

The Quintessential Seabee Trip from East Coast to West Coast

Editor's Note: The following e-mails (and story) were received by New Member Galen Tustison who flew (ferried) his newly acquired Seabee from New York to California. He bought it from Bob Stein (or his family) and is working to get it flying the way a Seabee should.

The beginning of this article are all the e-mails I received whether addressed to me or just "mass" mailings that I happened to get a hold of during Galen's escapade. The article is a moment-by-moment diary of his trip. Pictures are interspersed when appropriate and further down the article is the "**TRANSCON IN THE BEE**" section which was e-mailed to literally thousands of people to who knows where, and is written by Galen after his arrival in California.

This has to be one of the funniest stories on the planet! I'm sure you will enjoy it as much as I did and Galen's humor in the sometimes un-humorous situations is a realistic view from the Seabee seat. For those of us that have owned Seabees, we can definitely relate to Galen's predicaments but it took him to put it to paper in a realistic and hilarious way. Thanks Galen (G)! You are hereby immortalized!

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5 March 2006

Pete,

I have weighed the SeaBee to determine the empty A/C weight and CG. After crunching the numbers, I find C/G WAY out of allowed window.

UNFORTUNATELY, I didn't know how much fuel the plane had in it at the time of weighing. I therefore wrote a spreadsheet program where the empty weight and CG are calculated based on the amount of fuel specified as a variable parameter.

Thus when on my next visit to the dugly uckling and I fill it with fuel, I can determine the amount of fuel when I weighed it previously based on the tank capacity and the amount of fuel I will add to fill the tank.

I will have my notebook computer with me so that I can plug in the exact fuel quantity and determine the empty weight and CG.

Meanwhile, I have written a family of spread sheet programs for the assumed fuel conditions (at the time of weighing) of zero (an unlikely event because the engine ran), half full (most realistic scenario), and full (highly unlikely 'cuz the seller is cheap).

For each of these scenarios, I then calculated CG for minimum passengers and load (probably the way I will fly it back to Cal) with zero fuel, half fuel, and full fuel (to make sure that during the entire flight the CG stays in the required range) and maximum passengers and load, again for zero, half, and full fuel.

Interestingly, the worst case CG situation is with min pax and min fuel, exactly MY configuration with no passengers allowed by the ferry permit and a bad fuel leak..

Turns out, ballast is needed. In spite of what the previous owner's son says. I simply have to believe my numbers. He adamantly assured me that no ballast was needed. I said, "If that's the case, why don't you join me on that first flight?"

"Oh," he said, "I'm going to be busy that day." Any day, every day.

So what do I do for ballast? The easiest answer is water ... in 1 gallon antifreeze plastic containers, strategically placed under the forward floorboards all the way up in the nose. There is an access hole in the copilot's floor which provides easy access. There is a lot of room. Water is cheap and easy to get (especially for a seaplane) and easy to dispose of, and the plastic containers will tolerate frozen water (I hope). (Turns out I bought 18 gallons of auto anti-freeze. It doesn't freeze and I can always use it later.)

The thought of flying back to NY commercially with 135 lbs of lead or trying to procure it there turns me off.

Ultimately, I can see a permanent tank located in the forward compartment and a transfer pump allowing easy loading or unloading of water ballast. But that is in the future. (Has anyone in the SeaBee world done that???)

Come crunch time, I shall load the plane per my calculations, make several high speed taxi runs down the runway testing elevator control effectiveness, and then attempt a takeoff if all has gone well. Then climb like a home-sick angel to at least 1000 ft AGL, just once around the pattern, land and check everything for leaks, etc. I will probably try an hour or so of touch and goes before leaving the pattern and heading for CA.

I'm not real eager to be a test pilot but I'm not sure I have a choice. That first take-off has to be made eventually. Lou has suggested that I take the plane apart and trailer it to CA. (Where is his sense of adventure?) And if my calculations are correct, I'd rather make that first take-off from a 6,000 ft paved runway in very cold air than from the 2200 foot dirt strip here at the ranch in warm weather.

I will review my calculations with my IA friend here in CA (that's an A&P mechanic with an inspection authorization) who is familiar with SeaBees. When I told him earlier that I calculated that the plane needed about 135 lbs of ballast, he commented "That's about right." So I think I'm in the ballpark.

Anyhow, should be an adventure. The Franklin engine has a bit of a reputation for unreliability and ... especially ... for throwing oil. In fact one magazine reviewer suggested that "While it may be more efficient simply to pour oil on the vertical fin and elevator, it should pass through the engine once."

GFT

Encls. Endless weight and balance calculations ad nauseu

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March 30, 2006:

To Steve:

Frank was very helpful. Good 20 minute conversation. I will continue to pursue the (elevator trim) cable problem with him. I was back in NY Sullivan county airport for two weeks working on plane (it hasn't flown in 6 years following an accident). Fixed a lot of stuff. Made several adjustments, obtained ferry permit from FISDO. Will forward trip report. No one on airport has SeaBee experience. So must teach myself to fly it. Question about C/G and ballast. I will fwd trip report.

Galen Tustison

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March 31, 2006:

To: smestler@pbtcomm.net, cjjf@silverstar.com

Rodger, dodger. N60CB, a 1947 SeaBee, is mine. I spent 2 weeks back there freezing to death fixing things. The final day ... crunch day ..., with me all suited up ... long johns, extra wool sweater, thermal gloves, no heater in a/c, lots of air leaks, doors bungee-corded closed 'cuz latches don't work too well, 18 gallons of auto antifreeze installed as ballast to get C/G into "window", I taxi over to gas pit for fuel. Put in 50 gal (at \$4.25 per) and notice my feet are wet. Leak rate 1 gal per hour. Back to heated hangar, de-fuel plane, pull "rubber" bladder (a/c, not mine) and return to CA for repair.

Local mechanic on field who knew previous owner and condition of airplane won't sign off an annual inspection. "There's not enough money", he said. So the flight will be conducted under a special FAA ferry permit.

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The NEW Current Operating Plan (About April 2, 2006)

Bladder now repaired (two holes, no gaskets where there should have been... no wonder it leaked), return to NY 5 Apr, install bladder, put fuel back into a/c, teach myself how to fly the mutha (no one at field has SeaBee experience, a/c has not flown since accident 6 years ago). But then I won't be the first self-taught pilot. After all, who taught Orville how to fly??? He learned by careful experimentation. Me and Orville. What a thought!!!

So plan is more high speed taxi runs down runway (6000 feet long x 200 feet wide) to get feel of a/c and see if C/G is truly in the window. I've already done this several times but with each attempt resulting in brake failure, severe steering problems, inadequate takeoff power, or some other calamity. The last attempt I glanced over to the left and saw the crash truck standing by.

(I was later told not to have a second thought about the crash truck. "Charlie doesn't have a lot to do anyway." So I'm the local excitement.)

All this in +10 to +20 deg. F wx. Uck!!!

Route of flight is going to be straight south to warmer wx, missing P-40 (a.k.a. Camp David) and the Washington ADIZ (that's Air Defense Identification Zone, wherein if you stray, you are intercepted by F-16's and become famous immediately.) A bit of a navigational challenge 'cuz no radios in plane. If I fly low enough I can follow an interstate and read the road signs.

Straight down toward Atlanta, then turn right missing the mountains, thence to KADS (Dallas TX) and on to CA76. Co-pilot seat is empty. Interested?

G.

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April 12, 2006

From: combysatrm@aol.com
To: combysatrm@aol.com
Date: Wed, 12 Apr 2006 21:01:03 -0400

Still alive after two SeaBee takeoffs and landings. Departure out of Sullivan County AP, NY memorable for incredibly poor crosswind technique. Successfully missed all runway lights and windsock, but close call with hangar roof. (Turns out backward facing engine needs LEFT rudder on takeoff, not right.)

Crash trucks at TTN (Trenton Mercer County AP, New Jersey) unnecessary. Wheels were down, but no green light. Since fuel leak/bladder problem solved earlier, minimal risk of fire. A/C following on approach to 24 did complain about oil mist clouding windshields due to leaking SeaBee ahead,

Tomorrow, Thur 13th (if Fri 13th probably would stay on ground), depart for Frederick MD 120 miles to check for fuel/oil leaks and have lunch with friend.

Thence further southward, turn right just N of ATL toward big D.

God willing (and enough AeroShell 100) ...

GFT

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April 16, 2006:

Subject: SeaBee Transcontinental Flight, Leg 14, phase 1

Easter Sun (2006) , Easley South Carolina ... still alive ... but airplane (at Statesvill NC) is not well ... severe excessive oil consumption, now throwing 3-4 qts per hour. Virtually zero rate of climb out of Burlington NC (BUY). WOW!!!

