

# Sima's First GA Ride

## Prologue:

About the title, GA stands for General Aviation and that means any flight, business or pleasure, that is neither military nor a scheduled airline trip. Statistically, my General Aviation flights are safer than my dreaded daily highway commutes to Orange County to go to work, or for that matter, my drive to the airport.

Sima was transferred to work at our rather small building known locally as the 'Trailer Annex', several years ago. She is an interesting and fun gal to talk with at work. She told me she had been reading my flying stories during that time, and I think she might have become intrigued with the fun that the other people have had flying with me. She started to ask about going flying with me and every time I replied to her with a firm date for flying, she professed to be afraid of flying in a 'small' airplane. Fair enough I thought, some people are. After enough time had passed by, I chose to drop the subject, and I quit inviting her.

Maybe a particular flying story of mine kicked things up a notch because in the middle of August she surprised the heck out of me when she walked up to me at work and she gave me a firm flying date, Saturday September 5<sup>th</sup>, the first day of the Labor Day weekend. My calendar was free so I said yes. I already knew exactly where I would fly with her.

The weather had been so warm (around 100) in Corona, and for the past week the sky has been so smoky from the huge Station fire, that I thought this flight may never come to pass this coming weekend. If so, this will be a short, short story.



The forecast seemed to be cooling, albeit just a bit as of Wed night

At work on Friday Sima said she would meet me at my hangar at 10 AM. Based on my log of our week's temps, it was forecast to be in the middle 80s then. We agreed on 10 AM.

## Showtime:

Saturday morning I woke up early, happy, and excited. The air was clean and the sky was blue. I went outside and the breeze was cool and light. All good things for the first time aloft for someone who has had no experience in a private plane. My coffee was ready and I dove into that first delicious cup. I called Flight Service, got a standard VFR weather briefing, all good. Later, the phone rang, my wife Sue picked up, brought the phone to me, and said "It's for you." It was Sima confirming she was on schedule for our 10 AM meeting.

Sima showed up on time and started our day with a good morning hug. I love hugs. She jumped right in helping me with the chores that would hurt my knees, like sumping the tanks. I showed her a lot of stuff about how airplanes fly as we walked around my Mooney because she is one of those special people who is interested. Then she helped as I pulled that puppy out of the hangar. A whole hour was used up somehow..

**Picture time:**

I thought of WW II military airplanes with 'Nose Art' and asked her if she knew what I was talking about. No matter, I made my own nose art photograph. Call it Mooney nose art.



Sima is looking forward to a great day

My hangar neighbor Doug pulled up a few minutes later, and offered to take some pictures of us but I had the following method perfected. I set the 12 second timer on my camera, put the camera on my Mooney's tail, fire off the picture, and then I 'run' up to my position. Here is how it came out.



### Go time:

Sima was concerned that the motion might get to her so she put on one of the pressure point wrist bands that Kim had so graciously left with me for others to use. Engine start and run-up were normal and I activated the 'Corona Loop' flight plan into my GPS. I glanced at her during the beginning of my take off roll. She was smiling. I thought 'Lets keep it that way.'

Mother Nature made her presence known as soon as the wheels left the ground but it was no more than the usual wing wags usually present on a Corona departure. Two minutes later everything settled down as we climbed through 1500 feet. I had explained a week earlier that if she wanted out, I would just transition into a landing pattern and quickly get her on the ground again. On the downwind leg I reminded her of her option, but she was ready to press on. Great I thought, maybe I can show her a fun day.

We could see Lake Mathews off to the left a few minutes later. Sima was smiling and displaying her new level of excitement at actually being there, aloft in a 'small' plane. By then I had the autopilot activated and was quietly sitting there with my hands in my lap. I was having fun and so was she.

The route southeast from Corona over I-15 is a heavily traveled route for general aviation. Ever since I got the Avidyne Tas600 generated traffic display installed in my Mooney a year ago, I keep my Garmin 430 GPS on the traffic page. I had been monitoring the hollow white diamonds moving about my traffic display. One of them at 12 o'clock, changed from a white outline to a filled in white diamond, commanding more of my attention.

This photograph, from a previous flight should work to help me explain. It shows an aircraft 3 to 4 miles away at 1 to 2 o'clock, one hundred feet below us (the -01 part), and I watched our relative movement as we were going along. This day's airplane was right in front of us, at the same altitude, and coming right at us. A way different deal was tossed at me, I just don't have a picture of that.

