

Tales of two crossings—TBM 700

Second of two parts

With Reykjavik, iceberg fields, and the Greenland ice cap behind them, the TBM 700 crew lands on Narsarsuaq's Runway 7. The airport is tucked into the end of a fjord that's often loaded with fog—and more icebergs.

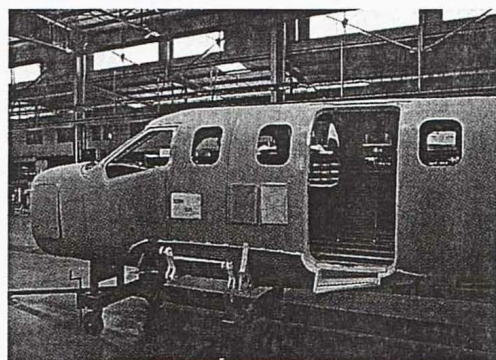
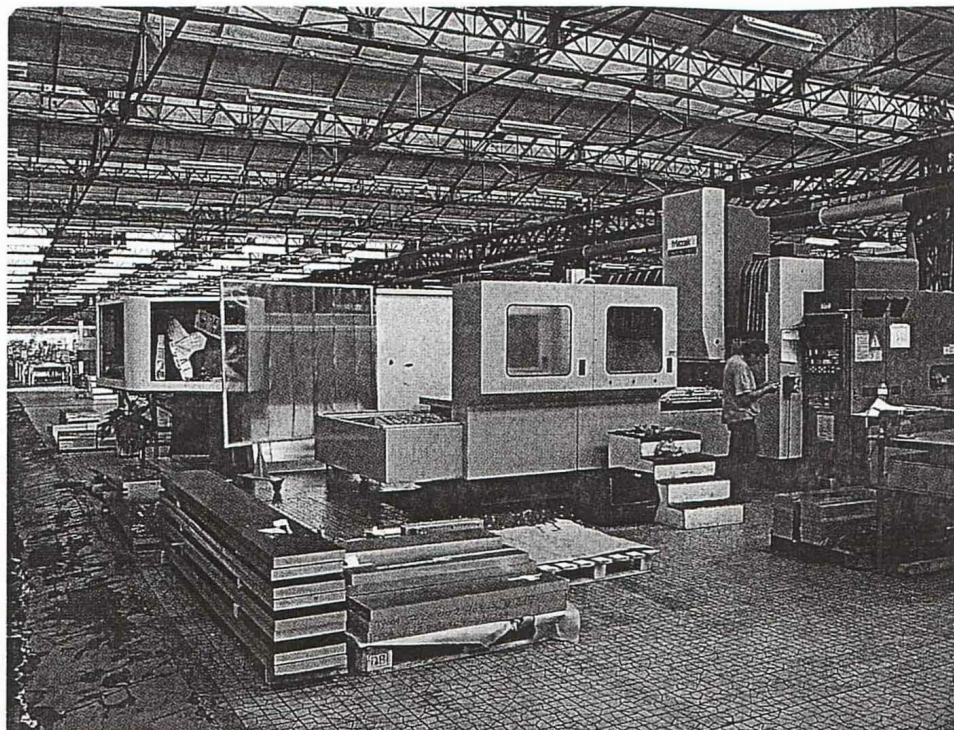


Atlantic adventure

Coming to
America in a
TBM 700

BY THOMAS B. HAINES

IT isn't until photographer Mike Fizer nearly goes face first into his duck à l'orange that I realize just how long our day has been—and it has only started. Fizer's droopy eyes and nodding head are not the result of too much wine at this never-ending French lunch. Instead his near-delirium comes from more than 24 hours without sleep—much of that spent sitting knees-to-chin in coach class aboard an airliner crossing the Atlantic from Washington, D.C., to Paris and then another airliner to Tarbes in the south of France. Tomorrow we will make the return trip in a new Socata TBM 700 single-engine turboprop. Undoubtedly the comfort will be more to our liking. For now, though, all I want to do is brush my teeth. ■ As with *Pilot* Editor at Large Tom Horne's Atlantic crossing in a Pilatus PC-12 (see "Tales of Two Crossings: Westbound, Hammer Down," December 1998 *Pilot*), this opportunity came about through a telephone call. In my case, it was from Nicholas Chabbert, the president of Socata Aircraft, the U.S. company that markets the TBM 700 and Socata's line of piston singles in North America.