Highly unlikely able to achieve min 5000 ft altitude necessary to cross continental divide near Benson AZ. If just taxi on I-10 westbound, will need clearance from AZ Highway Patrol.

Conference w/ mechanic at SVH Mon. Possible application to AZ Highway Dept to follow. Possible top O/H for plane (and pilot) to follow.

More later.

G.

P.S. Unfortunately on 14 Apr clipped corner of Washington ADIZ (P-40. See above), intercepted by BIG black POLICE helicopter. F-16's too fast to escort SeaBee. Mucho arial chatter on 121.5. Phone calls from Secret Service and FAA waited for me upon arrival at Orange County a/p, VA.

More later...

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20 Apr 2006

I'm back at the ranch (CA76) after massive oil leak (5 qts in 1 flight hour) caught my attention in NC. A/C on final approach behind me reported IFR condx due to oil mist.

Prop went to shop for O/H today in NC. Mech / IA at SVH (Statesville, NC) delightful guy. I told him I wouldn't charge him anything extra for him being allowed to work on my SeaBee. And this guy has been around. He actually has an O/H manual for Eiseman magnetos. But I question his experience with them ... no dirty thumb prints on the manual pages. But I can fix that. (I will secretly make a copy when I have a chance.)

SeaBee generates a lot of interest wherever I land. Secret Service, county Sheriff, FAA, plus a few others. At FDK (AOPA HDQ but Phil wasn't there), a guy walks up and tells me he worked on that airplane. Oh, I sez, u have CB experience??? No, I worked on THAT airplane in 1988 at a seaplane base in NY. Next thing I know, he gives me names of 4 or 5 CB pilots / mechs with knowledge / parts / etc. Perhaps there is hope.

Prop O/H nominal one week, if you believe prop shop. I have planned for 2 weeks 'cuz I'm a non-believer. Best laid plans of mice and men, etc.

I will contact friend at Hartzell Prop, Kevin Ryan, yes that's right, Kevin, you !!! ... and I still don't have FISDO approval for the Swift prop change after just 6 months) for O/H manual for HC-D2-V20-3 with AV129 hub and blade model L8433H S/N B68206 and 99554, clamp S/N E2079 and G(?)2212 so I can provide extra quality control / quality assurance for prop shop. I was VERY concerned that all 10-32 fillister head screws around prop shaft packing gland were just too damned short and, although safety-wired, not tight with mucho oil leaking.

Gunna dig in my heels on this one, even if it means my changing out hardware after prop shop is done. (Damn it all, why isn't Bernie here to help? What is the area code for heaven???????????)

I will try to find Franklin engine rocker box cover gaskets / push rod tube seals in meantime. I will change out ALL upon return to NC. I have made outline of one good rocker box gasket and will cut out new ones out of cork (a good cocktail hour activity) as necessary. Push rod tube gaskets more problematical, but ACE Hardware has everything, or so I am told. (If anybody has any suggestions here, I would appreciate.).

Now that wx is warming up, engine baffeling is more important. (In 20 deg F NY wx, who cared.) So will take baffle tape and drill / pop rivets / back-up aluminum / sheet metal cutters along for next leg of trans-con flight. Also, outside VHF comm radio antenna works worse than rubber duckie on hand-held transceiver. Perhaps time for new outside antenna??? What is Chief Aircraft phone nbr? Suzanne, I need you.

Garmin GTX320 xpndr and enc altimeter seems to work well. BIG black police helio (see earlier report) was able to find me easily when I apparently busted Washington ADIZ.

Seriously, though ...

I have now survived 8 (let's say that again, EIGHT ... one more time ... EIGHT) take-offs and landings. in CB. That first T/O was tuff ... long talk with my omnipotent copilot before that one. Crash trucks appeared on only the first two. T/O and landings get better each time (fewer bounces, less frightened pilot, crash trucks no longer expecting excitement), probably because now the ASI works and slow learning, semi-retarded (retired ?) pilot is beginning to realize where horizon should be on windshield.

Poor guy never got check out in CB, never flown one before, all potential instructors in FL where it was warm. He justified his lack of formal instruction by repeatedly asking himself ... "Why taught Orville how to fly???" (Turns out proper horizon position is just between to bug splashes on windshield. I haven't let anyone wash the windshield since I discovered this important ... essential ? ... fact.)

Upon my forthcoming return to NC and N60CB, I plan is to install prop, solve remaining oil leaks, clean up engine baffeling, attempt to climb to at least 5000 feet (over suitably low terrain and avoid all those damned high towers) so that AZ highway dept permit for taxiing on I-10 near Benson not necessary. If all that comes together and oil consumption (leakage) is within realm that only moderately wealthy Arab oil sheik can afford, then "Off we go, into the wild blue yonder ..."

GFT

P.S. To all of you who have taken out term life insurance policies on me, I'd renew them for another month or so. I intend to do same with FAA ferry (fairy ???) permit. But I'll bet you lose !!! I hope.

G.

P.P.S. Darcy, are you ready for your flight test? I was in Detroit yesterday at DTW waiting for you. To all others ... copilot seat still not occupied by mere mortal. Anyone interested?

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7 May 2006

Yup, I guess I'm a glutton for punishment for buying the SeaBee. But I've always wanted to land in the water ... in the same aeroplane ... twice.

Prop status: Disassembled by H and H Prop Service, Burlington, NC. Blades OK, clamps WAY under minimum thickness, bearings tired, hub ancient.) Unable to find used airworthy parts. So ... expect an order for new clamps, bearings and hub from them first thing Monday morning. I'd appreciate it if you could beat up Jim Brown and get me a special good-guy price. (This transcontinental ferry flight is turning into a expensive affair.)

Pilot status: I have reservations on US Air San Diego to Greensboro NC (via Philly ... that's right Jan, Philly ... but just to change planes) on Wed 10 May. (US Air was just \$500 cheaper than American so no overnight at DFW, even with the voucher ... sorry 'bout that, Fred.)

Arrive prop shop Thur to watch assembly of beloved prop. Renew ferry permit with local FISDO. Transport prop to aeroplane Fri which is still parked at Statesville, NC Regional airport, I hope. Install prop, chase remaining oil leaks, install new VHF Comm antenna. Depart Sat or Sun for Easley SC. If successful, proceed cautiously to Athens GA and points westward..

If you need help beating up Big Jim, let me know. I know some folks in the Mexican Mafia.

"Preciate your help."

Galen F. Tustison

P.S. For those of you who have been following the oil leak saga ... It dawned on me that the engine sits at a very different angle to the horizontal whether the plane is sitting on the ground or

flying. Prob 'bout a 15 degree angle difference. (Interesting that the engine oil dipstick is calibrated on one side for "LAND" and on the other side for "WATER" to account for this angular difference.)

No oil leaks during ground test run. But mucho leak in flight. Maybe jack up rear of plane for future ground runs? Hmmmmm!!!

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May 8, 2006

At the suggestion of one the IRSOC members, I contacted REAL Gaskets in TN who purportedly makes gaskets for Franklins. "Oh, yes we make gaskets ... but not for the 215 HP engine".

In the meantime however, when viewing a page on their web site, I saw a pix of a rocker box gasket with a pressure gauge on the rocker box allegedly showing that their gaskets hold up under pressure.

WOW!!! what an idea! Does that mean that I can pressurize the crankcase of the engine and look (listen) for oil leaks? Sure would make sense if it works. This means I can leak check without running the engine.

So that's my next step. I purchased a natural-gas-pipe-test-pressure-gauge-and-pressurize-the-pipe-and-see-if-the-pressure-gauge-drops-so-there-must-be-a-leak type instrument at Home Depot for the princely sum of \$9.67.

I will buy pipe adapters on site in NC when I get there. Perhaps I will take along a bicycle hand pump so I do not OVER pressurize the crankcase and blow any seals.

I'll keep you posted as the leaks are plugged.

And now I must try to renew the special ferry permit.

GFT

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May 10, 2006

Just got off the phone with a very nice lady in the Portland (ME) FSDO to discuss my busting the Washington ADIZ. Min suspension that FSDO inspectors are allowed to recommend is 30 days, but FAA legal staff can reduce it from there. (I'm not holding my breath.)

Next step: my preparation of a Statement. Then FAA legal staff review, possible informal conference, FAA decision, appeal to administrative law judge, appeal to NTSB, appeal to George, followed by escape to foreign country. (With the Bee, I can hide out on a remote lake in Canada.)

G.

May 10, 2006

Re: Seabee Ballast weights

Great idea! A friend also suggested SCUBA diving weights. Both good permanent solutions.

My temp solution of auto antifreeze has, so far, worked out well, is reusable, and I got a discount on the quantity buy because as I reminded the store manager, it was at the end of the winter antifreeze season and I was helping him reduce his inventory.

