

CHAPTER 55 EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 2011



Meetings are the 2nd Saturday of each Month

EAA Chapter 55 Hangar - Mason Jewett Airport – 643 Aviation Drive, Mason, MI 48854

Pres: Ken Vandenbelt 589-5051 Vice Pres: Bill Purosky 214-2729 Treas: Al Spalding 676-3370

Secr: Vickie Vandenbelt 589-5051 Editor: Warren Miller 214-2656 (all Area Code 517) www.EAA55.org



Climb and Maintain Flight Level 55

We had to absent ourselves from the September meeting since we were at the National Stearman Fly-In in Galesburg, IL. We had a wonderful time !! I understand that the MDOT seminar was very good and I wish we could have done both.

The family of Ernie Lutz extends a big THANK YOU to the members who came out to assist with moving planes, hangar cleaning, table set up, parking and tear down for Ernie's birthday party. And, what a day it was!! Ernie (and the rest of us) were thrilled with the T-6 fly-over and the visit of the B-25 from Yankee Air Museum. Congratulations to Ernie on his 90th birthday and best wishes for many more !!

Our Christmas Party will be held at Eldorado Golf Course on **Sunday**, December 11th at 4:00pm. The board will be deciding on costs at this meeting and we hope to provide final details at Saturday's meeting. We anticipate that it will be in line with what we have paid in the past.

Officer elections will be at the November meeting and we are still looking for more nominations.

And, it's that time of year when the board will be considering nominations for our chapter "Member of the Year" award. If you know of a member whose labors and contributions to the chapter stand out, please let any board member know who you would like them to consider.

Our program for October will be presented by Todd Trainor, Director of the Aeronca Aircraft History Museum and he will present "The History of Aeronca Aircraft".

Our program for November will be presented by one of our newer members, Gary Bauer, who will discuss Estate Planning. He will talk about general considerations when planning for your affairs

while still alive by way of a guardianship/conservatorship and powers of attorney. This includes various means of transferring property at the time of death and how probate/non-probate transfers are determined.

He hopes to provide you with an understanding of how the family dynamics really are determinative of how complicated and expensive the process may turn out to be - and what can you do to help you avoid some of those problems. Gary has been assisting clients for over 20 years and has seen numerous scenarios. Many issues can be prevented with a few simple techniques and there are some problems that are not avoidable unless you die with nothing at all.

As a precaution, Gary advised that he will not be able to give specific legal advice. Questions should be general in nature. If you have specific questions you would like to have addressed, you can forward them to Gary in advance and he will try to work the information into his program.

Share the passion,
Ken Vandenbelt, President

Anytime you're at the airport, stop and buy a Klondike Bar!

**Board of Directors Meeting
October 5, 2011, 7:00 pm
Chapter Membership Meeting
October 8, 2011
Breakfast 8-9 Meeting 9:30 am**

Breakfast Teams

| <u>October</u> | <u>November</u> |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Rosemary Duckworth | Tom Botsford |
| Fred Honhart | Kirk Curtiss |
| Greg Hover | Kyle Curtiss |
| John Karlen | Ken Drewyor |
| Terry Lutz | J. Morris Hickman |
| Roger Reeve | Karen Meirndorf |
| Drew Sequin | Dick Riisberg |
| Craig Tucker | Joe Whitesides |



September Breakfast Cooks: Ernie Lutz & Connie Stewart

EAA Chapter 55

Board of Directors Meeting, September 7, 2011

→Meeting was called to order at 7:00pm. →Directors present: Bill Purosky, Doug Koons, Al Spalding, Warren Miller, Jim Spry, Dave James, Ed Search & Joe Madziar. Absent: Ken Vandenbelt & Vickie Vandenbelt. Both had appointed proxies for the meeting. →Secretary's Report dated 8/7/11; Doug Koons made a motion to approve; Dave James second; all approved. →Treasurers Report dated 8/31/11; Joe Madziar made a motion to approve; Dave James second all approved. →Young Eagles; Doug Koons typed a list of all who helped out at our Young Eagles events. If anyone knows of someone not on the list, please add their name. Doug Koons also discussed a survey from Young Eagles headquarters. They are getting information about starting a similar program, like Young Eagles, for adults. →Nomination Committee; Joe Madziar stated that he had potential candidates for 3 of the officer openings for the 2012 Board. Joe will speak at Saturday's meeting. →Ed Search will continue to investigate getting information about getting the EAA Ford Tri-motor to come to one of our events next year. →Builders hanger; discussed the split of the gas bills concerning the tenants portion of the monthly bill. The consensus was to go back to the original contract, before it was changed. Discussion was tabled until next Board meeting. →Ernie Lutz Birthday Party; volunteers needed to help prepare the hanger for the party. →MDOT seminar; volunteers needed to set up during September members meeting. →Doug Koons made a motion to adjourn; Dave James second; all approved. →Submitted by Joe Madziar, Acting Secretary.

