

## Whirlwind Weekend

Finally! After all of the delays and cancellations due to low clouds, Santa Ana winds, and other obstacles mom Nature has tossed at me for the past few months, I had my turn at a **great weekend**. I was able to go flying, to my intended destinations. Two trips, with three lovely ladies, involving six flights. I want to share it with you.

Saturday was the Vintage Mooney Group fly-in to Catalina Island. It had already been postponed for two weeks due to the previous antics of momma Nature. I even had to call Leslie one time on Saturday morning to delay our departure for an hour due to the fact that Catalina still had a low overcast. An hour later, things were right and I called her again and said let's go.



Leslie looks ready to go

We departed without a hitch and aimed southwest. The awesome navigators (GPS receivers with moving maps) made by Garmin pointed the way. She said, "How high are we going to go?" I said six thousand five hundred. That put us over various class D airspaces yet under the LAX class B airspace. Although I explained that altitude is your friend when flying, she is more comfortable down lower.

When we were over the beach and the Pacific Ocean was ahead, Leslie asked, "How long will it take us to get there?" I said "About nine minutes." She said "Oh" in such a negative tone of voice, that it sounded like she was getting cheated out of something. I laughed out loud.

Four miles out, I took a picture of the Catalina airport. The picture was hazy so I used an 'auto correct' option on the photo editor to more clearly show the terrain. For me, while flying, it not this clear to see



Four miles out looking southwest at runway 22

I passed by the airport on the north side, descended, swooped around to the left, and set up for a right downwind to runway 22. It looked like this out of the right window. What you can "kinda" notice is that there is a major cliff dropping off on the left side of the picture. There is another big drop off to the right. Everything that looks like a hill going down IS a hill going down. The AirNav.com website states "**RY 04/22 SAFETY AREAS BOTH ENDS, 1600 FT + DROP OFFS TO THE SEA**".



Photo by Carl Chiverton

I made two right turns and lined up for final on the 3000 x 60 ft runway, which is shorter than Corona's runway. The 1600-foot drop-off kind of sticks in one's memory. They call it the "Airport in the Sky". Some people have referred to it as "like landing on an aircraft carrier".

The AirNav.com website also states "FIRST 2000' OF RWY 22 SLOPES UP 1.69%; REMAINDER OF RWY LEVEL." When landing, the two-thirds high point looks like the end. You can't see the rest of the runway until you get to that point. Yipes Nancy!

Is that unusual and unpleasant information enough to upset a pilot? Well, I noticed, about 15 seconds out on final approach, that in my efforts to remain high enough to not smack the unusual and somewhat unsettling looking terrain, I was too high to make a short landing. I don't do it very often, but I did a "Go Around". Not landing, but instead applying full power, going around and setting up for a second approach. It is one thing to read about this, another to be a passenger aboard, and a third and way different to be the pilot in command. It is a feeling of major responsibility. It was a smart choice and a good landing followed.

Carl Swebston from VMG helped us find a parking spot and greeted us when we got out. Leslie met a wonderful VMG gal from Tucson named Jo and they chatted for a while. I took a few pictures.



Mooneys

Unfortunately, I have osteoarthritis in both knees which is the most common form of arthritis, usually occurring after middle age, marked by chronic breakdown of cartilage in the joints leading to pain, stiffness, and swelling, this per dictionary.com. Leslie was kind enough to walk up to the second floor to pay our ramp fee / parking fee. VMG got us a half price parking fee bargain.



We had lunch right there at the airport. It was just a one-minute walk.

I had been talking about a **Buffalo Burger** for two weeks and **I got one**. It was my first ever. Grilled to order outdoors. Similar to beef yet just a tad sweeter. All the salads (mixed green, pasta, potato), chips and salsa, ice tea, whatever you could want on the side. Awesome. Leslie picked out a picnic table for us on the patio while I was off smoking and so I gladly joined her for interesting conversation over lunch.



More pictures around the airport area



After lunch, we got together for a VMG group photo and then we just gathered around out in front of the buildings for 30 – 45 minutes spinning hangar tales. That gathering was a "Pilot's Paradise" experience. You VMG people are the best.