I leave for NC and the BEE in three hours.

G.

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20 May 2006

On the ground at Pikens County A/P SC. Minimum oil leak ... will trace tomorrow. Severe TST watch right now. Prop still leaks oil. Kevin, more O-rings??? Another prop shop???

Sorry I didn't make it to AL SeaBee fly-in.

I can not say enough good things about the folks at Statesville airport/ Iredell Air Care / especially and emphatically Jones Barnes. Truly a gentleman, generous and hospitable in the best, finest Southern tradition.

But Jones, I'm gunna get even with Jack.

GFT

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Sent: **Mon, 29 May 2006 17:43:59 -0400**

Subject: Hola

Hola TTF,

Where are you????? Where is the Seabee?????

Jan

Greetings from Dallas. Spent 6 days in Cylacauga AL chasing oil leaks. (Bet you can't even find it on the map. Hint: 41 miles SE Birmingham on US 280.) Long, but successful chase. Flt from AL to Big D was 8 hours and used less than 1 quart of oil total. Found fundamental design problem in fuel pump, of all things. \$100 million class action lawsuit (against GM and AC Fuel Pump) to follow.

Plan to leave KADS (Addison TX) crqck of dawn tomorrow Wed. Overnight El Paso or Demming NM, on to so Cal Thur.

Also found partial explanation of mediocre take-off performance. T/O perf now better, but no rocket ship. Still working on that. Perhaps a rocket or two might help.

Probably no need to extend term life insurance policies beyond 15 June.

Co-pilot seat still unoccupied.

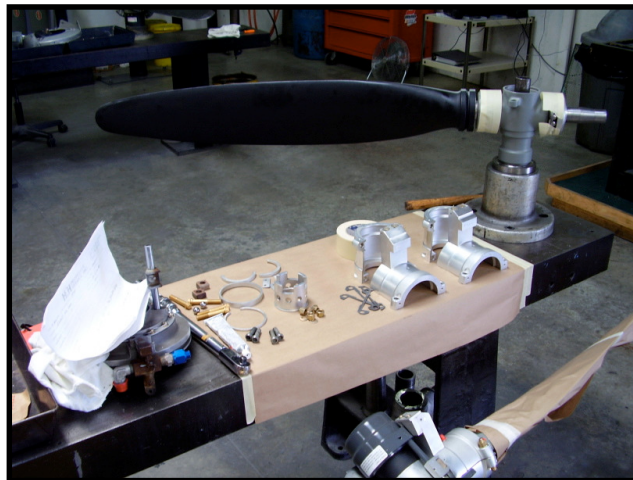
G.

Chris, please fwd this to Nathan 'cuz, once again, I have lost his address.

CB PROPELLER

*There once was a Sea Bee propeller,
That leaked out oil all over this feller.
A little drip here, another drip there,
here just wasn't any oil left to spare.
"Whoa", he said, as he grounded his Bee,
"A nearby prop shop, there must be!"
For a small bag of gold, so I am told,
The new prop is better than the old.
"Nary a drip", the FSDO man said,
And renewed the ferry permit which then read
"Good for flight wherever your destination may be,
Good for flight in your now-drip-free Sea Bee."*

Composed at an airport somewhere in North Carolina during moments of despondency and despair while, hopefully, awaiting the parts to rebuild his notoriously leaky prop. (Actually I'm beginning to worry about this guy ...mental soundness, and all that)



My Prop, My Prop - My Kingdom for a Prop

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LATEST LATEST LATEST LATEST LATEST LATEST LATEST

TRANSCON IN THE BEE

Phase 5, Flights 1 to 21

22 May - Mon

Leave Athens GA westbound. CAVU conditions. Later I was told of reports from a downtown coffee shop of strange airplane noises overhead. (What? A SeaBee strange?) Straight west N of Atlanta, then diagonally SW to intercept I-20. I land in Anniston AL. Lots of oil. The leak has returned. Pull the engine cowling. As usual nothing obvious. A local mechanic tells me there is a good Franklin mechanic in Sylacauga AL.

I make a phone call. "I'm told that you're the best Franklin mechanic east of the Mississippi," I said. "No," he replied, "I'm just the last one." His name was Ray Lett and he turned out to be incredible. A 30 minute flight (only 2 quarts) to Sylacauga AL (KSCD).



(On the Ground in Sylacauga, AL)

I arrived late in the afternoon and met Ray. We discussed the problem(s) but exactly at 5 PM all aircraft work ended. Out came the electric guitar and a cold draft. The hangar was filled with some good ole down-home country and gospel music.



"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"

23 May - Tue

I explained to Ray that ground runs of the engine never showed oil leaks, but after a one hour flight, the tail dripped oil. "Let's wash engine, you fly it around the pattern once, and then we'll look for leaks." A missing washer on crankcase thru bolt. Install missing washer. Test run again. My home-spun rocker box gaskets are working like a charm. No oil leak under the bolt with the new washer. But no obvious gusher type leak either.



(Rocker Box Cover Gasket Making 101)



(More of same)

Where is all the oil coming from? I am convinced it is fuel pumps. Ray thinks I'm nuts.

I kluge an air/oil separator bottle out of an old oil bottle and some PVC fittings from the nearby Home Depot and hook it up to the oil filler/breather tube. Ray has a better separator. We install his and test run the engine. The separator captures some oil but there is still some dripping/leaking from lower rear of engine. At this point I am thinking of buying stock in a paper towel company because I go through at least a half of a roll at each stop.

Another hangar jam session. Delightful ... Ray has a lot of musician friends who just seem to drop by. Very pleasant music, very pleasant surroundings, wonderful people.

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24 May - Wed

I worked too long in the sun today tightening things. 90 to 95 F, high humidity and in direct sunlight. I'm just not used to it and I collapsed in the motel under a cold shower. Burnt out, wiped out. Mentally and physically drained. Should I abandon the plane again as I have done twice before and fly back to LA for a wedding next weekend? The airlines are getting rich and I'm not making much progress.

Have I accomplished anything? Maybe. But I've run out of ideas. There's really nothing more that I can think of to do to solve these problems.

Tomorrow is time to depart for points westward.

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25 May - Thur.

Up early 4:30 AM. Out to the airport, load the Bee, a little bit of ground fog, completed the take-off checklist, mag drops about 70 to 80 rpm each side, and takeoff for Tusgaloosa (KTGL). Once around the pattern but no climb. Downwind I'm just 200 feet AGL. Nothing new to that ... this Bee has never really climbed. (I decided earlier that the climb performance is so bad that they didn't even bother to install a rate-of-climb indicator in the instrument panel. Weight saving and all that!)

So I head northwest toward Tusgaloosa. About 5 miles out of Sylacauga, just as I am over a very thickly forested area with no roads below, the engine starts running rough. A gentle 180 to the left and I am headed back to Sylacauga.

Once established on the return leg, I decided to play test pilot and exercise my mags. (See Mom, I'm getting brave!) Smooth running on BOTH, smooth with about a 50 rpm drop on LEFT, smooth and a 200 rpm rise on RIGHT. 200 rpm rise? Yup. Now that was a totally new experience for me. C'mon guys. I learned to fly in the days of mag drops. What's going on here?

On the ground at KSCD. Ray pops the cowl, we test run the engine, he can't find any spark on the left mag. Nada! Can't be, I said. The engine ran! No spark, he repeated, with no further comments. (Ray is not a loquacious person. He doesn't waste any time talking. But you quickly learn to listen to each word.).

And, of course, the oil leak continued. (Reminds me of the last sentence in Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" ... and it rained and rained and rained and leaked and leaked and leaked.)

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26 May - Friday

I struggled further with the oil leak. I am convinced that it is the fuel pumps that are leaking oil. We (Ray) pulled the starboard (gotta be careful on the Bee 'cuz the engine is mounted backward ... so right is left and left is right ... but starboard is always starboard ... right Glenn?) pump because most of oil was on stbd side, which requires lifting the engine to get the pump off. (Maximum inconvenience?)

But we could not make the pump leak oil on the bench. But of course the portion of the pump exposed to oil was not under pressure. I carefully examined the pump body. There are two gaskets, one on each end of the housing.

Bob (Wasick) in Buffalo told me that the screws holding the two end plates to the body come loose. I had already tightened them each at least one turn, some more than that. Why should anything on an airplane come loose? Why aren't they drilled and safety wired?

But what compresses the gaskets? Apparently nothing was intentionally engineered to cause the gaskets to compress. Compression of the two gaskets depends on the fuel pump body flange not to bend, which of course it does. The AC engine-driven fuel pump is simply a bad design. In fact the design is nothing less than incompetent.

