

HOW TO HAVE 1000 MILES OF

By: Jack E. Watson, (A.K.A. Race 25)

It's hard to imagine that this is the seventh running of the AirVenture Cup Race. I missed the first year. Flew five straight races and now with the misses laid up after a knee replacement I'm sidelined for the 2005 race. I'm not much of a nurse (as my wife will attest.) But thanks to the many volunteers who made this race possible I will always and forever be known to my non-flying friends as Jack...the race pilot, and "RACE 25" to my fellow racers. Yea, I know that sounds lame, but what the hey! I've recounted my adventures and misadventures so often to friends and fellow pilots that I'm beginning to understand how legends (and TALL stories) actually evolve.

If you're new to the race, I'm sure you will feel as I did my first time. Relax...yes this is competition, and it is the fastest motor-sport in the world. Some how in the past six years none of us have managed to kill ourselves despite bad weather and several un-planned landings. But, the safety record of this event is impeccable, due to the diligence and detailed planning by the organizers. Listen carefully at the briefings, ask questions, and seek out veteran racers for advice. Their will be winners and those who do not win. Ultimately you will all win something, even if it's just bragging rights. I won last years Unlimited class because the competition dropped out. The trophy looks great in my office...and I tell all my non flying friends all kinds of Mark Twain style stories about my classic dual at the finish line with some of the best pilots in the world. What do they know? They think a Ford Tri-Motor is a late 60's auto. Win or lose, all of you can tell your friends what you did this summer, without being embarrassed! Beats telling them you went camping at Yellowstone...



This event has a unique history. It started it's first year as a 1000 mile non-stop race from Kitty Hawk to Oshkosh, and now is in its seventh iteration. Each year the race has changed. Only one 1000 mile non-stop race was flown, then it became a one stop (Dayton,) and now for the second time a non-stop 500 mile course. Having flown the short course race last year (Dayton via Rockford to Oshkosh) I definitely feel that the race is better, safer and logistically more feasible than in previous years. Many of the veterans remember the fast fly-by abeam the Wright Brothers Memorial and hearing their race number called out as flew low level down the runway at First Flight. It was an incredible thrill to start a race in an experimental homebuilt aircraft by passing the Wright's first powered flight landing strip. Let me take you back five years to my first race (the second one held!)

"Ah, race 25 mark!" It felt like a thousand volts of electricity had connected all my vital organs as I pulled the nose of the Long EZ away from the dark ribbon of concrete immediately west of the towering Wright Brothers Memorial. The tiny t-handled throttle was nailed against its stop, and if willing the airspeed higher could have helped I would be flying at 500 knots not a meager 150 as indicated on my knotmeter. As the monument flashed by my right, I think I held my breath, hoping I wouldn't insult the spirit of the Wright's by my noisy intrusion on their hallowed ground. Smoothly now I laid on a course to Dayton and amidst the "mark" calls of other racers crossing the start line I settled in for the first of many adventures over the next five years in what was then the longest air race in North America for experimental aircraft.



Heading west toward the rising terrain of the Allegheny Mountain range I found myself enthralled with the amount of seemingly vacant land that makes up most of the Eastern United States. As nervous chatter exploded on the race common frequency I realized that the lively banter acted as seltzer of sort that probably helped settle the butterflies of the "new-guys" of which I was one. I slept very little the night before not knowing what to expect...sort of like waiting on a check ride. Keep in mind, at the time I was a 30,000 plus hour airline captain...butterflies are something I don't readily admit to. Usually I fly so high that the terrain below is hardly recognizable. And the cozy cockpit of an airliner is like my living room at home; a friendly and familiar place. Now I'm flying in a homebuilt aircraft that's as narrow as an Indy car, almost as fast and cost about as much to build as a set of wheels and tires on a race car. "This is insane," I say to myself as hug the ground as low as the law and my courage will allow avoiding headwinds at higher altitudes. To find a suitable landing site within gliding distance I'd have to be at 25,000 feet or higher. With 112 horsepower climbing is out of the question unless it's to clear a farmhouse...just kidding!

Ahead a wave of rolling hills slowly then suddenly become rigid peaked mountains dense with triple canopy trees that kept closing the distance between the Long EZ's belly and Mother Earth. That's all I'll see for the first two hours. To keep my mind off the lack of suitable landing site's I join in the race common banter to keep my mind off the dismal possibility of an engine failure. Running wide open and leaned a little south of peak the little O-235 L2C seemed to run rougher the more uninviting the terrain below becomes. I've got to get a bigger faster airplane, I think to myself. Hanging around these mountains at my slow 165 mph speed seemed to age me prematurely. Looking up I could see the con-trails of my airline brethren zooming along at 500 plus in their nice cozy air-

FUN IN 500 MILES OF FLYING!

conditioned multi-million dollar jets while the temp in my cockpit was over a hundred with a slow speed that almost matched. The higher I climbed the lower the temp got. But it never got below 90 degrees.