On the way back I asked Leslie if she would rather go straight back to Corona, or fly farther and then go to Corona an hour later. She asked what time it was and where else did I want to go. I said it was around 3 and that I would rather keep the destination as a surprise. Leslie decided she would rather go straight back to Corona, so we did. I never did get to tell her my other planned fun destination was Big Bear. Already had the flight log in my kneeboard and the trip plan in my GPS.

The trip back was uneventful except that I must have talked to SoCal on six different frequencies over the 26 miles of water to get back over the mainland. I was even cleared through the LAX class Bravo airspace at 7500 feet MSL, (the floor is 7000 there). We landed Corona (no go around, hehe) and I popped a Blue Can. Leslie helped me push November Five Eight Zero Seven Tango (N5807T) up the slope and into my hangar, gave me a hug, and went off to her planned evening's Cinco de Mayo festivities.

===== Intermission =====

I went home and started planning Sunday's flight. It was to be an AFW (Angel Flight West) mission to pick up May L. (a cancer patient, and a very pretty young lady) at Fresno and bring her down to El Monte. It also was the second time that I had volunteered to fly for her with AFW. Sofie, a friend of a friend, had signed up to go with me via email. It was to be her first ever general aviation flight, even though she had round tripped Syria via airliners.

Sunday 05/06/07, I awoke at 8 AM to blessed blue skies. The forecasters were correct this time. Yes, yes, **yes!** But I had two hitches grab me that morning. First, the network from my computer to a printer did not work. I wound up using a floppy disk so I could print my flight logs. Then, for the first time ever in 17

years, I could not get in touch with Flight Service. That is the part of FAA that provides weather briefings to pilots. I tried calling three times, once enduring being on hold for 10 to 15 minutes with no success. I have access to so much pilot weather data on the Internet, that I was comfortable going without my usual FAA briefing. I had to call Sofie and tell her to plan an hour delay meeting me at the airport. My Internet weather data proved to be spot on, plus I have real time weather onboard now. We don't need no stinkin'...

Sofie's sister drove her to Corona and pulled in right behind me when I arrived. (My emailed directions must be pretty good) I introduced myself to both of them. Her sister drove off after approving of me (I thought) and I proceeded to take Sofie on a walk around the Mooney, explaining what all the parts of an airplane do in flight.

We jumped in, the wind was from the east, and so I taxied west to runway 7 for a change. On the way to rwy 7, I saw a Ferrari car club get together and was amazed at the millions of dollars parked out of my left window. I just had to stop and take a pic.