EAA Chapter 55

Gen'l Membership Meeting, September 10, 2011

→Meeting was called to order at 9:16am with approximately 35 members & 6 guests present. →Following the National Anthem, Vice-President Purosky thanked the breakfast team & announced the team for October. →Secretary's Report dated 8/7/11; motion to approve; second; all approved. →Treasurers Report dated 8/31/11; expenses for MAD were the main expense; motion to approve; second; all approved. →Young Eagles; Doug Koons reported we flew 170 kids this year. Doug also mentioned the list of volunteers he compiled & asked everyone who volunteered to check the list to make sure their name was on the list. →Karen Merindorf announced

that the Mason Fire Fighters were having a 9/11 program on Sunday. →Nominating Committee; Joe Madziar gave his sales pitch to recruit candidates for the 2012 Officers Election. Joe also spoke of openings for other Coordinator positions that may be opening up in the near future. Ed Crouse volunteered for Fly-out/Drive-out Coordinator, while he is in town from May through October. →Tom Botsford spoke with Jeff Haueter from A&W. Jeff asked about getting someone to take an aerial photo of St. James Catholic Church in Mason for him. →Al St. George asked that all homebuilders give him any updates they have on their projects. →Vice-President Purosky announced that the program for today was the MDOT seminar. Approximately 53 people attended. →Motion was made and meeting adjourned at 9:35am. →Submitted by Joe Madziar, Acting Secretary.

ERNIE LUTZ 90TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION By Warren Miller

It was a great day on Sunday, Sept 25th when approximately 200 of Ernie's family, friends and Chapter members turned out for his birthday party, where good food and cake was enjoyed by all. Then, surprise, out of the blue came a B25, making a low pass with the gear down, the plane banked and landed and everyone was excited and thrilled to see it. The crew exited the aircraft and invited Ernie to enter the cockpit to reminisce about his days when he flew in a B25. The crew later presented Ernie with a metal honoring his military service and the fact he is still an active pilot. Ernie is a great guy and has flown hundreds of kids in the EAA Young Eagles program in hopes of them becoming involved in aviation sometime in the future.

Now, how many people have a B25 at their birthday party? The group sang "Happy Birthday" and Ernie, in his easy going, shy and quiet manner, accepted all the praise and cheers and said, "thanks for coming".



A few facts from Terry: Dad enlisted in the Army Air Corps, and completed a tour in the B-26 in the European theater, flying out of Chelmsford, England and flew missions on June 6, 1944 to support the invasion of Normandy. He later flew from bases in France. When he rotated back to the US, he was assigned as an instrument instructor in the B-25 at Montgomery Field. He left the Army Air Corps, but stayed in the Reserves (the Army

Reserves became the USAF Reserve), and flew occasionally out of Selfridge ANGB. He later joined a Nuclear Recovery Unit in Lansing, rose to the rank of Lt Col and commanded the unit.

MDOT Presentation

After last month's chapter meeting, Thomas Krashen presented a program called "Why airplanes fly and sometimes don't". Approximately 100 persons were in attendance to hear and learn about how the wing of an aircraft provides lift and flight and how it sometimes stalls and the reasons why. It was an interesting presentation in addition to a vivid crash video of an L19 after an engine failure in the western mountains of Colorado and the subsequent stall of the aircraft into the trees. The wreckage was not discovered until three years later and the video was retrieved from the plane.



