



Few things match the thrill of an all-out, maximum-performance takeoff. But I really wasn't ready for my first takeoff in our newly re-engined 2011 Crossover Classic sweepstakes Cessna 182. It was line up, apply the brakes, go to full throttle, and hang on for a V_y (77 knots) climbout that produced a 2,500-fpm climb and a windshield full of sky. The factory-remanufactured, 300-horsepower Continental IO-550 had turned a previously plain-Jane Skylane into a fire-breather.

Of course, Air Plains Services of Wellington, Kansas, did a fabulous job with the installation of the IO-550, with the attention to detail that you'd expect from a shop whose reputation is that of a primo engine conversion shop for

FIRST FLIGHTS

The verdict: 162 knots down low, 147 knots up high

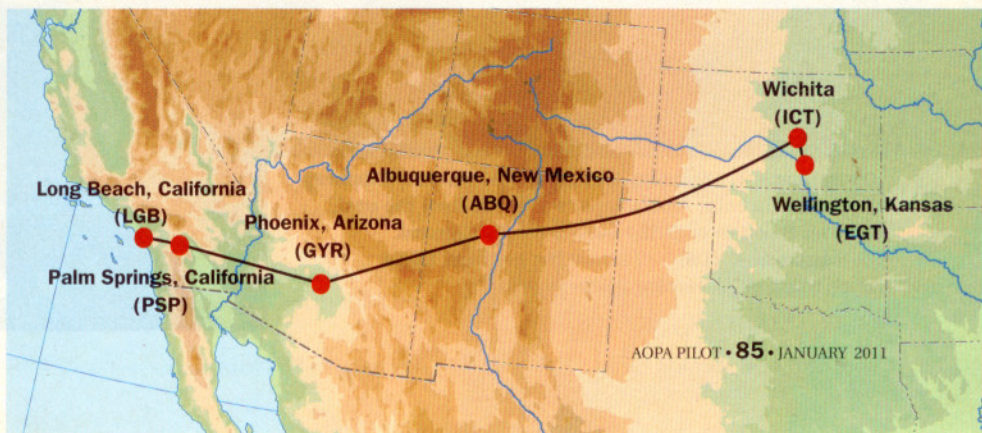
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER

Cessna 172s, 182s, and 180s. The baffling from Airforms, the alternator from Plane Power, and the propeller and spinner from Hartzell all looked great, and there was a luster to the engine compartment that you only see in new airplanes.

But it was the performance that came as a pleasant shock. I couldn't wait to ferry the 1974 sweeps Skylane from Wellington to Long Beach, California, where the airplane would go on display at AOPA Aviation Summit, our annual convention. After a checkout from Air Plains' Jerry Putter, I was good to go.

The Crossover Classic's two-day, nine-hour, 1,100-odd-nm odyssey took the newly re-engined airplane from the Air Plains facility in Wellington, Kansas to AOPA Summit in Long Beach, California. Bleak terrain? We had it. Good weather? We had it. Right wing heavy? We had it.



The author—and sweepstakes project manager—with the Crossover Classic at Airportfest in Long Beach. The airplane may not look like much here—but the factory remanufactured, 300-horsepower Continental IO-550 engine is a great kickoff to a very ambitious refurbishment effort.



ICT to ABQ: 510 nm; 3+18

I positioned the airplane from Wellington to Wichita-Mid-Continent Airport and then met up with AOPA Chief Photographer Mike Fizer early the next morning. It would be a long day.

The airplane was loaded to the gills: full fuel (about 103 gallons, including the 22 gallons in the Flint Aero tip tanks), plus our two bags, plus Fizer's 150-plus pounds of camera gear. Even

so, the takeoff was spectacular, with a 2,500-fpm climbout to our initial altitude of 6,500 feet msl. Our route would take us over Dalhart, Texas, then loop southward past the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and through a pass to Albuquerque. The engine had a mere 10 hours or so on it, so the rule was to run it hard so as to break it in properly. With that in mind, once level at 6,500 feet msl, I set the engine for best power, running

at 100 degrees Fahrenheit rich of peak exhaust gas temperature (EGT). Would the result be the promise of 160 KTAS? Well, here are the numbers: At 14 degrees Celsius, running at 23.8 inches of manifold pressure (full throttle) and 2,500 rpm, burning a whopping 19.4 gph, we turned in 162 KTAS. This was at 71 percent power. So, yes, Virginia, a fixed-gear Skylane can fly close to Bonanza speeds. And a slight tailwind component didn't hurt our groundspeed, either.

Over the Llano Estacado the terrain rose and turned bleak. We were in Comanche (the tribe, not the airplane) country, and the cockpit chatter began to center on Comanche history, as described in a new book by S.C. Gwynne—*Empire of the Summer Moon*. It was difficult to ponder what the consequences of a forced landing might be in this terrain, but not to worry. The engine ran strong.

