

SONERAI

NEWSLETTER

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SEASON'S GREETINGS

This is not your Sonerai Newsletter. It may look a bit like it, sound a bit like it and even smell a bit like it, but it is only your Notice of Renewal for next year. If you see a "PD 90" after your name on the mailing label, that means that I have you as paid up for the coming year. Otherwise, I don't, and if you would like to see the next year's issues it will cost you the \$12.00 renewal fee. (\$15.00 US overseas)

Should you decide to join the 1990 Sonerai Newsletter it would be a great time to send in any helpful info you have discovered in the past year. As you probably know by now, it doesn't have to be an earth shaking item that completely redefines Bernoulli's Theorem; more like how to fasten on tinnerman nuts. Anything that seems to be a Safety of Flight item would be greatly appreciated. I am still always amazed how open you guys are about your problems, even if you might be embarrassed telling things to other people, you understand the importance of getting problems out on the table to be looked at. Thanks a lot for that.

As I did last year, I've included one of my flight experiences for the \$.25 postage. This might be a good time to clean gutters rather than continue.

The trip to Colorado

The reasons we build our Sonerai's vary from builder to builder. Even though John Monnett never claimed any great cross-country capability for the Sonerai, it was always in my mind to use it for more than just local flying. I knew that the fuel quantity probably made coast to coast flights out of reach but there seemed no reason not to indulge in a little State to State ranging. In the Summer of 1981 I had yet to start a family, although married, and felt that after 2 years of Sonerai time, a trip to visit old friends out West was in order. The airplane was still no-radio (let alone no transponder) and had the stock 10 gallons of fuel, but where there is a will ...,etc.

The Sonerai logbook showed about 170 hrs. total time with the normal debugging period hopefully well out of the way. My destination was planned as Meadowlake Airport to the east of Colorado Springs, which is on the higher plains area meaning that it was at 7000 ft. MSL to the city's 6000 ft. elevation. Of course most of the airports in that part of the country have relatively long runways, in this case about 5000 ft. and since I would be solo there wasn't a whole lot of apprehension but those wings are rather short and they always say you need aspect ratio for climb, right? Time spent planning the trip showed that the distance would work out to about 900 stat. miles. Of course all the fuel stops where carefully worked out in advance. It is obvious I had never taken a long trip in a small airplane and thought that you could actually Plan this sort of thing. Now I know that you shouldn't even plan which State you are going to stop for fuel in because you are at the complete mercy of the weather.

The big day arrived with very questionable weather according to Flight Service (yes, I even believed them in those days) something about low ceilings and poor visibility -- so I went to the airport (Lake in the Hills) at 10 AM instead of 6 AM and got the sage advice of Gene Coppock of Tri-motor Stinson fame. He said "Go North!" which seemed at the time sort of a strange way to go to Colorado, but my pack was loaded in the front seat and north I went -- and then sort of curved around as far as Rockford, Ill. and became slightly bewildered for the first time. This pilotage was a little trickier than it seemed. The Mississippi River was not in it's normal place this day but I compensated and finally found Clinton, IA just as the weather cooperated and began to lift.

Things began to improve on the next leg to Pella, IA with the navigation working better, eventually following Interstate 80 around Iowa City. Since the trip had started late there was no way to make Colorado in one day but even in this

early stage of my career the push to get as far as possible in a day began to make itself felt. The stop in Pella was relatively quick, but a new type of weather presented itself in the form of a thunderstorm directly in the way. Well, the gentleman in the line office must have flown a Stinson Trimotor in another lifetime for his advice echoed Coppock's and north it was again around the top of Des Moines. I looped down to re-engage Interstate 80 after picking up a little rain off the edge of the storm, and gradually resumed my track. It was now approaching 6:00 PM and while there was plenty of daylight left this was at a time when fuel was not a guaranteed item at all airports, so a decision was made to stop at Red Oak Airport, IA so that I could fly till dark rather than try to get fuel at 7:00 in the evening (remember, 10 gals). A landing was made at Red Oak but not a soul was to be found, so the hot old engine was started and I left with about 3 1/2 gallons remaining for Plattsmouth Muni just about 40 miles down the road.