MDOT Presentation by Thomas Krashen
Pilot & Safety Officer



TIDBITS ~

By Vickie Vandenberg

NEW MEMBERS: Chapter 55 welcomes new members Ron & Becky Broschart.

HANGAR THINGS: Does anyone have any used towels to donate for the EAA kitchen and/or "rag bag" for use around the chapter?? How about any of the square-ish plastic pails that kitty litter & other products sometimes come in?? We could use some of these for spare buckets around the hangar.

YOUNG EAGLE UPDATE: Did you see the notice that Young Eagle sign-ups for the Sporty's Pilot Shop Flight Training Course has now exceeded 10,000 young people?? Hopefully, this includes some of the young people Chapter 55 has flown in recent years.

REFRESHMENTS: We still have snacks available.

FLASH ~ Klondike Bars are on **SALE** ... only .40 cents each.

BART SMITH: had a small heart attack and was in the hospital mid-September. He is currently suffering from a lung infection. Please keep Bart & his family in your prayers.

He is now back in residence at the ICMCF address: Bartlett Smith; Room #250; Ingham County Medical Care Facility; 3860 Dobie Road; Okemos, MI 48864

DAN SCHIFFER: as many know, Dan is recovering from the crash of his T-6 Texan which occurred on Saturday, September 17th. Dan anticipates another surgery on his foot injuries in early October - and we all hope he can concentrate on rehabilitation thereafter. It was captured on video (sign of our times) and can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xeMRRvyA9Q. Please keep Dan & his family in your thoughts & prayers.

PROXY VOTING: I am supposed to set up the proxy/absentee voting process this month. Since I am still awaiting nominations, I'll just say contact me if you need an absentee voting ballot.

PROFILE OF THE MONTH: I am going to try to write a new column each month doing a member profile or a project update. Once done, the info will be submitted for the web site. You can help me by sending me your own bio; otherwise, you're leaving it to me to make something up.

MEMBER PROFILE: DAN SCHIFFER

Dan has been an EAA55 member since 2000, along with his wife Margaret in recent years. His family has always had pilots and he grew up with aviation in his blood. He was told he took his first ride in a Piper Cub before he was born. He soloed in a 7AC Champ in 1969 and has since acquired multiple ratings.

He has also been blessed to fly and/or own a variety of aircraft - including L29 & L39 Czech Jets, T33A & T33C Shooting Star Jets, A37A Dragonfly (Viet Nam era) Jet, F4U-5 Corsair, AT-6 Texan, Stearman, Barons, Cessna's, and Citabria. Dan lists Cessna aircraft are his favorite and he had tears in his eyes when he sold his C182 - but I think that is true of most every plane he has watched fly away. Dan has used most planes for business & pleasure; so, while he has owned over 30 planes (so far), he says he has never kept one for very long. That was until he purchased his first AT-6 SNJ/Texan. He's owned four T6s since 1995 and he lists the T6 as his all-time favorite aircraft. Dan liked the Czech L39 which he owned for 7 years.

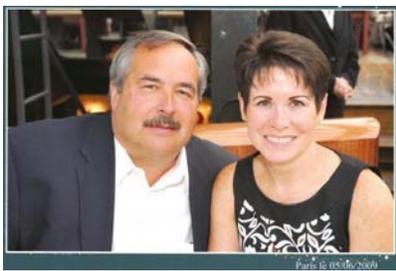
The family bought several Stearmans right after WWII to fly from the family farm near Remus, MI and it is a wonderful aircraft. His dad even attempted to use a surplus military parachute and jump from the Stearman flown by one of his brothers. At 3000 ft., he climbed out on the wing and while standing there hanging onto the strut, got scared. They landed with him on the wing and had to pry his fingers off the strut. Dan states "My dad also witnessed his younger 16 year old brother's accidental death in a Stearman. That, plus a few other Stearman accidents with his brothers, created a fear of the Stearman in my dad and I grew up with that. My dad never seemed concerned about any aircraft that I flew (not even the Jet Fighters) but he didn't want me to fly the Stearman. After my dad passed, I purchased my first Stearman and flew it 50 hours before I sold it. Physically, I have no problem flying the Stearman;

for me it's a mental problem. My cousins, Al & Mike, each have a Stearman and several good friends have them, and now I have another... my dad's spirit still talks to me and I'm working on getting mentally comfortable with this plane."