ABQ to GYR: 372 nm; 2+45

We gassed up at Cutter Aviation, then blasted off on the second leg of the day, one that would take us southward to help avoid five-digit minimum en route



On approach to Albuquerque International Sunport's Runway 3 (above). To enter Albuquerque's airspace from the east, we descended through the pass in the background. JP Instruments' EDM-930 shows the readouts taken when flying at 71 percent power (right).



altitudes. We flew past the TCS (Truth or Consequences), SVC (Silver City), and SSO (San Simon) VORs at 10,500 feet. Up that high, full throttle would give us just 64-percent power, and yet we turned in 147 KTAS, burning a more sedate 15.5 gph at a 50-degree rich of peak EGT mixture setting. Not bad, eh?

Because the “autopilot” (really a wing-leveler) was broken, hand flying was the order of the day. That’s fine, but the Crossover Classic is right-wing heavy, and if you let go of the yoke you’ll soon be in an ever-steepening right spiral. I transferred fuel from the Flint Aero wingtip tanks to see if this would help remedy the situation. To do this, you put the main fuel selector on the left main tank, then turn on the right tip tank’s transfer pump (you reverse

enough, we were descending south of Phoenix for another gas stop at the Phoenix-Goodyear Airport.

GYR to PSP: 208 nm; 2+00

My original plan was to end the flying day at Long Beach, but the weather had other plans. At Phoenix I learned that the LA basin was down to low instrument meteorological conditions. There was no way I was going to fly on instruments in this airplane—yet. (Advantage Avionics of Chino, California, is solving that problem as you read this, installing a Garmin G500 avionics suite and a Cobham/S-Tec System Fifty-Five X flight control system.) Flying with a single nav/com and a handheld GPS is not my idea of being fully armored for low-IFR battle.



A short hop from Palm Springs, after weaving our way past VFR waypoints in LA terminal airspace, was the destination—Long Beach (above). This trip segment may have been the shortest, but it had more legs than the trip from ICT to ABQ!

this procedure for transferring from the left tip tank). A half-hour later, the tip tank’s 11.5 gallons will have moved to the right main tank.

But we were still right-wing heavy. Oh, well, I needed to make sure the tips transferred anyway. You can watch the tip tanks’ fuel levels on a dedicated gauge over on the right side of the panel—outboard of the JP Instruments EDM-930 (which performed flawlessly, I might add).

Fizer took the wheel for several long stretches during the entire trip. Although not a certificated pilot, he should be. He could maintain altitude and heading within 100 feet and 10 degrees, no problem. And it was great to have him hold up that right wing for a while. Soon

After yet another breathtaking climbout, we set our sights for Palm Springs (PSP). My preflight weather briefing mentioned surface winds of 14 gusting to 20 knots, but other than that the ceilings and visibilities were good. We plodded on, over the Sonoran Desert and the Chocolate Mountains. By then, night had fallen and—save the automobile lights on I-10—the terrain went black. But every once in a while we could see a solitary porch light in the middle of nowhere. It’s a common sight when flying over the desert at night. Who, I always wonder, lives way out there, perhaps 75 miles from the nearest sign of civilization?

The route went from Phoenix to the BLH (Blythe) and TRM (Thermal) VORs,

followed by a descending right turn into Palm Springs. But the arrival would be no picnic. The winds had picked up. It was 20 gusting to 35 at Palm Springs, and several airplanes on final approach (one of them a Falcon jet) reported airspeed losses of up to 50 knots. That's serious. I vowed to use only the second notch of flaps and fly down final at 90 knots (about 10 knots faster than usual) to give us a margin against airspeed losses.

It was turbulent in the descent, and soon enough I was cleared to land. On short final, the bottom dropped out and the trusty old Crossover Classic sank mightily. The downdraft—or wind shear, or both—made the ground rise at an alarming rate. Good thing we had 300 horsepower to help us out. A gob of power and we were back on the glide-path for a pretty good landing, if I must say so myself.

PSP to LGB: 70 nm, 0+35

The next day dawned bright and clear, and the trip to Long Beach was a snap. We followed the recommended VFR route for east arrivals to Long Beach, and soon enough the trip was over. It was an unqualified success. The engine was very close to being broken in, all the newly installed systems worked perfectly, and visitors to AOPA Aviation Summit had the chance to lay eyes on this rare bird.

Summit's static display

Over the three days that the Crossover Classic was on display, scads of members came by to see the airplane they might win. Many had read about the airplane—either in *AOPA Pilot* or on the Crossover Classic website blogs (thanks for following along)—and were armed with all sorts of questions. A few took down detailed information about the Air Plains conversion and the airplane's performance, and I got the feeling that at least two potential customers would soon be winging their way to the Air Plains facility.

Another popular question: What's the next step in the Crossover Classic's transformation? Answer: Advantage Avionics in Chino, California. Stay tuned for the developments at that excellent avionics shop, and don't forget to check the Crossover Classic website for the very latest photos and blogs. See you soon! **ACPA**

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