Millions of dollars worth of red cars

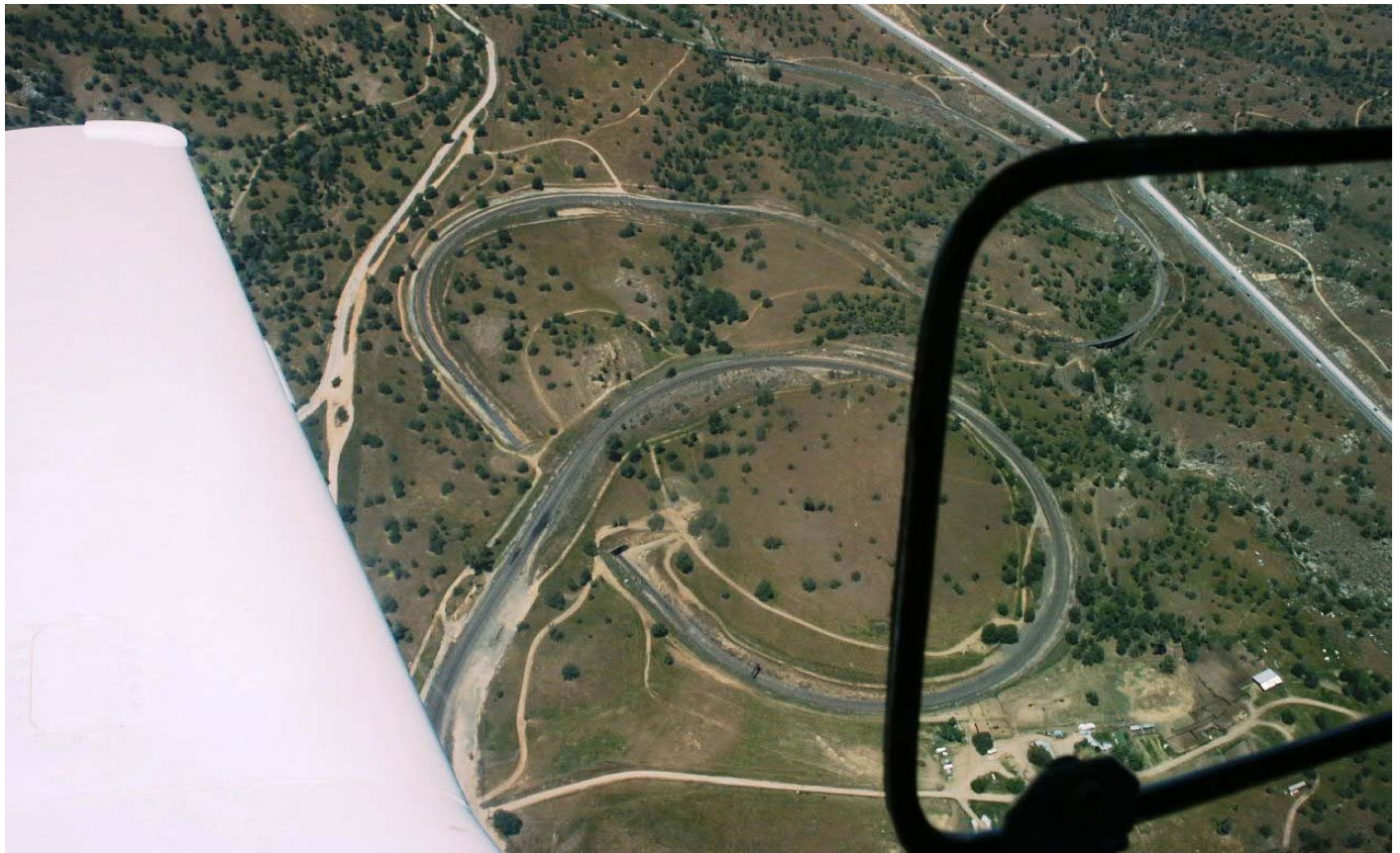
We departed with some wind gusts rocking the plane slightly - OK - medium or worse. I was concerned about Sofie because it was her first time, so I asked over the intercom. She said she was OK and smiled. Crossing the northwest over the LA basin, we hit some turbulence. Good old moderate chop. I hit my head on the ceiling. I was so concerned about Sofie; I turned and asked her if she was OK again. She smiled and said that she thought it was exciting in a positive way. She was having fun. I was getting yanked around by mom Nature. She was having fun. I am a very lucky guy to meet up with a gal like that.



Smooth air at last

We went to my first planned stop. Once over the San Gabriels, it is just on the north side of the High Dessert that contains Palmdale and Lancaster. It is called Tehachapi, to get some fuel. Why Joe? Well I'll tell you. First it was 20 cents cheaper than Corona and I was getting 30 – 40 gallons, second it was a great half way point to take a break and have a smoke, and third – I wanted to be down low anyway, because I would be only six miles from a photo op. And an unexpected surprise happened; we got to clear a hill by 30, 40, or 50 feet only a half-mile from the runway on final. You could tell the boy squirrels from the girl squirrels that close, Right Craig? We landed at 12:34 5/6/07. How's that for precision? Sofie and I walked far away from the fuel area and took a cigarette break.

We departed NW and climbed to around 1000' above ground. Then I reduced power so we would stay about there, sort' of. Hard to figure in hill country. The photo op I was interested in is a rarity in America. It is called the Tehachapi Loop by train buffs. To change elevation more than normal, without making the grade too steep, the engineers designed a circular path for the track using a tunnel, so that a freight train longer than 85 boxcars would actually pass over/under itself.



The tunnel is the black area to the right of my wing and left of the black small window outline.

Forty-Five minutes later we were parked at Mercury Air at Yosemite Airport at Fresno. Sofie and I took a cigarette break. May came out of Mercury Air, and I introduced the ladies to each other. May gave me a hug, and we all took each other's pictures.