In 2008, Dan and Margaret retired from their business of 35 years, Schiffer Mason Contractors, Inc. They love to travel, but miss family, friends, airplanes & pets so they limit their travel to 5-10 day spurts.

Dan is active on several boards including the LCC Foundation and the Mason Jewett Advisory Group, hoping to maintain and improve TEW for now and into the future. Dan is also the Airport Support Network Representative for the AOPA. Dan says "I love all aircraft, just some more than others." (ed 10/2011).

Dan's hangar is located at TEW Mason Jewett and he welcomes all EAA55 members to visit whenever he is on the field.



Dan & Margaret Schiffer



YOUNG EAGLES

By Doug Koons

Hi everyone, on 9/21 Ernie, Ken and I gave 9 more kids there Young Eagle rides. Our Chapter has now flown 179 Young Eagles so far this year. This brings our Chapter 55 total to 2,758. I will post the new pilot totals at the Chapter before our next meeting.

On 9/22 I received a call from a home school group asking about getting their group of kids Young Eagle rides. If I can get a time with good weather set up we may be able to fly another 10 to 20 kids sometime this fall.

Thank you all for all your support and help, Doug



NOTES FROM CAPE JUBY

By Terry L. Lutz

Chapter 55 Flight Advisor

September 2011 will be remembered as the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the destruction of a fourth airplane in Pennsylvania as passengers tried to regain control. September 2011 will also be remembered as a month of aviation accidents, with the loss of airplanes in Reno and at Hatfield Airport in Ottawa County, Michigan.

There has been a lot of online speculation about the crash of the highly modified Mustang named "Galloping Ghost" and flown by EAA Board Member and long time aviation enthusiast Jimmy Leeward. In case you missed it, Jimmy and the Galloping Ghost were featured in the May 2011 issue of Sport Aviation. It is worth re-visiting that article, because it provides insight into the history and modifications to the airplane, and also to Jimmy's Merlin-sized ambition to go faster than anyone at Reno.

A lot has appeared on the internet about the accident at Reno, with some instant analysis by observers who should know what they are talking about. It seems to center on the loss of the trim tab on the left elevator. Speculation would be that if the airplane were trimmed to fly level at 400+mph, the tab would be highly deflected and subject to high aerodynamic loads. And in 1989, another Reno racer suffered loss of the trim tab, resulting in a 10g pitch up.

If the trim tab was the initial cause of the accident, the NTSB will have to find it and do the structural analysis to determine the failure mode, and see if it consistent with the in-flight photographs of the tab failing. This is an important point, because you can't do accident analysis with what you find on the internet. The photos of the Galloping Ghost heading straight for the ground with the tail wheel extended are sharply in focus. The photos will have to be analyzed, along with the physical evidence, to yield the important clues. What we do know is that Jimmy Leeward was an experienced Mustang and Reno race pilot, and died while pushing the limits of the airplane and himself. We mourn for him and those who lost their lives in the impact zone.

Our near Chapter 55 EAA family has experienced very few aviation accidents among the members. You may recall that on May 13, 2000, Wayne Martin was flying his homebuilt Rotorway Executive helicopter back to Lansing after a trip to West Branch. It was a particularly windy day, and near Ithaca, the door of the helicopter separated, and struck the tail assembly. I remember attending his funeral on behalf of the Chapter.

After watching the video of Dan Schiffer's accident, we should celebrate (along with Dan, of course!), that we can stand around his wheelchair and tell him how scared we were to watch it! The line between safety and tragedy is as thin as the line made by a sharp pencil. Dan's accident is a reminder to all of us that no matter how consistent and safe our operations are, the unexpected can happen. If there are safety margins to be found, we should always be looking for them.

I recently attended the 55th Symposium of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots in Anaheim, CA. Nobody wants to have a street named after them at Edwards AFB, so we meet to discuss flight test techniques and the lessons learned from test programs conducted around the world. Sikorsky Aircraft has set the helicopter world on its ear this year by spending \$50 million of its own money (imagine that!) to build and flight test the X-2 high speed helicopter.