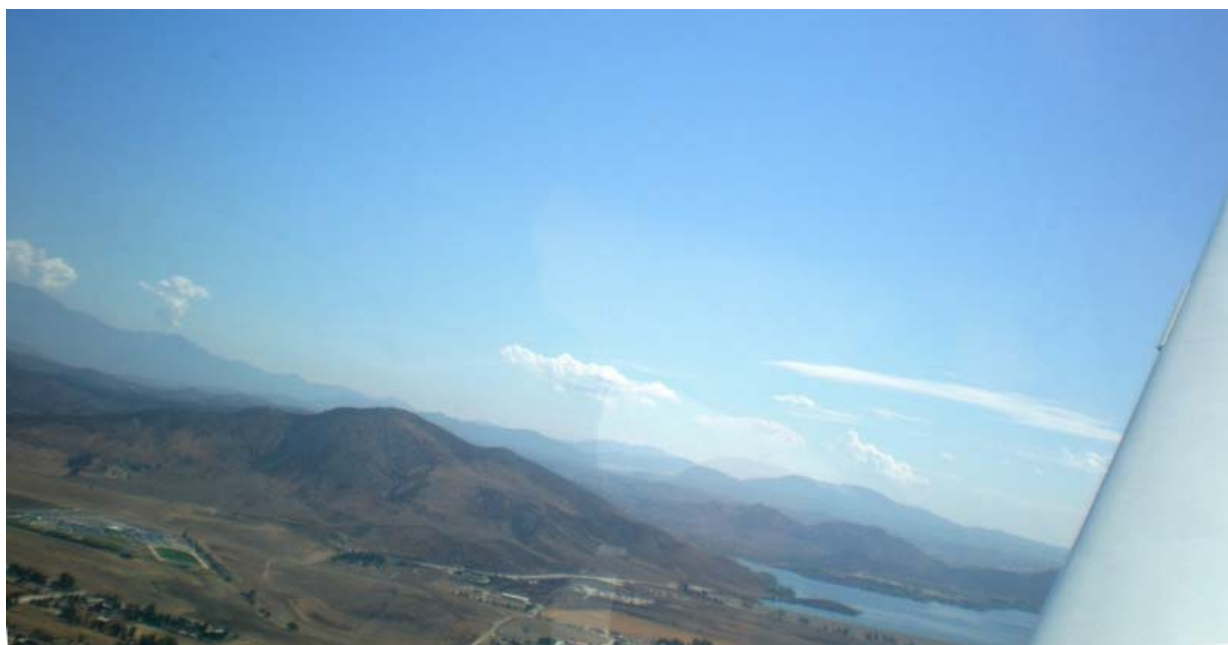


I could not find the airplane looking out the window. I hate when that happens. I know I have traffic headed right at me and I can't see it. I started a turn to the right. My traffic alert came alive with a

bright orange instrument panel light and a with synthesized voice advising us "**Traffic one mile, same altitude.**" The white diamond was now bright yellow on the screen and I zoomed in to the one mile range on the display as I continued my turn. As it passed by where we would have been, I breathed a sigh of relief and mentally thanked the people at Avidyne and Garmin for developing potential life saving equipment. I never did see that airplane go by.

If it's not one thing it's another. Just as I settled down, a patch of turbulence grabbed Sima's attention and she grabbed my arm with a worried look on her face. I firmly placed my right hand on her left knee for reassurance and said "It's all right, I am right here with you". She later thanked me and said that made her feel much better. Tough job but somebody's got to do it.

Things settled out again comfort-wise and I started making my descent and announcing my position and intentions on 122.8, the CTAF frequency for the French Valley airport area just north of Temecula CA. It was time to make some turns and Sima snapped this shot of the terrain in the turn. She is not used to turns yet. All in due time.



Then we were leveled out on a one mile final approach for runway 18

We landed at French Valley and went into the café. I explained the '\$100 hamburger' phrase to her which is what we call a flight to another airport for lunch. She was back feeling herself again.



I didn't eat much, and that's iced tea

Sima thought she could really get into this flying stuff now that she felt back to normal. I explained that I did not like turbulence either, but one just gets used to it after a while. I have flown with people who actually like it. It is not always present. I have flown the two hour trip to Phoenix without finding a single bump on occasion, just like sitting on a living room couch. Bumps cure boredom.

Sima excused herself and apologized when she returned to our table a few minutes later. She had taken an important call about some personal business that she had described to me earlier. It cut into our plans and so we would have to go the direct route back to Corona.



One more picture before we departed for Corona

Well over an hour had passed since we landed and it was 5 to 10 degrees warmer. The engine did not fire using my standard hot start routine. I had to slide the mixture knob  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way in before she came alive. Don't ask, I have no idea why. There is a first time for everything. I entered Direct KAJO into the 430 to set up the autopilot in guiding us on our way home.