Socata's newest building at its manufacturing site on the Tarbes-Ossun-Lourdes Airport houses the assembly lines for the TBM 700 and subcontract work for other French and European aerospace manufacturers. The new TBMs, with their extra-large cabin doors as standard equipment (top right), are replacing the earlier design's narrower door (bottom right). A pilot's door with folding steps, set ahead of the wing leading edge, is optional on the new airplanes.

Socata is a division of French aerospace giant Aerospatiale, which builds everything from light airplanes and airliners to satellites.

In a voice mail message last June, Chabbert said that the company would be flying the first TBM 700 with the new enlarged cargo door and new front pilot's door from the factory in Tarbes to the Socata U.S. headquarters at North Perry Airport just north of Miami. Would I be interested in flying it across? Twenty hours of turboprop time to exotic places with names such as Reykjavik and Narsarsuaq—*where* and *when* are my only questions.

Fast forward a couple of weeks to mid-July as we step outside the restaurant on the airport at Tarbes, half asleep after our long airline flight and a four-course French lunch. The south of France is spectacular on this summer day. Looking to the south, we can see the snow-topped Pyrenees in Spain. We have only the rest of the day to explore the Socata factory, so we decide to power through the sleepiness.

The factory's half-dozen buildings house the offices and assembly lines for the TBM 700 and the Caribbean line of piston singles: the Tampico, two models of the Tobago, and turbo and normally aspirated versions of the Trinidad.

After a short night, we are met by Jean-François Sochor, one of Socata's test pilots and our host for the flight. At the airport, we check weather. As we

walk across the ramp to our steed—TBM 700 F-GLBL, serial number 126—three other Socata pilots taxi out in Tampicos. They're on a delivery flight to Turkey. It will take them three days to make the journey; we'll be in Miami tomorrow evening.

By 8 a.m., I settle into the TBM 700's left seat and close the pilot's door. The new optional door allows the pilot to enter and exit the airplane without coming through the cabin. It, combined with the new standard large cabin door, makes the speedy TBM 700 an excellent air ambulance or package delivery aircraft. Sochor was the original test pilot for the TBM 700 when it was developed in the mid 1980s. To say he knows the airplane well is like saying Orville and Wilbur Wright had only a little something to do with early aviation. In addressing him, it's all Fizer and I can do to call him Jean-François and not Jean-Luc—as in Jean-Luc Picard, the captain of the starship *Enterprise* on the television show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. He's wearing boots, a freshly pressed flight suit, and sunglasses. Pencils, pens, flashlights, and other gear are strategically stowed in the suit's plethora of pockets. As we taxi out, he carefully and purposefully puts on a pair of leather driving gloves. He looks every bit the part of a modern-day French aeronaut. Louis Blériot would be proud.

Sochor entertains my myriad questions and finally by 8:15 a.m. local time,

just 18 hours after we had stepped off the airliner, I advance the thrust lever for takeoff. Despite our max gross weight takeoff, the agile TBM 700 sprints down the runway and we're airborne, headed for a waypoint called

NORTH ATLANTIC 'LOTING CHART

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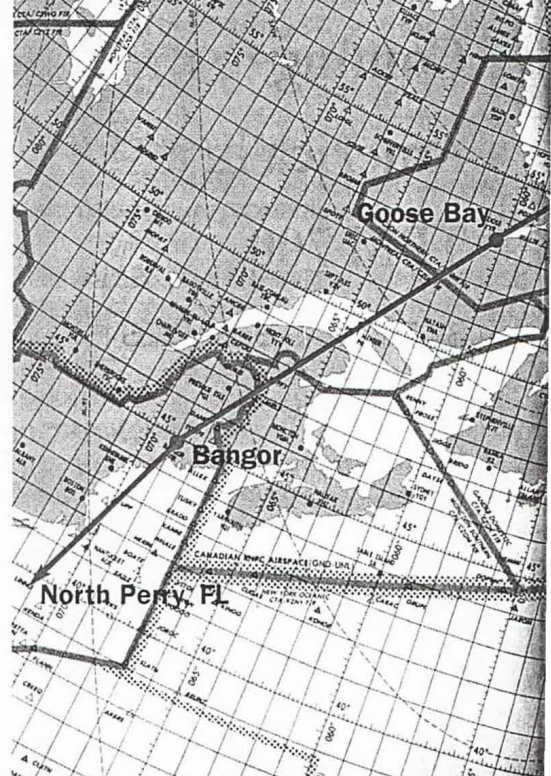
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FLIGHT _____