The X-2 configuration has dual counter-rotating rigid rotors, with a tail mounted pusher propeller. It was flown officially to 253 knots, but Chief Test Pilot Kevin Bredenbeck said they had been over 260 knots during a shallow descent. At that point, they were at 90% of maximum torque, with an estimated 200hp available. Sikorsky will continue to develop the concept, which is likely to change helicopter design for as far as we can see into the future.

Sikorsky was awarded the prestigious Collier Trophy in 2011 for their efforts, and Kevin Bredenbeck was given the James Doolittle Trophy for flight testing and expanding the speed envelope of the X-2.

One paper that took everyone by surprise was by the unlikely team of Lt Col Arnold E. Ebnetter, USAF (Retired), and Eileen Bjorkman. Actually, they are father and daughter. Eileen is retired from active duty in the Air Force, and has flown as a Space Shuttle Astronaut. The title of the paper was "Designing, Building, and Flight Testing a Homebuilt Aircraft to Set a World Distance Record".

EAA member Arnold Ebnetter designed the E-1 with a slide rule when he was an engineering student at Texas A&M back in the 1950s. But time passed, and a 22-year military career put the project on the back burner. Then he became a balloon test pilot for General Mills. After retiring, the project sprang back to life, but the original design had to be tweaked here and there to make a record attempt in the 500kg class (FAI Class C-1a1).

At age 82, Arnold departed Paine Field in Everett, Washington at 2pm, and flew 2327 miles in 18 hours, 27 minutes, landing the next day in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The airplane was powered by a Jabiru 2200 engine, fuel consumption was around 3 gph, and he burned 58.7 gallons on the trip. Fuel remaining was just 2.5 gallons, but enough to fly another 100 miles. Arnold Ebnetter broke the previous record of 1930 miles set by Frank Hertzler in 1984, flying a Vari-Eze. Apparently, there is no age limit to the human spirit.

Finally, the Ivan Kincheloe Award for test program management was presented to Joe Sweeney, a test pilot for Lockheed-Martin in Ft. Worth, TX. He has been a test pilot on the F-16 and F-35 programs. As a bit of history, Ivan Kincheloe was a Michigan native, born in Detroit, and raised in Cassopolis. He was a top USAF test pilot, and had been selected to fly the X-15, when he lost his life in the crash of an F-104. And Joe Sweeney's father, Charles W. Sweeney, was the pilot of "Bockscar", the second B-29 to drop a nuclear weapon over Japan.

I hear that the Fall weather so far in Michigan has not been so nice, but rest assured it will get better and there will be some great flying days before winter. Now is the time to put all your skills together and fly each flight with safety margin on all sides. And remember to take the time to help others do the same.



FROM THE FLIGHT SURGEON

By Gregory Pinnell, MD

The FAA is encouraging pilots to use their online medical application site MedXPress. The 8500-8 medical history form you are used to filling out is now available online at <https://MedXPress.faa.gov>. When you fill in this form you will receive a confirmation number that you bring into the office during your flight physical. The information you provided is then imported and the exam is filled out electronically. Your medical is printed out and off you go. If your application is not imported by the AME it disappears out of the FAA's computers in around 30 days so don't do it to long before your exam otherwise you may need to do it all over!

One warning, be sure you make a printout of the information you provided on the website and bring it with you to your physical. This way we can review your history and protect you from a possible medical denial which would preclude you from flying sport pilot. Confused? Please feel free to contact me at www.ok2fly.com and I will be happy to answer any questions about this program.

CHAPTER 55 CLASSIFIEDS

HANGARS: EAA55 Builders Hangar 517-589-5051 or Deanna 517-851-7047 or Lloyd 517-589-8619

WANTED: Garmin 396 or 496. Contact Dan Schiffer 517-862-6413

FOR SALE: Legal Eagle ultra-light experimental airplane; built in 2007, gray, 281" wingspan, rebuilt 1/2 Volkswagon engine, 5-7 flight hours, one seat, wooden propeller stamped with 54 x 22, altimeter, oil pressure gauge, tachometer, volt meter. From the estate of Jim Cushing; asking \$10,000. James Devereaux 989-534-1333

2009 Kitfox; Model 4-1200; Rotax engine; many extras. Jack Toman 517-882-8331

KIS TR-1, Subaru Legacy engine; GPS nav/com; many extras. George Moore 517-536-1034

