continually adjusting variables for safety and comfort. Even with a game plan, pilots and tennis players must be quick on their feet.

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