For how many years have aircraft owners been struggling with this problem, how many maintenance hours have been wasted, and how many dollars wasted for thrown, not honestly burned, oil have been wasted because of this bad, incompetent design?

Multiple nationwide calls to people who might have fuel pumps that don't leak. Bob in Buffalo offers to lend me a pump if that will get me home. He knew Bob Stein, the previous owner. I was touched by the offer.

At 2 AM I wake up in a sweat. I have dreamed about my leaking fuel pumps. I have dreamed that I can make spacers that will simulate the "spacers" that AC has designed into their new pumps. I have trouble getting back to sleep. I am wondering when the local ACE hardware store opens.

So that morning off I go to ACE to buy aluminum spacers to insert between the two bending flanges of the pump main body. The spacers need to be 5/8 inch long. ACE has 3/4 inch spacers, so I buy 15 of them and grind them down to fit. Also I installed flat washers and split tooth lock washers on each bolt so that maybe they might not come loose between AL and CA.

(When I get to California I will remove each bolt, one at a time, and drill the head. Then a liberal dose of safety wire.)

Nothing should ever fall off of an airplane. Nothing! Ever! Nothing! Period! Bob in Buffalo, drill the heads of your bolts and safety wire them! SeaBee owners of the world ... Unite!

Ray, by now like everyone else who knows me, thinks I'm crazy. But then I see a recent, new style pump lying on his workbench. And guess what? The new design now has, built into the body casting, the same "spacers" I have just installed on my stbd pump to prevent the flanges from bending. Vindication?

But no explanation for the mag problem. Ray suggested that my old coil may have had a heat problem. (I love these inexplicable, unprovable, unmeasurable mysteries. Helps renew my faith in poly-theism. You know ... the magneto god, the coil god, the wiring god, the mag switch god, etc.) He rebuilds the mag using parts that he just had lying around. "Don't expect too much," he said, "we're fixing junk with junk." Was it a bad coil? Don't know, but now we have spark.

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27 May 2006 - Saturday

On the ground in Sylacauga. My fuel pump modification is installed on the starboard fuel pump and seems to do the trick re oil leak. I test ran engine at high power with the tail tied down. (Otherwise the Bee goes over on its nose.) A mag check at 2300 showed less than 60 drop either side and smooth operation. No more mag rises!

Also Ray insisted that I needed twelve new spark plugs. I simply couldn't understand that. There may not have been much left of the ground electrodes but you could still see the stubs under a magnifying glass.

He wandered off into a distant, dimly lighted corner of the hangar and returned with twelve brand new plugs. They were date stamped 1946 and were in their original wrapper. Ray bought them in a sealed one gallon paint can type container. "Had 'em for years. Not a lot of call for them," he said. You've got to love this guy.

"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"

My theory of the engine's strange behavior is that stbd mag was advanced way ahead of its proper timing and way ahead of the port mag and fired the air-gas charge in the cylinders far too early, but not so early to cause destructive pre-detonation (I hope). But early enough to not provide much power. (But I ask for help on this one. Any thoughts, anyone in the Franklin / SeaBee community?)

During my tribulations at Sylacauga various folks dropped by to offer their thoughts, opinions, and support. Among them were members of the airport's glider club. Taking pity on me and seeing how under-nourished I was (actually I needed to lose the weight), I was invited to their Memorial Day barbecue that evening. (You hear that John Nichols? Free food!!! How come no free BBQ in NY?) An excellent meal, good fellowship, very memorable bluegrass music with Ray and his friends.

"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"

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28 May - Sunday

Time to leave. Once again out to the airport early. Reasonable take off, better than previous climb but certainly no rocket ship. Tusgaloosa here we come. Upon arrival, I check the oil. Yup, there's some on the cowl, but the tail is not dripping. Dip stick shows same level as at Sylacauga. Wow! Check it twice 'cuz I don't believe it.

Put some gas in this crate and off to Greenwood MS (KGWO). Ditto with the dip stick there. Fill it up with gas and let's go! I cross the Mississippi River (always a major milestone since I was a kid crossing it for the first time in 1947 ... but especially so on this trip) and decide that there just might be some hope of getting the Bee to California. Being a natural cynic, I check the sectional several times to make sure its the Mississippi.

(Ray, when I told him where I was headed, had said emphatically that a SeaBee will never make it that far. I told him "Please don't say that so close to the Bee that it might hear." I said that I had only been telling it that we were flying a 100 mile flight ... one after another after another.)

Next stop: El Dorado AR. Check the dip stick and add one quart. Things are looking up. But is it hot! HOT! Catch 40 winks inside the FBO's darkened, air-conditioned pilot lounge. Wake up, check the wx, and back out to the Bee. Right about then a commuter airliner arrives and I am told by airport security that I can't be near my plane. Stuff it, was my response. I got here first, long before the commuter. Tell them to get out of my way.

The negotiated settlement: I get to go to my Bee, airport security stands between me and the commuter plane, they get to take-off first. (The TSA guy realized that if they were gone first, there was no way I could catch them to effect a mid-air or other clamity.)

So off to big D. West out of EDO ... a lot of forest. Few (hell, no) roads. Not many emergency landing fields. C'mon Franklin, keep on chuggin". And it did. Soon I crossed the Texas line and the forest started to disappear. I was into cattle country with more (tree-less) pastures.

And finally, I fold up the Dallas sectional and get out the Dallas terminal chart. Now that's progress. A call to Addison tower about 15 out, their response "What is a SeaBee?" Verily I said unto them "Patience, and ye shall soon behold!" They responded with "Please use standard phraseology as described in the AIM page xxx, paragraph xxx. (Sorry I didn't write down the page and paragraph numbers.). I crank in the squawk code they gave me, hit the ident button, radar contact, fly heading 260 and Addison is 10 miles. Hey this may work!

On the ground at Addison. I sort of fell out of the plane and could hardly stand up. But 8 hours of flying and only one quart of oil (for the engine, not for me). I was exhausted, dehydrated, needed to get well oiled, but euphorious! (My first cell call was to my broker to short Shell Oil because I expected a severe drop in their aviation oil sales.)

The eight hours of flying was proof positive that the Bee needs to be flown all the time ... and with two hands. It seemed that every time I took one hand off the control wheel the plane would automatically launch itself into some unusual attitude. My arms and shoulders ached.

(Does anyone have an STC for power steering for the Bee?)

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29 May – Mon (No entries)

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30 May - Tue

(E-mail received)

Kevin,

Thanks for the info and drawing. After a week on the ground in AL, I am convinced, and my fix seems to bear me out, that while the prop might leak a bit of oil, along with the servo valve, the VAST MAJORITY OF OIL IS COMING FROM THE INCOMPETENTLY DESIGNED AC FUEL PUMPS. There is simply nothing positively compressing the gaskets in the pump housing. Any compression achieved depends on the body casting flange to not bend under stress, a risky, inadequate, uncertain assumption. And guess what ... the flange bends. Everyone in AL thought I was crazy, but I installed my hand-machined spacers (supports) and oil leak has dropped from 5 quarts per flight hour to 1 quatr per eight hours.

Subsequent to installing my spacers I just happened to see a newer AC fuel pump lying on a workbench. Guess what? The more recent body casting incorporated my "spacers" in the body casting. My, my, my!

Of course AC didn't bother to tell anyone about the design change. I'll fix that upon return to CA.

I think Franklin engines and Hartzell propellers have taken a lot of heat and abuse over the years for oil leaks that were not their fault.

Personally ... yes I was on my last legs. Nothing I did seemed to improve the situation. I cured a lot of little leaks, but the gusher remained. The mental and physical stress ... and add some good old summertime heat ... working outside w/o any shade for 8 hours one day. Yup, the end of the line.

Then the fuel pump spacer solution. People looked at me as though I was crazy when I said ... My fuel pump is leaking oil.

I have been very grateful for my rest stop here in big D. Arrived 7 pm Sun eve, slept fitfully, two naps on Mon, just 12 hours sleep last night, one nap so far today. Finally getting fluid to pass through my body, regained a bit of appetite, rested and ready for bear (no not that Baer in Denver ... need even more energy for that!).

So off I go into the wild blue yonder tomorrow very early AM. Westbound, hopefully over the next big challenge ... the continental divide. Would like to get to El Paso or Demming, NM (good motel w/ excellent Mex restaurant near the a/p) tomorrow, on to so CA Thur, again very early takeoff.

Thanks again for your patience and help, young man. I think I now owe you TWO big steak dinners.

Galen Tustison

Couple days on the ground in Dallas. I was exhausted. But things were looking up. Good news: Oil consumption under control. Bad news: Visa shut off my credit card. (Ah! the complexities of modern life!) A phone call to them. I struggle with their computer controlled voice response system.. The only dialect of mine that the computer seemed to recognize was Laotian ... and southern Laotian at that.) It seems that the always vigilant computers at Visa had detected an unusual spending pattern which had recently developed, they said. Lot of av gas purchases at strange little airports. Yup, I said, that's me. Card turned back on. I can eat again! And the Bee can guzzle again!