Rans 2007 S6S Coyote II; Rotax 912; many extras; \$49,000. Ernie Lutz 517-676-4601

DTV antenna; analog or digital; \$20.00
George Moore 517-536-1034

Telex ProCom 200 noise canceling headphones.
Bart Smith 517-676-2146

Generac Generator; \$350.00 Greg Hover 517-676-5126

Yesteryear Aviation; new surplus hardware; 517-676-4416

FREE: Collection of Sport Aviation dating from 1958 on;
All in boxes. Bart Smith 517-285-1518

FLYING ADVENTURE

By Ken Fackler, The Wanderer & Chapter 13 Member



As pilots, we should always share our lessons learned, right? Well, strap in and read on, fellow aviators!

The day this happened was a Friday in August and it was truly a gorgeous day for flying, one I'd certainly put in the Top Ten for the year. I decided that I'd do something I'd been trying to do for a while, that is, fly from my home field of Ray Community (57D) up to Mt Pleasant (MOP) and enjoy some casino gaming. I took off about 0845, a bit later than I'd planned, but the skies were clear with nearly unlimited visibility and a light northwest wind. Bumps? Who dat?

My Kolb Mark II is an Experimental light sport, and while I like it a lot it isn't a fast plane. I cruise between 60 and 70 mph depending on conditions. The plane carries 10 gallons of fuel and I burn it at approximately 3.25 gallons per hour. My plan was to stop at Saginaw-Browne (HYX) for gas and then swing south of the controlled airspace at MBS. As I neared Saginaw I estimated that I could make it to Mt Pleasant without the fuel stop so I changed course and headed directly for it. Just as I got on the southwest 'corner' of the MBS airspace my GPS signal went kaput! I'd seen this happen once before and wasn't too concerned. Apparently there are circumstances where the GPS signal can be hard to pick up.

By this time I'd been established on course long enough to have a pretty good sight picture of the angle I needed to maintain over the roads. I'd also noted my magnetic compass reading and could follow that. I was fairly sure the GPS signal would return before too long. That's what happened in the past. And while it was several years ago, I had flown into Mt Pleasant before and had a more-or-less sense of the terrain from that. So I plowed on. Sure enough, after about 10 or 12 minutes, the GPS synched up and I was right on course.

After a safe landing at Mt Pleasant, I caught the shuttle to the casino and had a very nice meal at their lunch buffet. I then toddled over to the blackjack tables and began the process of losing my money. :-} Ouch! Yes, I said losing my money. By the time I left I was down \$150 bucks! Oh, well, if you can't afford to lose it, don't play, right?

On the flight home I overflew Alma (AMN) and then went on to Owosso (RNP), where I again gassed up. I was pretty sure I could have made it home without any more fuel but I decided to play it conservatively, and the washroom was certainly a welcome sight! From Owosso, I went south of Flint and headed back to Ray. For the first third of the trip from Mt Pleasant there were just a few small to medium bumps but as the air cooled it smoothed out again and it was sweet for the rest of the way.

So that trip worked out at 4.6 hrs of stick-time for 16 gallons of fuel. Except for contributing to the Blackjack Dealer's Retirement Fund, I'd call it a very fine day. I woke up Saturday with the intention of flying but I was pretty fatigued from the trip on Friday and the winds were fairly brisk. I decided to stay home to rest and relax, which is exactly what I did. Ho hum.



Sunday's forecast looked good! The winds were forecast a bit higher than I would have wanted but I was planning a trip with short legs, all anchored by fields that had fuel available. The route? Well, the idea was to fly to Owosso, then circumnavigate the Lansing (LAN) airspace by flying to Mason (TEW), Charlotte (FPK) and then Ionia (Y70). There are several fast food places just across the street at Ionia so that would be my lunch stop. From there, I'd come back to Owosso and then home.

Well, that was the plan anyway.

To start with, the area east of Pontiac/Flint was all IFR conditions on Sunday morning due to fog. So after getting my bird ready, I sat with the other airport bums to wait for the fog to lift. I think it was around 0930 that it burned off and I was in the air about 20 minutes later en route to Owosso.

