

Atlantic Long-EZ Crossing

What do you do with your plane when you move overseas? Don't ship it—fly it!

BY JUAN RIVERA

Planning my North Atlantic crossing began in May, 1989, when my wife, an Air Force physician, received word that she was being assigned to Hahn Air Base in Germany. As initial research, I borrowed and read the January, 1989, copy of *IFR* magazine, which had an article in it about ocean crossings written by an experienced ferry pilot. Next, I contacted Bob Lavers at Air Transport Canada (506/857-7131) in Moncton, New Brunswick. He sent me a package that detailed all the requirements for crossing the North Atlantic in a single-engine aircraft.

In addition to a lot of paperwork and survival gear, the requirements include a full gyro panel, two long-range navigation radios and a high-frequency (HF) communications radio. I found a hand-held marine radio direction-finder that worked very well. The other long-range nav radio I had was a loran. Using the Goose Bay-Narsarsuaq-Keflavik route, loran coverage is normally good all the way to Scotland, but the Labrador Bay chain was down for maintenance during my trip. As I found out after I bought it, my Northstar loran was unable to receive the loran chains in Europe or past the Labrador Bay chain in the North Atlantic, so I had to rely on my second nav radio.

I was able to get a heading for the Simiutaq (SI) NDB on the coast of Greenland using both the Northstar and King marine lorans before the Labrador Bay chain went down. I was also able to use the East Canada chain all the way to the coast of Greenland, but the Northstar kept asking to change chains and warning about repeatability. The King loran worked great in the U.S., but not at all in Europe.

For the over-water crossing, a full immersion suit, life raft and sea survival pack are also required. The only spare items I carried along were a set of spark plugs and several quarts of oil. I used 100-weight oil, but now that it's all said and done, I would recommend a lighter weight because 100-weight felt pretty stiff when I was trying to hand-start the engine in Greenland. Furthermore, the oil temperature never got above 120°F on the flight from Greenland to Iceland.

One other item I had installed in the plane especially for the trip was an autopilot I bought from Navaid Devices. It worked well throughout the trip, allowing me to relax a bit during the long stretches over water.

Since the Long-EZ is licensed as an experimental airplane, I was required to contact all the countries in which I wanted to operate it to request validation of the airworthiness certificate. Canada and Iceland were aware of this rule, which is written in small print on the back of the certificate, but most of the other countries were not.

It was a classic example of bureaucratic red tape, but all the countries I wrote to eventually responded. The Danish version of the FAA said it would not validate my airworthiness certificate because, technically, the airplane was not certified. Fortunately, I was in and out of Greenland before I ever got the negative reply. In contrast to the official thumbs-down, the people at the airport in Narsarsuaq didn't care one bit about the rule; they even put my plane in the hangar with the government ice patrol planes overnight.

For maps, I relied on Jeppesen, which sold me a set of North Atlantic

charts, a VFR radio navigation chart for Germany, and an expensive set of books called *The Bottlang Airfield Manual*, which came in very handy by providing all the details I needed to know about international air travel.

I didn't install any extra fuel tanks because I planned legs that were only 700-750 nautical miles long. This left plenty of fuel to meet Air Transport Canada's 3-hour reserve fuel requirement.

The trip itself started from Dunnellon, Florida. I headed up the east coast to Barnes Airport in Massachusetts. Over the next two days, it was on to Caribou, Maine, and then across to Moncton, New Brunswick, for the required inspections by Air Transport Canada. Don't try to skip the inspection—security personnel checked my paperwork in Goose Bay and in Iceland.

After a low pass that was requested by the Moncton tower, I was off for the 4-hour flight north to Goose Bay. You need to telephone ahead for a PPR (prior permission required) number that you have to provide to approach control at Goose Bay Operations (709/896-7331). Outside the U.S., the plane seemed to get a lot of attention, with numerous controllers asking questions and always providing very good ATC service.

