June 17, 2008 - Leaving Clemson, SC
or, The Long, Long, Long Train

Back in 1954, I remember seeing a Dezi Arnaz, and Lucille Ball movie entitled **"The Long, Long Trailer"**, in which they went on a vacation trip pulling a 40 foot trailer behind their car. It was a funny depiction of the troubles, pitfalls, and foibles involved in transporting a really long RV. Since I routinely drive a 36 foot bus style motor home pulling a VW Jetta behind, I could easily relate to their slapstick adventure in this movie.

My train is ready to leave the station. Note the front carrier with the covered scooter mounted.

Well, I am now ready to begin hauling my even longer 70 foot "train" up to Seymour Airpark in the Tennessee Smoky Mountains. There I will spend a little more time practicing some mountain flying with a skilled and accomplished tail wheel instructor pilot. I own a large hanger at that 2,300 foot long grass strip that will allow me to go over, in fine detail, a final check of both the plane and the motor home, before I begin heading West. This will also be a good place for me to practice short field take-off and landing techniques, as well as view its natural beauty from altitude. Just a stone's throw from Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, I have come to know this area well in the 25+ years that I have serviced many of the small electrical utilities that dot that state. I have spent every January and February, working in and around Tennessee during the bleakest, gloomiest and least scenic season of the year. Yet I fell in love with the stark beauty of the mountains and valleys of East Tennessee during the winter. Enough so that a few years ago I purchased a couple of acres of land in Townsend, just outside of the Smoky Mountain National Park, for an eventual retirement home. Until that time, I will base and live out of my bus, located inside of that air conditioned and heated hanger, as there is plenty of room for all of my vehicles...ground and air.

There was a logistical challenge in trying to get all of my "stuff" up into the mountain. I had decided that the best way to accomplish this task is by loading my car inside of the 26 foot long enclosed Classic Aviator trailer that I will later be using to haul my aircraft around. On the front of the motor home will be the Vespa scooter that I will use for ground transportation on my trip.

After I get these items into Tennessee, I will register the new scooter and obtain my license to drive same. The car will stay behind in the hangar, while I am on my trip West, with the plane. A few days after I arrive, Troy Woodland, the creative genius behind Just Aircraft, and the craftsman who has gotten my Highlander to its 98% completion point, will fly the plane up to my grass strip. I will then transport him back to Clemson, and make an immediate flight back to the mountains. This will be much easier, quicker, and less costly than bringing the bus and trailer (8 mpg) on a 400+ mile round trip back into SC to pick up the plane. (By the way, I say 98% completed, as we yet have to install a Dynon autopilot--which won't be commercially available to late summer, and a cabin heater muff to the exhaust system,-- which won't be necessary until late fall. Both of these installations will be handled back at the factory when I return from my 3 month adventure, this September.)

This is the Vespa Scooter, without the cover

Although on this trip my car was in the trailer, prior to starting out for the drive up I-26 and I-40 through SC, NC & TN, we had to make sure that the plane would be secure on long hauls. Two days were spent in fitting rail channel guides on the trailer ramp and into the bed. Tie downs were fabricated and placed so that all 3 wheels would be secure and provide a minimal amount of movement of the plane. A supporting stand was made for the tail to take weight off of the wheel.

As you can see in the lower photo, there is less than 2 inches of space between the folded wings and each side of the trailer. When properly tied and snugged there is little likelihood that the aircraft will shift into those sidewalls. A tow winch is used to drag the plane up the ramp and toward the front of the trailer. Natural gravity will allow it to roll down the ramp, but a tail wheel tow bar is used to steady and steer it, while in transit.