The flight to Owosso was nice and smooth albeit the visibility wasn't all that great. I was monitoring the control tower at Pontiac (PTK) and they were busy, busy, busy! Airplanes all over the place, many doing the repetitive touch-n-go maneuvers we all remember from our training days. I was a little nervous but I was well clear and never, to my knowledge, had any close encounters.

Due to the winds aloft it took 1.4 hrs to get to Owosso, but I made it. Surprise! A six-pack of the crowd from Ray had also flown in and they were having breakfast at the Crosswinds Cafe, which is located right on the field. I sat with them for a few minutes and then went to get fuel before heading on to my next stop at Mason, a new destination for me.

That's when the wheels came off. Due to the late start caused by the fog and the rapidly rising temperatures, the air had gotten medium bumpy by this time. I started on a south-southwest heading for Mason, being careful to avoid the Lansing airspace to the west. But I wasn't too concerned because my route didn't really get all that close to it. I was monitoring the control tower just in case.



After maybe 15 minutes of flight, the GPS signal went out! Yes, again. I thought it would probably come back on before long, as it had before, but I began messing with it by turning it off and back on several times, trying to ‘help’ it synch up. No joy. Now, what with the wind and the bumps and having my attention on my GPS unit, I was no longer certain of my heading. And before the GPS went out I hadn’t really gotten a good sense of road angle nor had I been able to establish a reliable magnetic compass bearing due to those bumps. Soooo, out with the maps, and on I went!

I didn’t have a sectional map me that day. has was a TripTick you download



true with What I can from

AeroPlanner that generates a series of ‘mini-sectionals’ with your route marked. Alas, there just aren’t any good ground landmarks between Owosso and Mason, especially with the poor visibility. Folks, it ain’t nothin’ but flat farmland out there! Miles and miles of miles and miles, as the saying goes. But on I went!

At this point I had plenty of fuel and I thought I could probably stay reasonably on course and (I hope, I hope) that dad-drafted GPS was going to pick up the satellites just any time now. Right? So on I went. My worst thought at this point was that I might inadvertently drift over into Lansing’s airspace.

I also had with me a leg table, another product of AeroPlanner, with the times for each leg noted while allowing for the forecasted wind speed and direction. I was fairly sure these were accurate based on all I’d experienced so far. The leg from Owosso to Mason was slated for 42 minutes. And although I hadn’t actually taken note of my takeoff time, my engine timer should give me some guidance there. So on I went.

At about 54 minutes of flying from Owosso I came across a small town with a water tower. I decided then to invest the time and fuel to descend, circle, and read the name on it in hopes that it might situate me. The town was Dansville. But that city isn’t on the sectional maps! I used to carry a street-level map but I had long since abandoned it. I wished I had it then, you can bet. As I was doing this, I noticed a concrete runway off to the west, shining brightly in the sun despite the poor visibility. I thought, “Holy Course Error, Batman! That must be Lansing! Just as I feared, I’ve strayed too close. I need to divert to the east some to clear this.” So on I went, now angling a bit more easterly but remaining on a mostly southerly course. I was also concerned that the winds must have picked up quite a bit. If, as it seemed, I was only just at that time drawing ‘even’ with Lansing, I still had quite a long distance to go in a southerly direction to make Mason. And what would that portend for the next leg to Fitch-Beach at Charlotte, which was nearly due west? HmMMMM.

Of course, none of the above really indicates that I wasn’t as calm as all that. The feeling of being lost was growing in me the whole time, little by little. What should I do? Turn around? Could I even do that successfully? Did I have enough gas to get back to Owosso? Could I find it in this soupy air? Should I call Lansing and tell them I’m lost and ask for help? What help could they offer since I don’t have a transponder? This has stopped being fun.

So on I went!

After another 10 miles or so I finally reached my breaking point. I decided to turn back and, if I could, return to Owosso. I made a 180° turn and tried to keep a good handle on the reciprocal course. I did manage to find my way back to Dansville (and sure enough, there was Lansing off to the west again), so I was pretty sure I was doing a good job of backtracking. Still no GPS signal, of course. A while later I found another berg with a water tower, this one called Webberville. I wonder if that’s where the Webber grills come from? But alas, it ain’t on the sectional maps either. Am I going in the right direction? In this visibility, it wouldn’t take much error to miss Owosso completely. Am I going to have enough gas? Should I land somewhere off-airport and seek assistance?