Surely we couldn't have two airports in a row without fuel, but the guys at Plattsmouth didn't look too hopeful when I pulled to a stop at the pumps. They were clean out of fuel but the beer was in good supply apparently. They did the usual gawking at the "funny little airplane", noted that "yes, there did seem to be enough daylight" for an hour's flight and "well, maybe we could get around my little problem". As with most of the strips in that part of the world, there were plenty of cropdusters sitting around, so a bucket (literally) was found and a piece of hose and we proceeded to remove 5 gallons of 100/130 from one of the workhorses. \$5.00 US covered the 5 gallons and with a little uneasiness concerning the cleanliness of our operation, I set off for the next stop Hastings, Neb.

I set down just at sundown knowing that at this late hour I probably couldn't expect an FOB to be open and I was right. However, a KingAir landed right behind me and who should step out but the president of the local EAA chapter. A quick discussion revealed that

hanger space was available and one of the local members had space available for my tired old body at his home. Ever since this trip it's been my good luck to always run into EAA types when the need arose. I've even carried an EAA Chapter List on a few trips in order to contact our kind of people should the need arise again. On this trip I was not allowed to pay for dinner, stayed at an EAAers home and was returned to the airport at 6:00 AM. If you haven't run into this kind of hospitality, may I suggest a little cross-country time in your Sonerai.

The next morning's departure from Hastings, Neb. was nice and early. Navigation was quite easy since the thunderstorms of the previous day had cleared the air, and my first stop would be at Burlington, CO with an elevation of 4200 feet. The runway was 3600 feet long which seemed perfectly adequate with the catch that it pointed straight into downtown with all its grain elevators, but the air was cool and the takeoff and climb were fine. At this early stage of my Sonerai's career I did not have the mixture control on the Posa carburetor and was slightly worried about running too rich at the higher elevations, but there didn't seem to be any particular change in its operation so far. I had not heard yet that the Posa tended to be altitude compensating since it operated on a different principle than a float type carb. This was explained to me by Ben Ellison at Sun N Fun a few years later. I was watching the engine temps carefully on the next leg however.

The terrain from Burlington on to Meadowlake Airport by Colorado Springs is one continuous climb from 4000 ft. to 7000 ft. over relatively level ground. On this leg I just let the Sonerai keep climbing at around 100 ft. per minute and eventually ended up at about 9500 MSL over the destination. This was the highest I had had the Sonerai so far and the temperature was approaching its normal summer high of 80 F. or so. The runway's 5000 ft. looked plenty long enough but I knew the true airspeed on final would be much closer to 90 MPH than the usual 80 MPH that would be indicated on the airspeed. I had practiced short

field takeoffs and landings at home in Illinois using 65 MPH over the fence. This required a liberal amount of power and keep the sink rate within limits and resulted in an aircraft carrier style landing. You could definitely tell when you were down -- no float at all.

So after entering pattern altitude at 7500 ft MSL (9500 den.alt.) I flew final at about 70 MPH indicated and made the landing without any trouble. Once on the ground however the engine was running very rough and needed a lot of throttle to keep from quitting. While the operation in the air seemed normal enough, the idle was very rich. My friends showed up on schedule and we went about our business (fishing and helping them move down near Walsenburg, CO). Since they were in the process of a move it was decided to bring the airplane down to Johnson Airport in that area.

The takeoff from Meadowlake would be during the middle of the day with most of my luggage on board and a full tank of fuel since I was totally unfamiliar with the area and thought it foolish to start off short handed. Once again the idle was very "loppy" and smokey so I was a bit puckerred when it came time to put the "coals" to it (literally). As usual, the engine came through when the chips were down and after a few seconds to clear itself, took hold and we made what seemed like a normal takeoff albeit with a longer ground run and pretty shallow climb out. I never took time to notice the actual climb rate but it was probably helped on occasion by the strong thermals. Once clear of the Colorado Springs Airport traffic area I headed West to see what flying near the Front Range of mountains was like. In the future it would probably be a good idea to approach them at a shallow angle rather than straight ahead because it got Very bumpy as the west wind swirled on the back side of the hills and the 180 degree turn took longer than a 90 degree turn would have. I was quite tempted to reach up and shut the engine off to do a little ridge soaring but controlled myself and did as sharp a U turn as the turbulence and G forces would allow. It was Bumpy!