DATE _____

1. Coast Projection. Standard Parallel: 45° and 45°.

1993 (Supersedes Lines)



About an hour and 15 minutes into the trip and just southwest of Normandy, the French shoreline emerges from beneath the clouds. We have flown

Crossing the English Channel, we hear from British controllers and are soon handed off to Scottish Control as

we proceed toward our first stop at Glasgow, Scotland. The wind at Glasgow is forecast to be at 17 knots gusting to 25, so I expect my first landing to be a gusty one. I have flown the TBM 700 before, but not in nearly a year. As we approach Glasgow, we get the latest ATIS. Fortunately the forecast was wrong. The winds are 280 degrees at only eight knots with a few clouds between 1,600 and 1,800 feet. Approach vectors us to join the localizer. As

There's no time for golf, though. We taxi to the FBO and dash inside to check weather and file a flight plan for the next leg, to Reykjavik, Iceland. We grab

Back up at FL 260, I take the opportunity to more closely survey the professional-looking panel. TBM 700 pilots want for little. There's a two-tube electronic flight instrumentation system that allows a variety of map displays, including overlay of weather radar data. Standby flight instruments on the copilot's side provide redundancy, as does

The map displays the North Atlantic Ocean with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. Key locations marked include Reykjavik, Narsarsuaq, Glasgow, and Tarbes. A legend in the bottom right corner defines the symbols for ACFT IDENT, COMMANDER, CO-PILOT, and ATLANTIC CLEARANCE. The map also shows various flight paths and aircraft positions, with labels for specific aircraft and their status.

NOTES

ACFT IDENT _____

COMMANDER _____

CO-PILOT _____

ATLANTIC CLEARANCE _____



On short final to Reykjavik's Runway 2 (above). In Narsarsuaq, Jean-François Sochor (left) and Tom Haines look over the next leg's weather.

the standby generator. The cockpit is well configured for single-pilot operations. An automatic system even switches between the left and right fuel tanks to assure a proper fuel balance. The electric aileron trim isn't used much. The electric rudder trim is a necessity to counteract the torque on takeoff. I find myself adjusting it with the changing of each phase of flight. The sophisticated pressurization system has a 6.0 psi differential at this altitude, with a 6.2 psi maximum. As a result, the cabin is at a comfortable 7,500 feet. Fizer snoozes in the back with plenty of legroom, despite all of our gear.

Fifty minutes into the flight, we cross the Stornoway VOR and leave the coast of Scotland behind. Ahead is 61N10W (61 degrees north latitude, 10 degrees west longitude), our first over-water waypoint and my first Atlantic crossing in a GA airplane. A little nervous at the thought of 500 miles of open water between me and the next chunk of real estate, I triple-check all the systems. I am glad that if I'm crossing a lot of deep,



cold water behind a single engine that it's one as proven and reliable as the PT6. The autopilot, slaved to the GPS, rolls smartly to the next heading as if it were flying to some high-powered VOR ahead instead of a point over the North Atlantic. The GPS is communicating with the Shadin fuel flow computer and,

as a result, we know to the minute when we'll get to Reykjavik, how much fuel it will take, and how much we'll have upon landing. I think of Charles Lindbergh and his historic solo crossing only six decades earlier. Wouldn't he be amazed at how simple it is now?

The weather charts at Glasgow



Getting into Narsarsuaq is one thing. Getting out—on a weekend—is another. The airport doesn't open until 8 a.m. on Sundays so an early departure meant some waiting around and passing baggage through a hole in the fence before takeoff.

showed our route crossing two jet streams. We lumber along at 255 knots groundspeed at first. We then smoothly cross one jet stream and our speed kicks up to 275 knots. Minutes later we cross the second jet and the speed zooms to 287 knots. I'm surprised by the amount of traffic on the frequency. Scottish Control is working all sorts of airliners and military traffic. From these altitudes, the VHF radios seem to work fine. Down low we'd need either a high-frequency radio or a friendly airliner to relay our positions.