I eventually (and it felt like days later) crossed Interstate 96 which helped give me a reasonable sense of my relative bearing if not my course. I knew that if I kept heading north I’d sooner or later cross I-69 and that I should be able to find SOMETHING from that. But the fuel situation was now beginning to look grave. Fortunately, I finally found another town, one which I recognized, called Bancroft. From there, I knew exactly which way to go to get back to Owosso. Moments later, the GPS came back online! Hallelujah!

At this point, I get to thinking: “The place I was going to eat, Ionia, is now off the table. It’s about 1330 and I really need to eat. In fact, I’m starving and dehydrated!” I was pretty sure the Crosswinds Cafe at Owosso had closed at 1300. However, the airport at Flushing has a restaurant and is just slightly farther away than Owosso, and it has gas. I decided I had enough fuel on board to make it so I turned in that direction and bounced my way there.

On approach, I thought, “I’ll get the gas first, and then eat. That way when I’m done I can just hop in my bird and go.” So I taxied over to the pumps and tried to get gas twice. Nothing I could do would make that stinking gas pump dispense a drop of fuel! It made all the appropriate sounds but nothing came out: nada, nit, swab-o. Aaaargh! At this point, I just had to put the problem aside and get something to eat, cool off, and hydrate, which I did.

As I ate, I pondered the problem. Should I go back to Owosso? That isn’t too far but it’s directly against the wind and opposite the direction I really want to travel. Lapeer (D95) is in the right direction but it’s farther away. How confident am I that I can get there with the fuel I have left, not very. So I asked the waitress where the nearest gas

station was located. She told me it was about a half mile west, so I set off to hoof it there and back.

When I got there, they did indeed have portable gas cans for sale. A two-gallon can for eight bucks: BOHICA! Now comes the trudge back to the field and the temperature is above 90 and the humidity is unspeakable. A couple of young fellas (maybe 18 or 19) saw me when I was about one third of the way along; they took pity on me and gave me a ride the rest of the way. Good boys! Who says the youth of America is going bad? Not I!

I carry a fuel funnel with me, and it's a good thing because it would have been nigh on impossible to get that gas can and its spout maneuvered into place to pour into my on-board tanks. It turned out the can I'd purchased was one of the new cans with the 'safety' valve in the end of the spout, which I had no realistic way to activate. In fact, I nearly tore a nail off trying to pry that stupid valve out. Eventually I gave that up, removed the spout, and managed to sort of splash-pour the fuel into the funnel. I went inside the restaurant again to wash (I had gas all over my hands and arms) and to allow my tanks to equilibrate so I'd have a better idea of just how much I had at this point. After looking at the tanks, I was confident I could reach Lapeer without any worries, which as it turns out was correct. I filled up there and proceeded homeward.

Well, it was definitely one of those days when, at least for a time, I was "up here wishing I was down there." I've since made that trip successfully but I did some things differently. First, I got a weather briefing and asked for a RAIM alert

check. The RAIM alert (and, no, I don't know what it stands for) is an on-request service from the briefer in which he checks for known outages of the GPS signal. Secondly, I invited a flying buddy to go along in his plane, thus having the benefit of two GPS units. I also invested in a good ground-level map which stays tucked into the seat pocket next to me!

And now we come to the part of this tale where you get to laugh your blinkin' arses off! Remember how when I was lost I found Dansville? And that I then spotted Lansing off to the west? Well, that wasn't Lansing. It was Mason, my destination! I actually had my goal in sight but confused it with another airport because I was so disoriented. Ugh, ugh, and likewise, crap! Go ahead; laugh it up, you jokers.

For the 'inquiring minds who want to know,' it turned out that my GPS unit was bad. It died completely not long after this flight was completed.

Feel free to share this with anyone who would get a chuckle from my mishap or, better yet, learn something that will help them be a safer flyer.

POCKET CALENDAR:

Oct 8 = Hillsdale Chili Fly-In; 11am-1pm

Dec 11 = Xmas Party; Eldorado; 4:00pm

Jan 21&22 = Great Lakes Aviation Conf