

Interrupted Pre-Flight Leads to Disaster

Robert Grady (CT) - I totaled my Vari-Eze, N728RJ due to fuel exhaustion. With 16 gallons on board for the planned one hour flight and 30 hours in the aircraft I felt confident. I planned to determine fuel flow for different altitudes. I had experienced some lead fouling with the 100LL I was using and planned to add TCP to the fuel.

During pre flight, I checked the right tank and remembered the TCP I was going to add. I added it but forgot to tighten the Dzus fitting on the cap. I completed the preflight and took off. My airplane has a clock with big numbers in front of me on the panel and fuel sight gages that are hard to see while flying. I use the clock to determine fuel quantity remaining. I had seen a fuel gage at Sun' n Fun I planned to install but - - -. You can guess what happened next.

The first trouble indicator was a cough during descent. I climbed and headed toward the airport - - just in case. Four minutes later at 8,000' I heard what no pilot wants to hear - silence. I did what I was supposed to do, "Fly the airplane". I looked for a landing place and thought I might make the airport ten miles ahead. I almost made it but realized I might hit houses in my glide path so I headed for some trees near the airport. The next minutes were hectic but I managed to free the canopy latch, however the safety latch did its job and I could not get the canopy completely open. As the plane descended through the trees it turned upside down and wedged between some trees and a rock about four inches off the ground. I could not get out of the cockpit and spent the next 23 hours trapped in the plane.

I had been in contact with someone on the local frequency on the ramp but had not declared an emergency so FSS just called the FBO and asked if there was an experimental on the ramp. There was, but it was not me! There was no further action. It was not until later that night when a friend went to check his airplane that he noticed my plane was not back and

my car was still parked behind my tie-down. He was concerned and called other friends to see if they knew my whereabouts. The next morning they had gathered to initiate a search. The first plane off spotted the wreckage and I was rescued about half an hour later, dehydrated, but otherwise none the worse for wear.

I learned some things that I hope will help others in similar situations. First, the Vari-Eze is a great flyer and the construction strength is tremendous. There was no damage to the cockpit and the harness held me intact. Second, at the hint of any trouble, **Communicate!** Third, if you rely on sight gages only, consider upgrading to something showing fuel quantity on the panel. A clock is not enough because apparently the cap was just loose enough for the fuel to be siphoned out in after 42 minute, including what was in the header tank. I don't understand this but the logs mentioned the tendency for the header to drain the mains after sitting for a long time. I did not notice that while I had the plane, but there must have been a flaw in the fuel selector valve.

Others suggestions include: Even on short hops, tell someone what you intend to do. I crashed only a quarter mile from the runway but nobody knew I was there. Carry backup communication. Usually I carry a handheld but I was only going in the area that day so I didn't think I needed it. **DO NOT VARY YOUR PRE-FLIGHT ROUTINE!!**

Lastly, because the airplane is so strong and the canopy almost unbreakable, make sure you carry one of those all purpose tools that fold up with you. Mine was in the car.

I was lucky. I survived. The lesson I learned was not to take things for granted. From here on out, I will be especially alert if my pre-flight is interrupted or changed. I shall remember my Boy Scout motto, "Be Prepared".

Unfortunately, my bird is totaled but I am still around to fly again.

Now is the Chance to: Fly Australia

Allan Aaron (Australia) - I invite any of you canard enthusiasts to join me and my family on a 2 week "fly yourself holiday" around Australia, tentatively set for next May.

I'll arrange airplane rental and coordinate distribution of maps, briefing, regulatory material, background travel information, and investigate license conversion requirements with our FAA equivalent, etc. I'll organize accommodation to suit budgets and preferences of travelers, organize tours and activities: deep sea fishing, diving, sightseeing, 4x4 trekking, art galleries, opal mining etc.

Flying Australia is pretty easy, with much less congested airspace than in the USA. My wife, Shereen, will probably fly commercially to a couple of the choicest spots with my 6 year old while my 11 year old son will fly with me. Some of you with less enthusiastic fliers as spouses or with young kids may wish to do the same.

A typical 4 seater rents for about US \$70 per hour with fuel. The plan is to share flying costs (by hours as PIC or bums in seats??). Food is relatively cheap here - though portions are not nearly as big as you yanks are used to! I don't know what flights to Sydney cost but I can get a Sydney to LA flight for as little as US \$600, or more typically, say US \$1000.

If you think this sounds fun, please reply. (allana@interconnect.com.au) or FAX (61 2 93372118). I'll return a more detailed plan and information relative to destinations and sights.

Please note **this is not a commercial venture!** We'd be delighted to have some of you with a common interest join us for what we hope will be a great holiday! Each time I go to the USA many folks say they want to come down and visit Australia ... well here is your chance to do it and see more in 2 weeks than most others will see in 2 months.... and not pay tourist rates to do it!

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