

Tahoe II - Yes we went back to Lake Tahoe!

It had been only several days after Kim and I had returned from the wonderful Lake Tahoe weekend with the Vintage Mooney Group that I received an invitation to return to the same place in just under two weeks. It was from Michael Golden, the owner of Mountain West at the South Lake Tahoe (TVL) airport.

This invitation was all about their annual airshow at Lake Tahoe. Plenty of perks were offered to us. Free this and that. How could I justify this extravagance in my spending habits? Two round trips to Lake Tahoe from Corona is \$500 just in fuel.

Pangs of high fuel prices tugged at me, but I really wanted to go again, really. I sent an email out to a group of people who had expressed an interest in flying with me over the past several years. Many replies indicated that they had already signed up for something else that weekend, as I expected. A few said yes. I picked John Jones to go with me because he had never flown with me before, and so he should have a chance.

John had just enough sense of adventure, and confidence in a guy he just barely knew at the office to go flying with me. He is on temporary assignment in my building, testing our new court case computer management system. I am sure he will write something from a 'first timer's' perspective.

I got a standard FAA weather briefing. Based on the easterly winds aloft and the forest fires in California, I chose the Owens Valley instead of the San Joaquin Valley route. The air had smoke in it but it was the lesser of two evils. I drove to the airport and met John.



John arrived with a great anticipation of a fun weekend and he quickly warmed up to my sweetheart.

I showed John how all of the airplane's parts contribute to our flight as we walked around 07T. He was very interested in all of that stuff and asked some advanced questions. We moved along moving the airplane out and our cars in, and then we were gone. I had a schedule to follow. More on that later.



Hundreds of miles later I took a picture of California's Mono Lake, sorry, the air was too smoky

As we drew near to Lake Tahoe, the approach and landing was uneventful except for the fact that we heard Jolie's voice in our headsets during my landing roll. I landed at 11:55. We taxied over to Mountain West. Oh my gosh, look at that, Jolie Lucas was guiding us to our parking place. She is a true VMG'er for sure.

The airport shut down from 12:00 to 1:00 so airshow performers could practice for Saturday's performance. I have been to my share of airshows in my life, but I have never attended 'the day before'. What a treat. It was all good stuff and no crowds.

Remember when I mentioned that I am sure John will write something from a 'first timer's' perspective? Well he did and in spades. I am going to scuttle the rest of this and let you read what this was like from my passenger's point of view.

Ed Shreffler
07/14/2008

Although I had been a passenger in small plane years ago, I was a little nervous about how my stomach would react to air flight after all these years. Fortunately, I knew that my boss Kim had a pair of wrist bands that were designed to reduce flight nausea so I asked her if I could borrow those for the trip. She graciously said yes.

So armed with my borrowed wrist bands and a new digital camera (which I barely knew how to use) I left my place in Aliso Viejo around 8:00 Friday morning. I had heard about the fires up north, so I thought I probably should call Ed to make sure the trip was still on and then I was on my way. Traffic was light and I got to the Corona Municipal airport in plenty of time. That gave me time to check out the local diner and have a breakfast sandwich.

Ed showed up a little after 9:00. We opened the hangar and there was Ed's 201 Mooney. We got moving quickly because Ed knew there would be a planned closure at our destination. He showed me how to check the gas for water and sediment, and then I pulled the plane out of the hangar. That was a stretch for my shoulders and felt great! Once we were in the plane Ed went through his checklist. This is a list that he made himself and I have to say I was very impressed. We went out to the runway and took off over a beautiful forest where the trees were covered with vines.



Once we were up in the air we didn't talk much because there was a malfunction with my head set. I could hear Ed and the people he was talking to but he could not hear me! He explained to me a few things along the way for the most part I relaxed and enjoyed the view. My bracelets worked really well. If I felt a little nauseous, I pushed on the buttons, but I didn't need to do that much. However, Ed would occasionally keep notes on a log, when I tried to read what he was writing, I didn't feel well.

From a regular pilot's perspective, there was not much of a view because of reduced visibility. From my perspective, it was great. I was flying in the air in a small plane and I was loving it. We took an unusual route by flying up the Owens valley which has a bad reputation for unruly winds and turbulence. However, on this day, the wind was blowing favorably and considering that the central valley was smoked over, the Owens valley was the best course.

At one point we had a little mishap. While Ed was reaching behind his seat for the oxygen tank, I was trying to position myself to give him more room. I must have joggled the yoke hard enough to take us out of auto-pilot. The plane lurched suddenly and there was a sudden sinking feeling. We both knew something was wrong, but we didn't know what or why. Ed turned around instantly to assess the situation. He was very calm, and said, OK let's stabilize this situation here and he did. Later, when my camera had slipped under my seat, I decided to let it be instead of trying to reach for it. After all, a little adventure goes a long way and I didn't want to nudge the yoke again.