May and Sofie

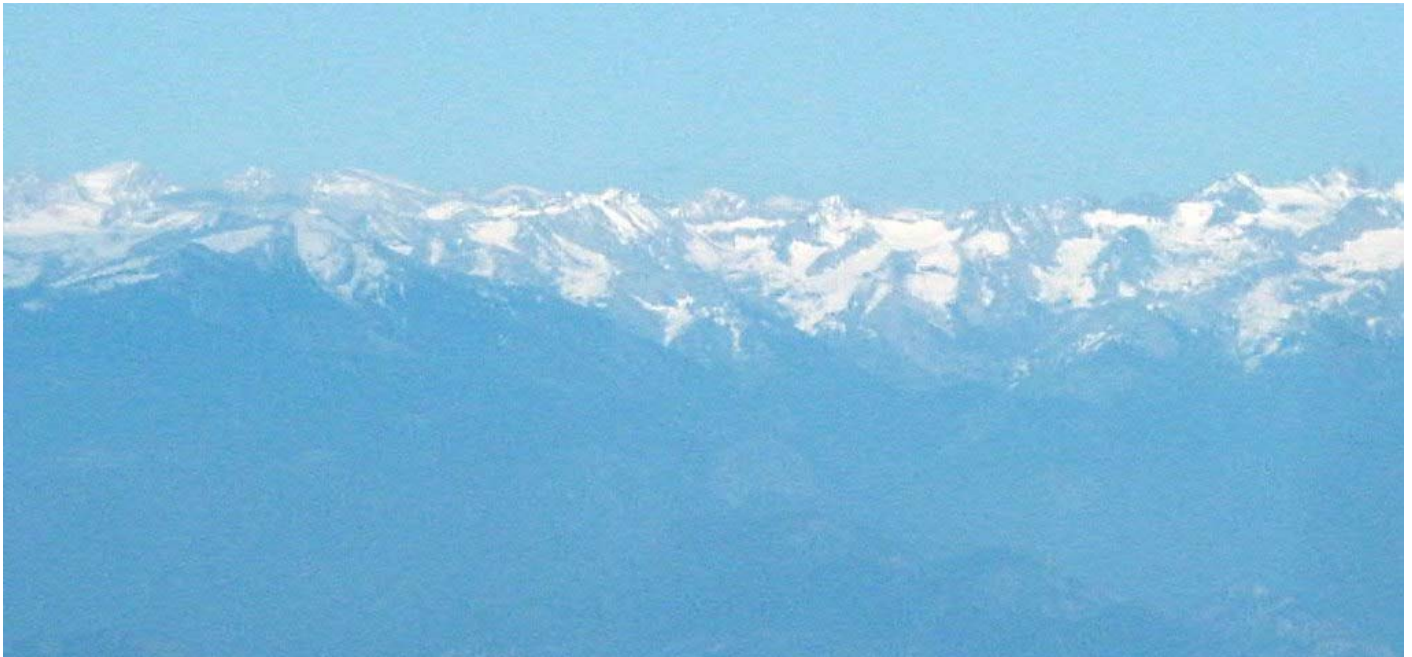


May and her AFW pilot



Sofie and the author

It was time to take off again but now my call sign changed from Mooney Five Eight Zero Seven Tango to Angel Flight Zero Seven Tango. We punched down the San Joaquin Valley like a house on fire. While talking to Bakersfield Approach on 118.9 and then 118.8, I got their clearance to climb and then slowly slipped up from 7500 to 9500 for terrain clearance over the hills ahead.



Looking out my left window, I could see the snow capped Sierras 30 miles to the east.

After we popped over the crest of the San Gabriels again, I found a steep valley on the south side and followed it down showing off those red speed brakes popped out of the top of my wings. We had the VSI pegged at -2000 feet per minute and way below redline on the airspeed indicator. Precise Flight gets the nod here. Thankfully no one had a sinus infection. My ears did not even plug up a little bit. After lining up with

runway 19 at El Monte, we parked and I helped get May's things out of the baggage compartment of my Mooney. She went to the terminal building where a friend met her. Sofie and I took a cigarette break.

Another take off and a landing just thirteen minutes and eight seconds later put us back at Corona again, (no go around, hehe).

Sofie helped me push the Mooney up the rise and into the hangar. I popped a Blue Can. Sofie's sister drove up to the hangar and we all had a good time kidding around for a while before they departed for home. 658 miles of fun. How lucky can a guy be?

Ed Shreffler  
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