It's a nice summer day in Reykjavik—wind out of the northeast at nine knots, 60 degrees Fahrenheit, unrestricted visibility, and a few clouds at 3,200 feet. Farms and fishing villages dot the coastline as we approach the city. The airport is located in the center of town. We touch down on Runway 2 exactly three hours after leaving Glasgow.

When you're in Reykjavik with only 45 minutes to spare (*and* based on my 45 minutes in Reykjavik), I recommend the gift shop at the Loftleidir Hotel, which is located a few yards from the FBO. Grabbing a couple of pairs of

lambs' wool slippers and an Iceland baseball cap and T-shirt as souvenirs, I jog back to the airplane, wondering how much *is* 10,000 kroner anyhow? Guess I'll know when the credit card bill comes.

I jog back to the airplane, wondering how much is 10,000 kroner anyhow? Guess I'll know when the credit card bill comes.

The fuel truck pulls away and it's time to go again.

We're cleared to the EMBLA intersection west of Iceland. Then a string of lat/lon waypoints leads us toward Greenland. When still 315 nm from Narsarsuaq, our next stop, we see the craggy white mountains that heave themselves up out of the deep blue ocean to form Greenland—the name is a big-time misnomer. There's nothing green about it. Giant icebergs guard the shore. We cross the island's east coast and start our descent. Visibility is unrestricted; there's not a cloud around anywhere and the scenery is indescribably stark, yet brilliant. Black rock peeks

through linen-white ice caps. We fly along in awed silence.

The distance to Narsarsuaq counts down, but still no airport in sight. Finally, we spot it hidden in the fjord, as I had been told it would be. We're too high to

land, so we descend into a parallel fjord and admire the view. We then hang a hard right, head up another fjord, and then make another right and plunk the airplane onto the runway.

It's Saturday afternoon in Narsarsuaq and we're the only ones around. Sochor places a fuel order and we head upstairs in the terminal building to the weather office. The controller is also the weather briefer. The weather looks good for the rest of the trip. We're planning to spend the night in Narsarsuaq, but debate about whether to continue to Goose Bay, Newfoundland, today. Finally, with nine hours and 15 minutes of flying in for the day, we decide to stick with the

original plan. A bus arrives, we throw our gear aboard, and head down the narrow road to the hotel. It, the airport, and a few apartment buildings seem to be about all there is in town. The sun sets sometime around midnight and rises again a couple of hours later.

We're up early and head to the airport, only to discover that the terminal doesn't open until 8 a.m. on Sundays. We do our best to fend off the gnats and mosquitoes. Finally Sochor spots an opening in the fence and we begin loading the airplane. After a fashion, the controller and terminal crew arrive and we can be on our way. At Narsarsuaq, you land on Runway 7, which is uphill and into the fjord. You take off on Runway 25, which ends over water. Then you can snake your way down the fjords to the ocean or climb out of the fjord by circling above the airport. There's fog in the fjord, so we climb above it and then head southwestward.

Just more than three hours after leaving the starkness of Greenland, we land in lush Goose Bay.

After a quick turn and a call to advise U.S. Customs of our arrival time, we launch for Bangor, Maine; it is the first time in the whole trip—through six countries—that we deal with customs or immigration. Scattered heavy rain-showers pelt the airplane and turbulence rocks us as we continue southwestward, this time at FL 280. The true airspeed holds at about 280 knots, but the groundspeed jumps to 307.

At Bangor, a friendly Customs agent completes the paperwork while sitting in the cabin of the airplane to escape a passing rainshower. An Immigration officer gives Fizer's and my passports a quick once-over and then has Sochor fill out some forms.

After fueling once again, we head for Charleston, South Carolina. From there south, the weather is rotten—thunderstorms everywhere. Charlie South is forecasting winds out of the southeast at 14 gusting to 19 with clouds at 3,000 to 4,000 feet. Leaving Maine, we head down the East Coast of the United States, passing over Boston and New York.

I notice that Sochor is constantly looking at his watch. Finally, out of nowhere, he asks if the controller might know the score of the World Cup soccer match. The final match, between France and Brazil, is under way in Paris and he is fretting about missing it. Doubtful, I call Washington Center: "Center, Fox Gulf Lima Bravo Lima, we have a French national on board. He's awfully curious

about the World Cup score."