The rest of the flight went smoothly, and just before Tahoe we flew over a beautiful peak where we could see the snow in the crevices. We pulled in to the South Lake Tahoe airport 5 minutes before the airport closed for a one hour practice at noon for the next day's show. Jolie was waiting for us and directed us into our tie down area. That was my first indication of how casual this FBO was: Here was a non-employee guiding us in. And she wasn't using the colored things that they normally use, but was waving us in with water bottles! FBO is just one of the many new terms I picked up this weekend. It stands for Fixed Base Operator. This FBO is owned and operated by Michael Golden, who treated us more like family than customers.



The Mooney contingent



Practice jumps

Shortly after we flew in, the jumpers started practicing their routines. We got to watch them up close. Towards the end, they come down so fast you think for sure they are going to crash! But their control is so excellent and they were amazing. We had sandwiches and hung out for a while. A vendor was there demonstrating motorized bicycles so I piddled around on one of those for awhile. This gave me a chance to wander around, inspect the planes up close and snap a few pictures.

One of the nicest things about this weekend was getting to know Ed better and meeting his flying friends. If I can have half his energy at his age, I'll be doing well! I met Mitch & Jolie, who are both pilots, then Paul & Gina, also both pilots and on Saturday Bob & Charlotte. These people have amazing life styles flying here there and everywhere, but they are very friendly and down to earth, and I enjoyed hanging out with them.



Ed with Jolie Lucas on Friday

Before this, I didn't know that there were different types of turbulence; Paul explained the difference between mechanical and thermal turbulence to me. I also learned a lot about Mooney planes and realized what makes them different from other planes and how the Mooney has evolved over the years.

On Friday night, we were treated to a barbecue dinner with live entertainment, thanks to Michael Golden, where we were all introduced to the military personnel who were flying in Saturday's show. Saturday morning I followed the trail head from the hotel down to Lake Tahoe and enjoyed the scenery. I usually call my Mom & Dad on Saturday mornings, and it was fun to surprise them by calling from the shore of Lake Tahoe! After my morning walk, we got off to a slow start and rambled down to the air show just in time for another barbecue lunch! After that, we wandered around checking out the vendors and enjoying the show.



Lunch on Saturday



Charlotte Keller making Ed feel very welcome



A good crowd for a small city



Looks easy from the ground



Michael Golden is second from the right



After the show was over, we took a group photo and everyone gradually went their own way. Ed had fixed my headset by then. Since we were not in hurry this time, Ed explained the instrument panel to me, and then we took off. Our take off pattern was not what you would expect. According to the online information, we should

have turned left, but Michael advised us to turn right over the golf course because the winds would give us some lift. That worked out real well.

There were tall puffy clouds in the way, and by this time I knew that meant turbulence. (If I remember correctly, thermal turbulence.) So Ed steered around the big clouds, which took us off course for a little while but gave us a smooth ride. The rest of the flight was pretty smooth. We had put the oxygen tank in the front to make it easier to reach, and I held on to my camera so I could take some in-flight pictures. There was one part of the trip where Ed had to navigate a narrow path between a military restricted area on one side and a TFR on the other. A TFR means temporary flight restriction. The area to the west had a TFR because of the fires. We flew through this narrow gap smoothly.



One of the many fires

We had to change radio frequencies several times as we moved along, so I asked Ed if I could set the dials for that. I thought it was nice that he let me do that, but then he really surprised me when we got closer to home and offered to let me fly the plane!

By this time we were approaching the Cajon pass and I could not believe Ed was going to let me fly right through it, but that's exactly what I did! I was amazed at how hard it was to fly. I had to keep the plane steady, stay at the right altitude and steer in the right direction. This was especially hard because the instrument panel is so high and it was hard for me to see over. And the mountains looked so close I was afraid I was going to hit them. Plus I was overcorrecting, so I had to learn how not to overdo it. When I lost track of the altitude or direction, Ed was quick to get me back on track, and when I was worried he assured me that all was well.

Finally it was time for Ed to take over and I was relieved! He brought the plane down a little after dark and walked me through the post landing checklist. I filled up the tanks (one in each wing) with gas using Ed's credit card, and then we pushed the plane into the hangar. (Thanks Ed, for that credit card number; it will come in handy!) Ed and I kicked back for a while with a blue can and then called it a day. And what a day it was! Thanks, Ed for the amazing experience!



John Jones
06/30/2008