



SWEEPSUPDATE

A MONTHLY UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF YOUR SWEEPSTAKES AIRPLANE

Getting there is half the fun



Crossing two Great Lakes, a sliver of Canada,
and a safe arrival at OSH

BY DAVE HIRSCHMAN

Flying to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, from the Mid-Atlantic starts with answering one potentially fateful question: Over Lake Michigan, or around it?

In AOPA's 2009 Let's Go Flying Sweepstakes Cirrus SR22, flying over the lake means being out of gliding range from either shore for at least 15 minutes, but it also results in a nonstop flight, less air traffic, and a mercifully brief period in Chicago Center's busy airspace. Staying over land involves circumnavigating Chicago to the south and west (sometimes *way south* and *way west*), a fuel stop, and the associated descent, hot start, full-power climb, et cetera.

This year's trip to Oshkosh presented an especially challenging set of circumstances that, in the end, showed off some of the Let's Go Flying Sweepstakes SR22's amazing capabilities.

For starters, fellow traveler Warren Morningstar and I would confront 30-knot headwinds

over most of the route. A menacing line of thunderstorms would require a significant deviation north or south, and if we climbed near the airplane's 17,000-foot service ceiling to extend our range, we'd be at—or close to—the freezing level. And even though there were only two of us aboard, we'd be carrying so much gear for the show that the



After its cross-country from Frederick, Maryland, to Oshkosh, the Let's Go Flying SR22 took its place in front of AOPA's Big Yellow Tent.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER AND CHRIS ROSE

airplane would be near its 3,400-pound gross weight limit.

Morningstar flew from the left seat and handled the takeoff, climbing smoothly and steadily, even though it was his first time flying the SR22 and its somewhat unconventional side-stick control. He hand flew the airplane to 12,000 feet and configured for a lean-of-peak cruise (164 KTAS at 12.4 gph). The headwind made its presence felt right away, but if we could continue our relatively straight line, we'd get to the big show with more than two hours of fuel remaining.

That's when the XM Weather display on the Avidyne MFD gave us the news about the weather ahead. A cold front in the Ohio Valley was spawning a line of storms that stretched from southern Indiana well into central Michigan. The south edge of the front was thin but violent, with red and purple radar echoes and numerous lightning strikes. The north side was wider but the radar showed only greens and yellows, representing light and moderate rain showers.

We had a pair of inflatable life preservers on board in anticipation of crossing Lake Michigan. Deviating around the

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approaching weather system north of Cleveland, Ohio, meant they'd do double duty as we'd cross Lake Erie as well.

Morningstar, who grew up in Utah, said he didn't mind flying over the big bodies of water. "At least it's summer," he said. "The water down there's probably about as warm as it ever gets."

We entered IMC and continuous light chop near Cleveland, and a nearby airliner reported light rime ice at 14,000 feet. The OAT indicators (two of them) in the Let's Go Flying SR22 weren't in complete agreement. The one on the PFD (which gets its information from a probe

on the wing) indicated the air around us was just two degrees Fahrenheit above freezing. The one on the MFD (which gets its data from a probe on the engine cowl) showed eight degrees F above.

"I wonder which one we should believe?" Morningstar said.

We continued north all the way into Canada before a wide gap allowed a westbound turn toward Muskegon, Michigan. I wasn't sure if we needed any special permission to cross into Canada and back on an IFR flight plan—but Cleveland Center handled us the entire time. We stayed at 12,000 feet but soon began collecting traces of rime ice. The airplane's TKS system removed the traces almost immediately, but tiny, cone-shape spires clung to the wing tips.

The OAT on the PFD registered freezing while the one on the MFD registered six degrees above. "I guess we know which one to believe now," Morningstar quipped. (The OAT probe on the cowl was likely sensing heat from the engine.)

We could have descended to warmer air, but flickers of blue sky above showed we were near the tops of the clouds. We climbed to 14,000 feet and pushed our way westward in blue sky and smooth

air. The higher altitude required using the portable Mountain High oxygen system. But the higher altitude also allowed us to reduce fuel consumption to 10 gph, and groundspeed was virtually unchanged. We had sufficient fuel reserves to make our destination under normal conditions. But the sometimes-swarming VFR arrival into Oshkosh isn't normal, and we didn't want to enter the melee with less than two hours of fuel in the tanks.

The clouds disappeared over western Michigan, allowing a clear view of the blue water ahead. We were on an IFR flight plan for Sheboygan on Wisconsin's Lake Michigan shore (Oshkosh wasn't accepting IFR arrivals), so we planned to cancel when we arrived overhead and then continue VFR to the big show.

Oshkosh ATIS was wisely being broadcast on a powerful transmitter and we were able to pick up the information more than 120 miles away. The winds were out of the west at 16 gusting to 23 knots and the ceiling was 4,600 broken.

Morningstar clicked off the autopilot and started a long descent over the lake. Shortly after reaching the Wisconsin shoreline, we ducked under a layer of cumulus clouds and bounced

along toward Ripon and the well-traveled Fisk Arrival.

It had been several years since I last flew to Ripon, joined the conga line, and followed the railroad tracks to Fisk, then Oshkosh. But the clearly written and illustrated Oshkosh notam made the process easy to understand.

Morningstar took out his video camera to record the event, and I took over the flying duties.

Given the strong west winds and relatively light traffic (for Oshkosh, anyway), I assumed we'd be landing on Runway 27, and I'd preprogrammed the radio frequencies accordingly. As we approached Fisk, however, the Cherokee Six in front of us was assigned Runway 36, and we got the same instruction.

One frequency change brought us to Oshkosh Tower South, and we were told to land on the "yellow dot" about half-way down the runway.

The Let's Go Flying SR22 and its highly authoritative rudder pushed back against the crosswind and held the centerline. Moments later, Oshkosh volunteers directed us to AeroShell Square where we shut down the engine. The tanks still had 24.1 gallons of fuel remaining after 4.8 hours in the air. The

ground crew tugged the airplane to AOPA's Big Yellow Tent for its weeklong display.

We were pleased to open the airplane to the highly knowledgeable and airplane-savvy visitors that Oshkosh attracts, and glad to answer questions about the many modifications that have been made to the Let's Go Flying SR22 in recent weeks. The Forward Vision EVS-100 infrared camera system and its pop-up display screen drew the most curiosity, and AOPA members also wanted to know about the AmSafe airbag seatbelts and S-Tec autopilot roll servos.

We didn't intend to add so many new products and upgrades to what was already a fantastic airplane when philanthropist J. Lloyd Huck donated it in late 2008. But each modification has improved the airplane's already impressive performance and utility.

And when you see it at AOPA Aviation Summit in Tampa November 5 through 7, the Let's Go Flying SR22 is likely to be sporting a few more additions. Old habits are hard to break!

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