"France is winning two to nothing," the controller fires back instantly—obviously a soccer fan. Sochor speaks English pretty well, but the U.S. controllers are particularly difficult for the French to understand. I translate as best I can. I know he gets it when he lets out a whoop and pumps his hands up and down in excitement.

France maintains the lead as I crab into the stiff crosswind for the landing at Charleston after three hours and 50 minutes, the longest leg of the trip.

The weather is deteriorating to the south as I check the weather and file the flight plan for the final leg to North Perry, just north of Miami. There are thunderstorms everywhere over Central Florida and another bunch of Level Four and Five cells that have already passed through the area and are off the East Coast. The briefer recommends that we head right down the coast and even go offshore a few miles to avoid the worst of the storms.

It is good advice. With the help of the weather radar, we manage to stay clear

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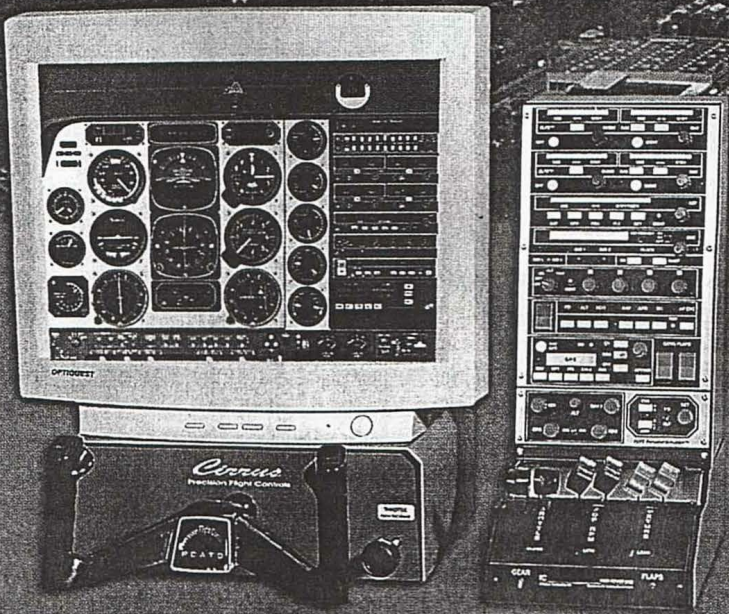
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of the storms, but not without a lot of deviating. Even at FL 280, the big cells tower overhead. ATC descends us to FL 200 well north of our destination. There

To celebrate our journey and the arrival of the first of the new TBM 700s with the improved doors, we pop open a bottle of champagne—the good stuff—that Sochor has stashed in the cabin.



we pick up a little ice. It seems ironic that we had just come from Iceland and Greenland and hardly seen a cloud, let alone ice. And now, in Florida, we get ice. Airliners are holding everywhere trying to get into Orlando and Daytona Beach. We receive seemingly countless reroutings and vectors, and yet I feel quite at home in the TBM 700. It handles the weather with aplomb. Flying the TBM 700 is like having the ultimate sports car. It's fast and sporting to fly, yet it rides turbulence well and trundles down the localizer with ease, whether mixing it up with Bonanzas or Boeings.

We finally pick our way through the last of the rainshowers and spot North Perry. As we call in for landing clearance, the tower controller volunteers that France has won the match. The news, coupled with an inelegant but successful landing on North Perry's rain-slicked and short runway, is an excellent capstone to a long day of flying. To celebrate our journey and the arrival of this first of the new TBM 700s with the improved doors, we pop open a bottle of champagne—the good stuff—that Sochor has stashed in the cabin. Minutes later, thunder cracks and the skies open up as we push the airplane into the hangar at Socata's U.S. headquarters.

Later, as we have dinner along the beach in Fort Lauderdale, I look out at the dark ocean and reflect on our trip:

4,478 nm in 20.3 hours of flying over two days. Way across that ocean is where we started just yesterday morning. What is most remarkable about the

trek is that nothing remarkable happened. The TBM 700 performed flaw-

lessly hour after hour, flight after flight. It made even a rookie ocean-crosser like me look pretty good. It was the best kind of adventure—exciting but not overly adventuresome. Like Horne, I'm waiting by the telephone for the next such opportunity to come along. □

To view additional photos of the Socata TBM 700, check out the AOPA OnlineGallery (www.aopa.org/pilot/gallery). E-mail the author at thomas.haines@aopa.org

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