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31 May - Wed

Out of KADS early ... and my friend who drove me to the airport doesn't normally get up early. Boy, that was a struggle! He mumbled something on the way to the airport about cruel and unusual punishment. Clearly he didn't fully appreciate my explanation of the beauty of the early morning, the madrugada, as they say south of the border. Can I somehow infect him with the "enjoy the beautiful early morning" gene?

Mild weather, an overcast at 10,000 feet keeping it cool, a tail wind. Yup, that's right, westbound and a tail wind. I was all the way up to 100 kts ground speed at one point. What was the name of Elton's song? Rocket Man? But flight service warned me "Look out for ground fog." What? the wx is beautiful! What are you talking about?

Sure enough, about 50 miles east of Abilene an undercast began to develop. And it was low. Was ABI becoming IFR? My ferry permit said "daytime, VFR only". Besides, the only gyro instrument in the plane, the T&B, didn't work. And the wet compass was totally out-to-lunch. I tried listening to Abilene ATIS but no luck. I tried calling Abilene tower, flight service, anyone. No luck. Can't hear anybody. Nobody can hear me!

Right about then the beautiful Cisco TX airport appeared. Have you ever been to Cisco? Nice airstrip, very friendly folks. So I landed with the idea of making a cell call to someone who might shed some light on the developing severe ground fog situation.

Turns out the fog situation was very local. KABI was severe clear. (Now that I've had some time to analyze the situation, I think the low ground fog was generated by the Texas Highway Patrol in an effort to hide their radar speed trap on the interstate. You talk about a vast right wing conspiracy!) So off I go. But wait! My through instrument scan on climb-out reveals that the engine oil pressure gauge says ZERO. Zip, nada, zilch, zero. Hmmmmmm.

Well, the engine is still running so there must still be some oil pressure. But back I go to Cisco. Exciting, memorable 5 minute flight. Pop the cowl. Sure enough, plenty of oil on the stick, but a broken wire at the oil pressure sensor. Simple repair. Off again I go. This time oil pressure. And not everyone can say that they have landed twice at Cisco TX.

Land at KABI for fuel and a one hour nap. (I guess my age is showing ... I am beginning to enjoy mid-day naps.) Out of KABI westbound? Then contact Dyess AFB approach. What altitude are you climbing to? This is it kid, 1500 ft AGL. If that is the case, turn right immediately to avoid the C-130 in the pattern here at Dyess at your altitude at your twelve o'clock position about a mile. In fact stay well north of the interstate. I love those easy-to-understand clearances, especially since there was only one interstate. "And report clear of my airspace." Yes sir! Being the gracious, hospitable controller that he was, he didn't add "And don't come back."

I simply ran out of energy just east of Sweetwater, TX. That old SeaBee power steering problem. Landed, guzzled three diet cokes, checked the gas and oil. Hibernated in an air-conditioned FBO

for an hour, swapped some half-true flying tales, saw the remains of a Bamboo Bomber, then back into the wild blue yonder. Wx was perfect, 100 mile viz, no clouds, just hot. HOT!

I called it a day at Midland-Odessa. Again I just sorta fell out of the airplane. I'd been to KMAF before. Good FBO, reasonably priced hotel on the airport (always ask for the air crew rate), good mini-restaurant, excellent peach cobbler. And the pizza wasn't bad either. But the air-conditioning was great. Good nite's sleep.

=====

1 June - Thur (Its June already. This "adventure" started in March.)

Crack-of-dawn take-off. High country ahead. The ground is at about two thousand here. Continental divide is about 4200. Need a few feet above that. Can the Bee climb that high? Why didn't I lighten ship in Dallas and send some junk home by UPS?

West to Pecos TX. Beautiful runway, friendly folks, reasonably priced gas, and cold diet cokes. But its getting warm. Takeoff run a bit long. Then, demonstrating my flawless navigational skills, I leave town following the wrong damned road. No, I don't want to go to San Antone, quick turn to the northwest until I intercept the 4 lane, not the 2 lane, highway. Hope no-one saw me. It might detract from my superior pilot image. But that's the problem flying more that a couple of hundred feet above the ground. Its hard to read the road signs.



(Van Horn TX elev. 3955 temp 115)

I made a serious mistake landing at Van Horn TX. 3957 ft AMSL, by now mid-morning. I'm hungry and I wanted to check the oil. Land on the 7000 ft runway. Call the gas guy on the phone in the small, air-conditioned terminal building, wait for him to come, buy 20 gallons of gas, talk him into driving me into town to Wendy's for a quick (breakfast) hamburger, back to the airport, quick nap in air-conditioned terminal building on a conveniently located sofa, back to the Bee, takeoff, head west.

But it immediately becomes apparent in the 2 PM heat (110 deg F) and at that elevation (3957+ ft) that the Bee is not going to climb enough to get through the pass west of town. I need about 4200 feet, perhaps a few feet less if there are no big trucks on the interstate. The Bee simply isn't going to make it. A 180 back to the airport, back to the (wonderfully) air-conditioned sofa ... and 40 more winks.

Same results at 5:30 PM take-off. What did I expect? The temp had dropped all the way down to a mere 105 degrees F. I took off and headed once again toward the pass. Once again the result

was obvious. Once again back to KVHN with its air-conditioned terminal and sofa and, once again, 20 more winks.

Its now 7:30 PM. Am I stuck in Van Horn for the rest of my life? One more try. But this time the Bee climbs! (Do I hear cheers in the background? Believe me, there were cheers in the Bee!) But just barely did it climb. I got through the pass looking up at the cellular towers on each side. (Fortunately no big trucks!) Fly directly over the westbound lanes ... they never build radio towers directly over the highway ... I hope.

But at least I'm through the pass. A bit of high ground between me and El Paso. But the temperature is cooling. Perhaps there is hope.

The rest of the flight to El Paso is, as they say, history. Except I over-flew West Texas airport (T27), the little general aviation airport southeast of town 'cuz they had not turned the rotating beacon and runway lights on yet. I realized my slight navigational error just before crashing into El Paso class B airspace, I think (I hope).

Oh, and land long, West Texas said, we're setting up the barricades on the runway because tonight we're having drag racing. Helps pay the rent, I was told. So I land just beyond the pick-up truck with the flashing lights. After all, we gotta pay the rent!

West Texas airport has friendly folks, actually absolutely delightful, reasonable gas, a courtesy car, and a nearby Red Lion motel with fantastic latte hot chocolate. Damn! That stuff is addictive! (Does chocolate really stimulate the brain the same way sex does?)



=====

2 June - Friday

Before dawn getup with all the twinkling lights of a clear west Texas night (I could not believe how much the area has grown, I couldn't believe the beauty of the twinkling lights!), crack-of-dawn takeoff. (Pete, trust me, you can learn to love it!)

This is crunch day. Will the Bee make it over the continental divide? Long, long, long takeoff roll out of West Texas. (Editor, please insert about five more "longs" here.) But with full fuel, 85 deg F at 5 AM, 4007 ft AMSL. No climb. What did I expect?

Swing well to the east to avoid El Paso class B. I attempt radio contact with ELP Approach for clearance through, rather than around, ... saves 12 miles, I was told. (They're sure to hear you, I was told.) Radio weak, scratchy, and unreadable, sayeth the Oracle of El Paso.

Get a better receiver, I replied. And learn to respect your local SeaBee, I added, but then I flew around big ELP.

Cross the Rio Grande and I-25 north of ELP, Las Cruces to the right, Mexico to the left, and tethered balloons to 12,000 AMSL in between, follow the Amtrak tracks and pipeline northwestward (do they tether balloons over railroad tracks and pipelines?), nurse the mother up to all of 5200 feet. Pass by Demming NM with its good motel near the airport with its excellent Mexican restaurant. Even with my mouth watering at the memory of the last chicken fajitas meal there, I decide to forgo repeating that pleasure and keep on flying westward. If I had landed at Demming, the same problem as at Van Horn the previous day might have occurred. What do I mean might have? It would have been a certainty.

Westward ho, cross the great divide. Didn't even feel a bump when I crossed it. (One always feels a bump on the highway when crossing a state line.) Cross the AZ line (again no bump), over Wilcox. This is Geronimo and Cochise country. (This is also where my old friend and mentor, Al, ya that's you, installed telephone poles for the Southern Pacific railroad. Upon climbing his recently installed, not well set in the ground, poles, he got seasick! Try flying in a Bee midday, Al!)