Johnson Airport by Walsenburg had 4600 feet of runway and was at 6050 MSL but didn't present any kind of problem with approaches. My friends were actually moving into the Sangre De Cristo Mountains up near the town of Gardner, so we

spent a day or two getting them moved into their ranch house. I volunteered to dig the new latrine for the outhouse (find the dummy in this picture) so they would have something to remember me by. It must have been about 100 degrees and we were at an altitude of about 7500 feet so a flatlander like me started pooping out pretty quick. I had my pistol on since we had seen a lot of rats and was leaning on my shovel taking a break when all of a sudden two A-4 Skyhawks "wooshed" overhead about 100 to 200 feet up from behind me. It had only been a few years since I had been overseas and managed a neat drop into the hole. They continued on down the valley following the contour of the land til out of sight. My friends came running over to see what the hell was going on and help me out of the hole. It turns out that the ranch was in a "hot" military operating area and it's red roof made a perfect turn point for their low altitude runs. I assured my friends that they would probably be back since I had only got off two shots and wasn't sure if the second plane was badly damaged. They reminded me not to drop into the "fox-hole" in the future.

The trip home was relatively uneventful after a false start out Johnson Airport caused by low ceilings in the lower terrain by La Junta. The first part of the flight took me over some real desolate areas like Rattlesnake Buttes but at least the elevations were heading on down. Since the weather prevented an early start as on the first day of the vacation, I had to make a stop overnight somewhere. This worked out to be at Pella, IA just as night was setting in and the airport was officially closed down. I debated walking into town for a Motel and then opted to spend the night in my sleeping bag. I mean, isn't this what Charles Lindbergh did when barnstorming? Unfortunately, I may have missed one chapter in his book when I awoke at midnight from under the wing with little red ants crawling all over me. They didn't say you had to check for anthills before speading out the old sleeping bag. The rest of the night was spent out on the asphalt, lucky it didn't rain.

Since this trip I have added a Nav/Com and the 6 gallon Aux. tank which makes a big difference on how you plan your stops but it still seems that I end up at some airport that happens to be in the right place at the right time.

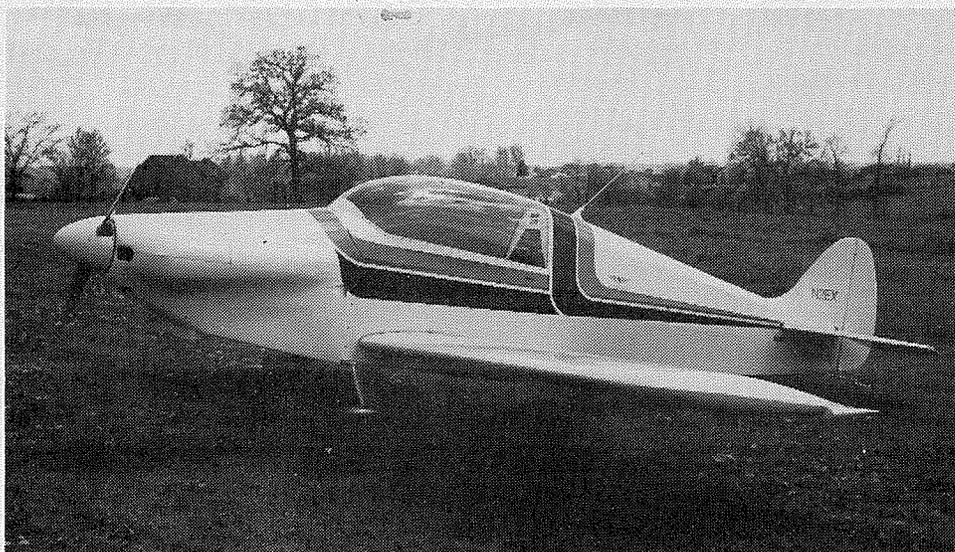
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John Giordano's beautiful Sonerai IIL