

July 13 & 15, 2018 - Today's flight to Punta Gorda, FL. or "Why it is that I Fly"

I have mentioned, previously, that I have been asked if I really enjoy these almost daily jaunts in my Highlander simply to have a breakfast or lunch at small local airports that I have visited so many times before. This, especially, in light of the fact that when I used to fly for business and pleasure I had taken my much faster airplanes to such exotic destinations as Acapulco, Mexico; Nova Scotia Canada; Cabo San Lucas, Baja CA; Grand Cayman in the British West Indies, (just to name a few) and have landed at some really busy airline terminals including JFK in New York, Midway at Chicago, Dallas Fort Worth, Texas and Houston's Inter-continental as well as John Wayne International, just to the south of Los Angeles.

Today it is certainly a completely different type of flying and for entirely different reasons. Back "in the day" the main purpose for my fast retractable and then twin engined Piper Comanche's was to cover ground rapidly and economically. It was to get to places much more efficiently than I could using ground transportation or the commercial carriers. When working I routinely traveled with over three hundred pounds of test equipment which included a 2 1/2 gallon cryogenic container of liquid nitrogen which had an ambient temperature of below 300 degrees F. This was **not** allowed on the airlines which meant that I would have to scout up a supplier for my empty checked container once I arrived at my destination's commercial airport, which would often be many, many miles away from my client's facilities. Using my own airplane allowed me to land at much closer smaller airports to my jobsite and be ready to proceed with my project within hour's after arrival. This was especially important to my nuclear generating plant facilities.

Today's flying is more for the pure enjoyment of being up in the sky early in the morning when the air is cool and calm, whisking along, sometimes as low as 500 feet, over the cow pastures or sugarcane fields and seeing if I can still master the skill of navigation that comes from hand controlling the machine and maintaining headings within 10 degrees and altitude within 100 feet of desired. My cognitive abilities are kept well honed whenever I do fly into tower controlled airspace by quickly and decisively responding to and following the instructions of air traffic control, many times while they are handling another half dozen airplanes in similar situations. Some of these airports are pilot training centers and those students are often from other countries and many times their English is rudimentary and not always easily understood. Their skills are often unpolished thus adding to the difficulty in navigating that airspace and it is always gratifying in getting an acknowledgment from the Tower Controller after following his instructions to the "T" and then being thanked for same.



My view from 4,500 feet on today's flight across the State to the Punta Gorda, Florida airport, some 100 miles away. It is always pretty when flying above white puffy cloud tops.

Today's flight was to be to Punta Gorda (the Fort Myers area), a tower controlled field some 100 miles to the west, and clear across the state of Florida. It has a restaurant, the Sky View Cafe, which has some of the best fresh blueberry pancakes that I have tasted south of the State of Maine. I had not been there for almost a year, and what makes it challenging is that it is home to Allegiant Airlines, one of the new "low cost" carriers which seems to dominate by taking its passengers to "out of the way" destinations where the larger carriers "fear to tread". With over two dozen destinations from Punta Gorda alone they have 7 based 150 passenger aircraft that operate daily out of this small airport, some doing two or three round trips each day. It gets to be a busy place and it is always an interesting exercise to fit my little 100 MPH airplane into the landing pattern around these larger and faster Air Buses. Today's flight was routine and conducted at 4,500 feet which had me above the white puffy cumulous clouds that covered much of the state this morning. But Punta Gorda is also a vibrant general aviation airport with plenty of small aircraft and an active EAA chapter.



Typical of these is the above photo of a **Fieseler Fi 156 Storch**, a German pre WWII liaison airplane with very similar operating characteristics to my Highlander with its 100+ MPH cruise speed and capable of operating out of some very short runway fields. In addition to the photo on the left, which I captured, is a air museum photo of a military version with its wings swiveled back for storage, just as does mine. However it is substantially larger and will carry up to 3 people.



After breakfast I taxied over to the self-serve gas pumps to fill up and while getting ready to fuel a pretty yellow RV-6 experimental airplane pulled up behind me. Like mine, this is a 2 seater but almost twice as fast and one with which I am very familiar as I join a group of RV pilots almost every Sunday morning over at Okeechobee County Airport. Since I now have "more time than money" I offered to let the RV pilot, who introduced himself as Jason Hover, go ahead of me and while he was fueling I struck up a conversation. Seems that he flies for United Parcel Service and is acquainted with another UPS pilot who is the wife of a gentleman who is purchasing my hangar at the Seymour Airpark near Knoxville TN. A

small world this aviation business truly is. And what makes it even more so is that today (7-15), at this Sunday morning's RV Pilots breakfast who would arrive in his beautiful yellow RV-6, but that same Captain Hover along with a passenger.

And, it was such a beautiful day that I capped it off with an early evening flight along the South Florida coastline from Stuart down to Peanut Island in the West Palm Beach area. The evening air was just as still as was this morning's although with a bit more haze, especially when viewing toward the setting sun. So, this is why I fly. It is not only about the destination or even the trip that gets me there. It is not only about maintaining one's manual skills, thought processes cognitive abilities and reactive reflexes, but it is the capacity to connect with other pilots, discover new and interesting aircraft and aviation hardware and every day learning something that will help me navigate this long time avocation of mine.