Concentrating on small control deflections needed to track a razor straight great circle route to Dayton, and keeping a cautious eye on the oil temp had become a full time job. An autopilot would be a big help but not as much fun...I think. Rational thought aside, I'm wondering why I decided to try this racing thing. Abruptly my engine skips a beat, or so I think, and my heart misses a pumping stroke. Wow...I had know idea these little mountains reached up to 4,000 feet plus. As I clear a ridge line by about 50 feet I find a small gap in the next ridge that looks like the last of the Allegheny Mountains. I've already flown over three states and flying smoothly between the 100 foot wide void that separates these two peaks I start a shallow dive sort of "nap-of-the-earth" F-111 dive toward the Allegheny Plateau below and ahead. I don't know about the rest of the racers but the thrill of having the mountains behind me ranked a 9.9 on my "Fellin' Good" score card.

The ride still seems best hugging the dirt and the temperature is back to 100 plus in the cockpit as I bounce along trying to keep from under-flying guy wires from the numerous transmission towers along the route. I've got to push the mixture in a little to keep the EGT and CHT happy. A double take at my oil temp makes me doubt my abilities as an aviator. Gee, golly I didn't know oil temp could get that high with out the engine failing...glad the mountains are at my "six!" Got to climb...find a little cooler air. Pushing the mixture forward and popping up a thousand feet got the temp back to the edge of the yellow and I carefully re-leaned the engine. Up ahead a scattered deck shielded the blazing sun from the ground and looked to be a little cooler than a few miles back. Now I'm going down again. Ground speed increased about 5 mph from the previous low level flying speed. It's a bumpy, but faster ride and the temps are at the top of the green across the board. I'm not sure how



efficient that POGO maneuver was...probably lost a minute or two. I won't know until the finish line and months of reflection about the benefit of multiple altitude changes during the race. This is unlike RENO style pylon racing where spectators can easily tell (as can the pilots) who's leading and who's following. I would find over the course of several races that in a cross country race you must always assume you're in last place trying to take the lead. More important, and definitely unlike RENO, if something happens to you or your plane during the race it could be a very long time before help arrives...so I would learn over the years to plan my options accordingly. Over flat land the race becomes more interesting as quite a few of the racers are now on the deck flying beneath the headwind. I see a few of the faster planes pass below me...looks like their at freeway level...must be an illusion. I even pass a plane. Not sure they are part of the race but it felt good to pass something other than vehicular traffic. I change frequency for the Dayton finish line about 20 miles out. The air temp is finally settles below a hundred in the cockpit. The butterflies and pre race jitters are only a memory. With the finish line in sight I lower the nose for a dive to the deck at about 200 per. Passing the time keeper at about 10 feet off the deck I pull up sharply and break for the downwind cool off. "Nice job race 25." The finish line time keeper keys on his mic. Leg one is over and I am now (to my own satisfaction) a race pilot.

This is only a brief glimpse of the race experience I had as a first timer. Each year I raced, a new adventure would write itself. Countless tales will be told for years about the early days of the AirVenture Cup Race. Some have been published on EAA's AirVenture Cup web site others have graced the pages of the race program you're now reading. All of the stories had a common element. They were about common people doing an extraordinary thing. FLYING EXPERIMENTAL AIRPLANES THAT MOST OF THEM HAD BUILT THEMSELVES IN AN ALL OUT RACE! To many of you this may not seem such a big deal as to merit a word like "EXTRAORDINARY!" But take it from the history books if you don't believe me. Only about a thousand extraordinary individuals have ever earned the right to call themselves a race pilot. Now you are among those numbered!

With all the flying I've done over a forty year career I still get charged up when I hear my ol' call sign "RACE 25." I like it! But my wife refuses to call me "Race 25" or Captain for that matter. So I guess I'll have to stay in racing to keep the moniker. This race pilot stuff is WAY KOOL! But as you new racers will soon learn it's what you do with your life that counts not the title that's given you. Flying your first race will certainly be an experience to remember and will certainly add worth to your life's experiences. I'm certain you'll agree that when you cross the finish line you will have had a thousand miles of fun in 500 miles of flying.

I'm sorry I can't race with you this year. But like the California Governor is so fond of saying...I'LL BE BAK!!! Fly safe and straight.