At the runway, we were behind a beautiful red Lancair which was behind a big brown and white Beechcraft King Air twin turboprop. The King Air took off. As the Lancair took the runway and started the takeoff roll, I keyed the mic and spouted " Lancair, caution wake turbulence". He replied with a brief "Roger" and disappeared in a flash.

OK our turn. Check for landing traffic out my left window, announce my intentions on the radio, taxi onto runway 18, get centered and aligned with the dashed white center line, push throttle forward to full power and concentrate. Steer with my feet on the two rudder pedals. It takes maybe 10 seconds for the needle on the analog airspeed indicator to wind clockwise to the 70 knots position, about 80 MPH. A gentle pull on the yoke and the earth starts to again recede. I love that feeling.

I made gentle left turns onto the crosswind and downwind legs as Sima is not yet used to these new attitudes. Passing through 3000' and clear of the airport area, I activated the autopilot and it turned us 30 degrees left to capture our course line to AJO. Once there, 'George' turned us to the right to maintain course. My hands were back in my lap. So much more relaxed than driving on a freeway. Reaching 4500 feet, I pressed the ALT button on the autopilot and watched as George gently lowered the nose and maintained that altitude perfectly.



Sima took these self-portraits and the one on the left is her PC wallpaper at work already

I don't know why, but the phrase Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang comes to my mind even though I never saw the movie. Mother Nature was again back with us big time. The airplane moved sideways and bounced at the same time. Sima let out a sound. My right arm got grabbed instantly. My right hand was again pressed back into public service holding Sima's left knee. After a surprise transition from mild to moderate turbulence, I think I even held her willing hand for a moment. Things settled down a minute or two later. Smiles returned. Like I said, somebody's got to do it. I never learned these things in flight school.

There are so many more things to view just over that slight rise that we never see from our travels down a given road. What we see here is not only Interstate 15 and the storefronts and other businesses constructed alongside it, but also the residential neighborhoods just a few blocks away. The ponds constructed for whatever reason. The lay of the land. The contrast between the developed areas and those that are not. And of course, on the right, that beautiful Mooney wing that allows us to be momentarily perched at this very special vantage point.



As I compose this, I am again thankful for my good fortune

As I don't want to squish the next picture into the remaining space on this page, so I am reminded by my inherent silliness to advise you that the remainder of this page has been "intentionally left blank."



I just like this picture, the colors and the variety. We see barren land, a creek which nourishes lush green vegetation, side roads, new residential developments, blue sky, white clouds, many hills, and Lake Elsinore at the top right.

Very soon it was time to let down again and our speed slid up to near 180 MPH thanks to the assist from gravity. Again, I watched my turns so they were not heavy handed, while watching for traffic out the windows, and on my display as well. I turned final at Corona and again my headset came alive with "**Traffic one mile, same altitude.**" This time I dismissed it as it was an airplane on the ground waiting to take off. We made a gentle one bounce landing back at Corona. I logged that as three landings for the day. 😊

After I stopped the Mooney in front of my hangar, shut down, and logged my numbers, we got out, opened the hangar doors, and backed our cars out. I had something that was a bit special in my car, waiting for this moment. I brought it out of my car with me. Just a piece of paper?

Remember the title of this piece? As this was Sima's first general aviation flight, she was therefore presented with an official AOPA First Flight Certificate by me right there on the ramp in front of my hangar. My A&P Dave walked over just in time to take pictures of the presentation.





Another happy moment - Sima's First Flight Certificate presentation

She needed to get going but she had an idea that this would be the perfect time to showcase my Mooney and her Mercedes. Great idea, but because there is so much white in the bright sun it was undeniable that her face protected by her Mercedes sun shield would be impossible to see.



M & M's - Mooney and Mercedes, (mine goes faster)

**Reflection time:**

Remember me mentioning 'She is an interesting and fun gal to talk with at work'? Well, away from work this gal literally explodes into 100% fun. I could not believe the transition. I hope Sima accepts my future flying invites.

With a quick goodbye hug, Sima left so she could concentrate on that pressing business that had brought us home early. I sat down on the back of my RAV4 and had a Blue Can while smiling about our flights. Then as requested, I stopped by Dave's hangar to take his picture along with his crew wearing their brand new uniforms before I went home.

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**Epilogue:**

Airports are often constructed in windy areas for a reason. When I get home with my hair all over the place, there is no question as to where I have been. I call it 'airport hair'.



Exhibit A - Airport Hair