The great American southwest. Never less than 100 miles visibility, unless, of course, you are driving through a snow storm when the viz is down to a few feet, as I have done. (Viz was so bad I couldn't really be sure where I was.) But today there is no snow. Having survived the great divide and between instrument scans and map reading, my addled mind relaxes and wanders to all my friends and relatives who have purchased term life insurance policies on me for this trip. Will they lose their bets? What odds am I getting in Vegas?

The familiar towns along I-10 and the VOR's slip below me. I fold up the El Paso sectional and open Phoenix. Progress is measured by folds in the sectionals. Life is beginning to look pretty good. Where is that next Mexican restaurant serving chicken fajitas?

But by the time I get near Benson AZ I am tired. Almost 4 hours of non-stop, no power steering flying. I need fuel and again the lack of power steering is getting to me. So is the thermal turbulence. The desert southwest can be a bit uncomfortable during the middle of a hot summer day at low altitudes. And I am low.

So I land at Benson only to discover it is a mere 110 deg F. Time for a nap in an air-conditioned FBO. Buy some fuel. Wait out the temperature. But it doesn't drop. (Nor does the price of fuel!) It just doesn't drop. I had wanted to continue on to Casa Grande that afternoon because of a familiar motel with another good Mexican restaurant with a delicious chicken fajitas meal. (Yes, I'm addicted to Mexican food. Right Jan?)

But right about then as I am struggling with the launch (lunch?) decision to attempt a probably unsuccessful takeoff into the afternoon heat, the cute little gas pumper gal at the FBO at Benson offers me a courtesy car and the promise of an air-conditioned motel close to the airport. Did someone once say ... Discretion is the better part of valor? This time I chose discretion.

So RON in beautiful downtown 110 deg F Benson AZ.

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3 June - Sat

Another before dawn get-up, another just a little-pink-in-the-eastern-sky-and-just-light-enough-to-find-a-soft-spot-to-land-if-the-engine-quits-on-take-off-type take-off. This time toward the east because the temp is 85 deg, the elevation is 3900+ ft, the runway is downhill that way, there is a big ... let's say that again, BIG ... valley to the east, and the cactus are not very tall. (I just hate it when I get cactus needles in my tires.)

Besides, westward, the runway was up-hill and the ground rises. And it rises faster than the Bee could climb.

Since there was no wind, the decision was easy. (Damn, I'm beginning to make some good decisions in my old age ... especially when there is no wind!)

So off I go ... eastward ... two circles over the valley to gain altitude ... head west ... and follow the railroad tracks. That's usually a pretty good bet 'cuz normal trains can't climb more than a 1% grade ... the wheels spin on the rails. The only real problem comes when you're following the tracks and then they go into a tunnel. But clever pilots are very careful about that. Turns out the Bee can't climb more than a 1% grade either. And its not very good with tunnels either.

So I'm very careful. I had planned to have my Michigan-based, carefully trained copilot, with me to specifically look out for tunnels. Right Darce? But this time, I'm on my own.

So I zoom over the ridge (ok, maybe not zoom ... how about struggle) and there, before me, in the early morning sunrise is beautiful downtown Tucson. Slender shafts of light penetrating the mountain valleys to the east highlighting Tucson. (Really, Pete, sunrises are beautiful! You will learn to love them!)

Avoid the bone yard at Davis-Monthan, skirt KTUC international, stay well east of I-10. Chug on northward. Cut the corner southwest of Casa Grande, but with fond memories of that chicken fajitas dinner, and right about then, fat, dumb, and salivating as I am about that Mexican meal, the engine quits.

Well, maybe it didn't completely quit. But it sure skipped a few beats. And so did my heart. However, dear reader, being the superior pilot that I am, carefully trained for EVERY emergency situation, I quickly scanned all the gauges. Although everything was normal, I quietly cursed Ray, that "last Franklin mechanic", because the Bee might have heard him say that it would never make it to California.

Fortunately for my stopped heart, the engine resumed its monotonous drone, which allowed my heart to resume its also monotonous drone. Why did the engine quit, ever so briefly? Just another GMIL, as I call them ... a great mystery in life.

Meanwhile, the Bee and I have cut the Casa Grande corner. The Bee and I wizz ... yup, no other word to describe the Bee's performance ... wizz ... past Gila Bend and continue on to Yuma. Again we follow the nice, low, shiny railroad tracks around the north of town, rather than fly over that ridiculously high pass that the interstate follows. We zoom across the Colorado River. (Hopefully, I will return to the Colorado in a few months to get my seaplane rating.)

The Colorado River? California! I'm almost in tears. Across the sand dunes of Glamis, on to Imperial CA where I will land and take on only minimum fuel so I (we) might be able to get over the mountains behind San Diego. Imperial, at 54 feet below sea level, is a mere 115 deg F at 10 AM.



(54 ft Below MSL Imperial, CA)

I ask the line boy if he thinks it might snow today. He gives me a strange look. Anyone flying a Bee and asking about snow in June at Imperial already has two strikes against him. (And California has a three strikes law!) I notice he is calling the sheriff on the phone and speaking rapidly. I quickly pay my bill and take-off.

The Bee simply does not climb. Tell me about density altitude. Here I am at 54 feet BELOW sea level and ... the Bee does not climb. On "climb-out" I turn away from the runway heading to avoid some TV antennas on the one story houses a mile or so away from the runway.

A gentle, very gentle, very very gentle (don't tilt that lift vector! we need all of it vertical!) turn to the west, avoid Navy El Centro (they, like their compadres at Dyess, have no sense of humor) and there, in the distance, are those mountains ahead of me. A veritable wall. Wallus granitus!

"C'mon Bee, you've gotten me this far. We can do it."

As I try to coax every foot of altitude out of it, I sincerely hope the Bee didn't hear Ray in AL. At 75 mph, the alleged best-rate-of-climb speed for this crate, the altimeter slowly creeps upward. Someone at Imperial told me I need 4200 feet ... and look out for the windmills, he added. Windmills, I said, what windmills? This isn't Holland. Watch out for the windmills, he repeated.

I got through the first pass following I-8 at about 3200 ft. There was a good wind out of the south so I stayed on the north side of the valleys picking up some "free" lift from the wind.

C'mon Bee, we can make it. And then I saw the windmills. Damn, they were above me. Time for plan B. But before I could execute said plan B, I first needed to figure out what it was.

Perhaps I should lighten ship ... you know, like they do in the movies. Throw out unnecessary stuff. But what to throw out? Everything aboard is valuable ... well maybe not priceless ... but certainly valuable. Gotta think fast, though, 'cuz the ground is coming up fast. And those damned windmills!

Alons (as the French might say)! Is the ridge to the west a little lower? Sure enough .. it is! Now I have a viable plan B! Do you see, dear reader, how following interstate highways can get you

into trouble? It would have taken me through a higher pass studded with airplane-snaring windmills! The new Plan B turned out to be simply following old highway US-80. Lower elevation, broader valley, and no damned windmills!

A bit closer to the Mexican border perhaps, but I can handle that with my flawless navigation. After all, I eventually found the right highway to follow out of Pecos!

I crossed that ridge at 3820 ft. Although the Bee was down to the best-rate-of-climb speed, I didn't have to throw any of my valuable possessions out. (Darce, if you had been aboard, I might have been tempted to ask you to make the ultimate sacrifice. But I would have left the final decision to you. Actually, there would have been minimal risk to you. Your parachute was recently repacked after the last malfunction.)

At 3820 ft I had at least 50 or 60 feet to spare. Why waste gas on climb power if you really don't need to? And beside the wheels were down. Hell, I could have taxied along the highway until I was finally over that ridge.

So now we're across the ridge ... me and the Bee. Fat, dumb, and happy. If we hadn't gotten over the ridge, the accident report, of course, would re-phrase that to read "overweight, under-trained, and complacent." So be it. I'm over the ridge. Westward into the San Diego smog, now just to find Ramona, and get this crate on the ground. I'm home free! Almost.

I keep chugging along westward, or so I thought. What's my heading? Lot of smog. No discernible landmarks. Where's Mt. Miguel? Where's Mt. Soledad? Oh ya, the compass is 60 degrees off so I gotta be careful. Mexican border and all that. Was the compass correction to the left or the right? Oh, there's a town below on the left side. Actually, it's more like a village. Hmmmmm. Interesting town, er village. Only the main street is paved. Hmmmmmmm. Gee, do we have any towns ... er villages ... like that in the United States anymore? Hmmmmmmm. Is that a long east-west fence I see down there just this side of the village? Hmmmmmmm.

Well, dear reader, the Hmmmmmmm's have it. Time for plan C which didn't require a lot of thought. A quick turn to the north. Fortunately no black helicopters this time. And besides, I was prepared to blame any alleged border intrusion on that other airplane that I "saw" just to my left, you know, that stealth Lear jet that just bugged out.

The rest, as they say, is history. No black helicopter, I find Ramona, Ramona tower hadn't even heard of me (much to my relief), the Feds weren't waiting to talk to me. Ho, hum ... just another routine flight. I even had to tell Ramona tower that this was the termination of a transcontinental flight in a Bee.

What is a SeaBee? Is it high wing or low wing? they asked. Hell, they'd never even seen a Bee before! I hate these young controllers. No respect (to coin a phrase.) I simply get no respect!

I landed, taxied to parking (just the way John Wayne did in "The High and The Mighty" except all my engines were still running and the prop(s) were all still connected to the engine(s)) and got out of the plane. Actually I think I fell out. I was exhausted, I could hardly stand up, my arms and shoulders were about to fall off (remember ... no power steering).

A fellow pilot there at the airport immediately recognized my frail condition and ran to me with an ice cold bottle of lemon flavored water which he intravenously injected. Or did I just drink it? Hard to remember. My recovery, though, was near instantaneous ... just one more quality that superior pilots occasionally exhibit.

The next day, after a good night's sleep and an extensive shoulder massage, I flew the Bee the final 8 miles to the ranch (CA76) where, of course since I was worried about landing on the short runway, I over exuberantly (irrational exuberance?) applied the brakes upon landing and nosed it

over. The Bee, tough as she is, took it in stride and slid along for a few feet on the dirt runway, I eased up on the brakes a bit, and everything returned to normal.

I've flown transcon in light planes probably 25 to 30 times now. I'll never forget the first trip (I missed Guadalupe Peak, Wayne. You probably don't even remember the conversation.) ... and I'll never forget the flight in the Bee. 41 hours, 29 quarts of oil, 31 take-offs and landings ... and some of the most wonderful people I have ever met.

So where do we fly next?

(E-mail)
June 4, 2006

The SeaBee Is Home

After 31 flights totaling 41 flying hours, SeaBee N60CB has landed at the Flying T Ranch (CA76) just east of Ramona, CA. The aircraft departed Sullivan County airport NY (KMSV) on 11 April and arrived at its CA destination on 4 June.

The 60 year old Republic SeaBee Model RC-3 consumed just over 600 gallons of aviation fuel and 21 quarts of oil. Major oil leaks were solved in Statesville NC, where the prop was overhauled, and Sylacauga AL. From Sylacauga AL westward to its California destination, the Franklin engine used only three of the 21 quarts.

The aircraft achieved a maximum altitude of 5200 ft AMSL crossing the continental divide in southern New Mexico and a minimum altitude of 54 feet below sea level at Imperial CA where it landed for fuel.

Enroute the air speed indicator, the wet magnetic compass, the oil pressure gauge, the oil temperature gauge, and the hydraulic system for raising and lowering the landing gear and flaps failed.

The pilot would again like to thank all those folks along the route who were so helpful and hospitable. Without your help and support it would not have happened.

The flight was conducted in memory of Jerome E. "Jerry" Hoke, perhaps the world's best flight instructor.

To honor this old bird and its successful flight, a ceremony will be held at the ranch at 10 AM, July 4th to christen her "Queen of The Oceans". President Bush, Administrator Blakely, and Governor Schwarzenegger have been invited. All recipients of this announcement are also invited.

GFT

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"Peacefully parked in pasture prepared for party"
(Chairs L-R reserved for Pres. Bush, Gov. Arnold, Admin. Marion, others)



Pooped participant "posits" self in "Others" chair.



Co-pilot applicant wields champagne bottle.



Student pilot Tustison steps up to the plate, er ... Bee, for a swing.



First flying lesson

GFT

P.S. Once the Bee got to CA76, I called Ray, since he doesn't have e-mail, to let him know that the Bee made it all the way. He said, "Well I guess you've made a liar out of me."

"No," I said, "not a liar. You just didn't realize how tough that Bee really is."

"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"

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E-mails to the International Republic Seabee Owners Club below:

6/28/206

Subject: SeaBee To The Rescue???

Because of the recent heavy rains and extensive flooding in the mid-Atlantic states, SeaBee owner Galen Tustison has made his venerable flying boat available to Federal relief agencies.

Although Tustison is not yet seaplane rated, he has had recent experience flying through that area. Besides he says that enroute to the flooding his Michigan-based co-pilot will read to him the chapter in "How To Fly An Aeroplane" entitled "How to Take-off and Land in the Water Twice (or more) in the same Aeroplane."

Tustison recently received a clean bill of health from the California Psychiatric Board after completing a cross country from New York to California in the 60 year old aeroplane. "All those attempts by my relatives to have me committed were ruled invalid," he said. "Now I can get back to serious flying ... and disaster relief."

=====

6/29/2006 10:50 PM

Subject: None

Yess'em I be there on 4th for christening..

By road:

Ranch address is 26702 Highway 78, 8 miles east of Ramona. Follow highway 78 from Escondido eastward thru Ramona TOWARD Santa Ysabel and Julian. (If sign says "Welcome to Arizona" you have gone too far.) Just after emergency call box 78-441 (actually about another 1/2 mile) is Flying T Ranch on left (cows knocked sign down 4 or 5 years ago ... haven't gotten around to fixin' it yet ... been too busy playing airplanes and boats).

Driveway entrance is on left (north side of highway) on top of a small hill. BE CAREFUL! On-coming traffic comes on FAST!

Gate combo is 2601 (Irina's birthday 26 Jan)

By plane:

Airport designator CA-76 (it's in most databases ... if not write your Congressman), 8 mi e KRMN, LA sectional, 9 DME 228 deg radial JLI VOR (114.0 MHz), lat 33 deg 4 min N, long 116 deg 45 min W

(N.B. Controllers at LA ARTCC and SoCal Approach have been alerted to possible air traffic congestion vicinity JLI VOR during that period. File your flight plan early!)

Phone here is 760 - 789 - 2200 (except I never answer it).

Gate will be open from 9:30 AM. Bloody Marys served from that time until exhaustion of supplies or guests.

SeaBee christening "Queen of the Oceans" ceremony at 10 AM sharp. (Ya hear that Shindler, sharp ... no more dilly-dallying!) Champagne to follow (immediately).

All guests expected to be sloshed by 10:15 AM.

Bring aviator goggles, scarves, parachutes, how to fly books, SeaBee repair manuals and spare parts, as appropriate.

C U then.

G.

Dick: Pls fwd to Stu. also need full name (his, not yours) and e-mail address for possibly incredibly lucrative consulting job re airline and airport ops study.

Fred: Ditto for Wayne W. also need current address and e-mail for same possibly incredibly lucrative consulting job re airline and airport ops study.

Ray: You guessed it ... ditto but re Joe, the retired Delta pilot with the Stearman. You remember, the one whose alternator didn't work.

EPILOG

In 1922 my uncle, Frank Bloise, a young Puerto Rican gentleman of French-Spanish extraction, graduated from University of Michigan medical school. He promptly married my aunt Vera and they headed west to his internship at a San Francisco hospital.

In those days you didn't just hop on Southwest Airlines, and arrive refreshed and relaxed after surviving airport security and the in-flight peanut meal. The best you could hope for was a week-long train ride. No attacking Indians, probably no Jesse James types either by that time in our history. But a week of clickity-clack and swaying back and forth a la Arlo Guthrie.

But Frank owned a car that he wanted to take to California. The original Federal road system was just being implemented... you know, the one that gave us US-1 on the east coast and US-101 here on the west coast and Route 66 in between. (Woodrow Wilson had signed the Federal Aid Road (they weren't even called highways yet!) Act on 11 July 1916 and that started the construction crews a-building.)

So off they went. Took 'em a month. The only paved roads were, occasionally, in the centers of small towns along the way. No motels ... they hadn't been invented yet. And no McDonalds either. One of today's i-Pod carrying kids might ask ... How did they survive?

Well, they did survive. What they did have enroute, in massive, character-building quantities, was mud and flat tires. Mud everywhere, my aunt later told me, everywhere, she said again, which surely meant everywhere. The ground, saturated by the spring rains, had not yet dried out. And at least two flat tires a day, sometimes more. That's 60 flats. A lot of OJT for tire changing.

Every time I have crossed the US, whether by car, commercial airliner, or light plane, I have marveled at their spirit of adventure and their tenacity and persistence. They got there, Frank did his internship, became an excellent surgeon, and served honorably in the US army behind enemy lines in the Philippines in WW II. He was also the designated turkey carver at all of our family gatherings at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Today a plane makes that transcontinental trip in about 4 or 5 hours. Unless of course the plane is a Republic SeaBee. Took me just 52 days. Progress!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Galen Tustison - California-based nut case who always (at least since his teen years) wanted to own a SeaBee. After paying off the mortgage on his house and getting rid of his three kids, had a few extra pennies. "The Epiphany came one day while waiting at a traffic light here in California", he says. "That's when I saw the bumper sticker on the car in front of me that said "It's never too late to have a happy childhood."

He found a Bee on Long Island in Aug 05 but it got sold before he got there. The next contender was in upstate New York. Tustison flew back on Southwest to inspect ... and to fall in love. This Bee hadn't flown for six years since it flipped over in the water upon landing with the wheels down. Repaired by the previous owner's beer drinking buddies, the local mechanic wouldn't sign off an annual inspection. "Not enough money to cover the liability," he said. "After all, I knew the previous owner (now deceased) and I know the plane."

So Tustison, an A&P of ill repute and marginal ability, rolled up his sleeves, as much as he dared in 20 deg weather, and started inspecting and repairing. That went on for a month and a half and required two more transcon trips on Southwest. Special FAA ferry permit in hand, he taught himself how to fly the plane (no one with any SeaBee experience on the field or nearby ... they were all in FL where it was warm.) by taxiing up and down the runway faster and faster until finally, on one run, it became airborne. Scared the hell out of him! but assuming a nonchalance pilot stance, he was heard to ask "Isn't that the way Orville did it?"

Thus gaining "flight" (or was it fright?) experience, the 5,000 hour, slow-learning student pilot took off from Sullivan county airport NY on 11 April and arrived at the ranch outside of San Diego in June (early June, but still June).

Would he ever undertake such a perilous, harrowing, traumatic, failure-filled trip like that again?

"Where are we flying to and when do we leave," he asked?

Jan - My tolerant, long suffering cousin in PA who provided me with a sofa to sleep on, a hot shower, some good home cooking, and multiple car trips up the road that runs along side the Delaware river to Sullivan county airport in NY. (Tustison, always observant as a good pilot should be, immediately recognized the utility of the recently harvested cornfields on each side of the highway. Excellent emergency landing strips, he noted on his High Altitude Enroute Jeppessen charts.)

The poor kid would dutifully drive him up there and would return home waiting for the "Come get me" phone call that would signal the arrival of some major repair or maintenance problem.

She lives close to a good chicken fajitas restaurant and a Hampton Inn with a free hot breakfast. (That's a long story. Tell you later!)

(Some good, however, did come out of it all. Tustison was able to practice his plumbing and electrical repair skills at her house.)

And incredibly, she wants to fly in the Bee. (Long suppressed death wish?) The FAA ferry permit said essential crew only, so I told her to practice her map reading and radio operating skills. But unfortunately her work schedule and the Bee's flight schedule remained incompatible.

Darcy - Ah, my Michigan-based, potential co-pilot affiliated with my cousin Fred. Delightful lady, good sense of humor, but the poor gal is scared to death of flying. And even after I sent her a copy of AJP Taylor's "How To Fly An Aeroplane" and a complete set of anti-anxiety pills. (Being the suspicious sort, she says that she tried the pills on the dog, which never fully recovered. That's trust for you.)

Fred and I intend to conspire to take Darcy flying. We're still working out the details of the drugging and kidnapping. Poor Darcy!

Jones and Rachel Barnes - Absolutely delightful folks who run Iredell Air Care in Statesville NC. Very helpful, couldn't do enough for me. Refused to charge me anything. Probably just took pity on this poorly clad, oil-bespattered, haggard, under-nourished Bee owner. (Boy-o-boy, if I convince the IRS the same way! Wow!) If you ever visit them, look out for Jack ... and his sense of humor.

Ray Lett - Ace Franklin mechanic in AL. Incredibly helpful and hospitable. To my dying day I won't forget the hangar jam sessions. Enjoy the beer, Ray. If the air temp were 15 to 20 degrees cooler there, I would consider moving.

I grew up in the South many years ago and knew the southern way of life and its hospitality then. After living in CA for forty years where everything moves at 80 miles per hour, I had forgotten what southern life was like. Thanks, Jones and Rachael, and Ray, and friends for re-acquainting me.

Pete - Charming guy, excellent engineer, internationally famous ham radio operator and DX-peditioner, former co-worker, just all around good guy. Oh, I forgot to mention ... a Collins radio equipment collector, too. Willing to put up with me and my nonsense for a few days occasionally. My mid-continent support system in big D.

One serious character flaw, however. Does not like to get up early. Pete, trust me on this one. Sunrise is the most beautiful time of the day.

Jerome E. "Jerry" Hoke - This guy tried to teach me to fly in 1969 at Torrance airport (KTOA). My God, how hard he tried! Sorry, everyone else, but I still consider him the world's best flight instructor. He knew, gently but firmly, how to demonstrate the errors (and there were many) of my flying ways and how to coax better and better performance out of me. Got me through private, commercial, multi-engine, and instrument.

Jerry died several years ago from burns as the result of an engine stoppage on final going into KTOA. Still don't have the NTSB conclusions, but I have a lot of trouble believing that he ran out of fuel.

Clear skies and smooth air, Jerry, and thanks for opening up the world of flying to me.

P.P.S - There were a lot of other important and influential people in my aviation life. Today, perhaps, they would be called mentors. War stories? Wild tales? Good advice? Yup!

To name a few ...

Rodney "The" Payne - ex P-51, ex C-54, pilot who asked me, after I had bought my first airplane, "How many engines does it have?" "One", I timidly replied to this pilot 20 years older and a zillion hours senior. His reply, "I only fly in airplanes that, when I tell the crew chief to feather number eleven, he asks "Which wing, sir?"

Rod also claimed nervousness flying over water. "Hell," he once told me, "I get nervous flying over wide rivers!" Rod is now flying in airspace where he doesn't have to worry about the FAA or passing medicals anymore.

Wayne Wetzel - A former Navy STUF COD and Douglas AD pilot and instrument instructor who saw a lot of Vietnam at low altitude, in between flights for United as, first, a DC-6 flight engineer moving up to -8's and eventually retiring as a senior 747 captain, taught me basic instruments, at least enough so that my inevitable crash would not be too embarrassing to my next-of-kin. His instruction saved my life on several occasions.

On my first really, really long cross country 36 years ago (Torrance CA to Ft. Lauderdale, FL in a Cherokee 140) when everyone ... everyone ... thought they would never see me again (wife, kids, neighbors, mortgage holder, life insurance company), which rattled me so badly (I wasn't a superior, fearless pilot at that point) that I walked up to his house one night to ask his opinion of my plans.

After spreading the sectionals out on the living room floor and after careful review, he said, "You should have a good flight. Be careful of the weather, and don't bump into Guadelupe Peak."

I had one hell of a flight, only got lost a few times, got stuck up on top twice, found Guadelupe Peak, and I didn't bump into it ... not on that trip or any one since. (Bet you don't even remember that conversation, do you Wayne? I sure do.)

I'm sorry that our lives have gone in different directions ... sometimes that we can't always control that. But thanks for saving my posterior.

Rudy Mjorud - retired Air Force pilot, former company pilot, who worked at The Huge Air Crate Factory (a.k.a. Hughes Aircraft Co.) where I was also employed (but my boss claimed, never worked), in El Segundo CA. Just before that really, really long cross country (see above), I asked Rudy "How do I know where I can stop to buy gas?" Rudy reached into a desk drawer and retrieved a well-worn, scotch-taped together Jeppesen low altitude flight planning chart that showed every airport that gave Answer? "You stop where they give Green Stamps!"

In one swell foop, I learned about corporate pilots AND where to stop for gas. Thanks, Rudy, with your crazy ties!

Joe Angeletti - one of my bosses at the Huge Aircrate Factory (see above) who had studied aeronautical engineering in college, transitioned to electrical, but gave me his introductory aeronautical engineering textbook, albeit a bit worn and burned at the edges.

I have read, reread, and re-re-read that well worn book. Still don't understand Reynolds Numbers and supersonic flow but I do understand coefficient of lift and drag and a bit of the sub-sonic topics. I think that owning a Bee, I probably don't need to worry about super-sonic airflow. Hell, terminal velocity is only 180 mph (on a standard day, which never occurs).

Lou Greenbaum - a boss who, knowing that it was against company (ref Huge Aircrate above, a company founded by a pioneer of aviation) policy to fly a private airplane on company trips, would dutifully read me the company policy and admonish me not to violate it, and then would ask how the flight went.

Not enough good words to described all that this guy taught me. Just not enough. I can't even begin to try.

Ok, let's dry our eyes. Let's see now, who else?

Oh yes, my loving wives ... who fortunately don't know, have absolutely no clue, what airplanes and flying really cost. And don't anyone tell them!