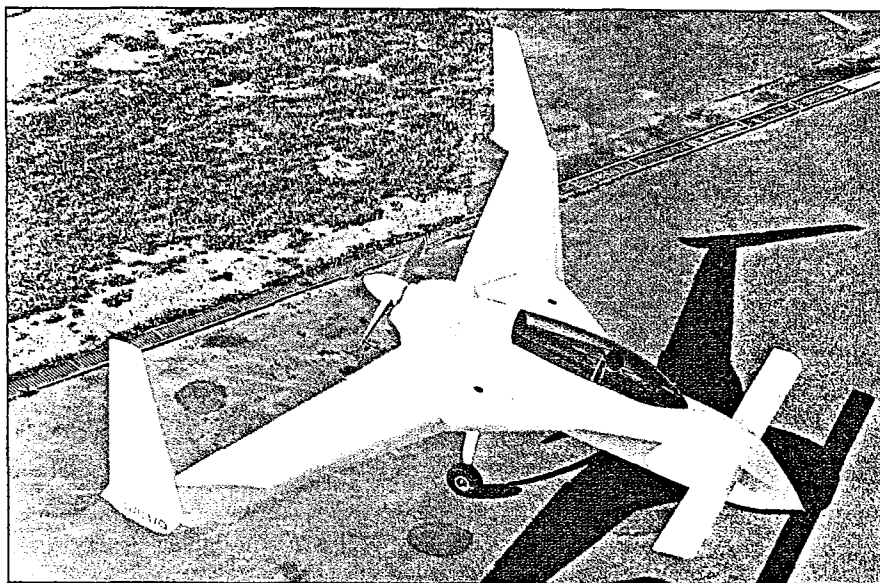
Goose Bay was my first landing at a primarily military airport, so phrases like "check wheels down" and "arresting cable up" made the approach a bit out of the ordinary.

Before I left, a lot of people I talked to about the trip told me that the weather briefing I'd get at Goose Bay would be something really special, and they were right. After having made an appointment the night before, the Weather Service had a folder

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The author's Long-EZ rests comfortably stateside before the trip to Germany via Labrador, Greenland, Iceland and Scotland.

Though not large enough to be called icebergs, huge chunks of ice like this float in the harbor at Narsarsuaq, Greenland, reminding Rivera that the waters of the North Atlantic are freezing cold.





LONG-EZ

continued

prepared for me that covered the entire flight. They also had a briefer go over it in depth with me. Because I was following a high pressure system out of the U.S., the weather couldn't have been any better.

After I was out of VHF range, I started using the airline traffic passing overhead to relay my position reports. Aircraft flying over the North Atlantic are required to monitor 121.5 MHz, and it is normal practice to call them and ask them to relay position reports. My calls always got an instant response. We usually arranged to meet on 131.8, the air-to-air frequency for the North Atlantic. There were always a lot of questions about my aircraft and the trip.

About 7 hours out of Goose Bay, the coast of Greenland and the fjords that lead to Narsarsuaq Airport came into view. Though Simiutaaq NDB is on the west coast, anyone flying too low to pick it up has three choices. You can fly up the fjord on the right as I did, which puts you on a long,

right base for the runway. If you follow the center fjord, you jump up over a hill and are on final. The third fjord does not lead to the runway. You shouldn't fly up the fjords if there are clouds below the tops of the ridges at 3600 feet. Instead, you use the Narsarsuaq NDB/DME approach to get in. There is an instrument approach depicted on the chart that uses the NDB and DME, but the local controller told me that the airport is normally only open for VFR traffic.

I stayed at the Arctic Hotel in Narsarsuaq, where the room was warm, clean and reasonably priced at about \$60 per night. It wasn't a difficult choice—it is the only hotel except during mid-summer, when a few other hotels open for the tourist season.

It snowed during the night, so I had to wait until noon before the low clouds and fog moved out to sea. Just before I left, the weekly airliner arrived and advised that they'd encountered a lot of turbulence over the ice cap on their way in from Iceland. Not having to be told twice, I passed on flying over any part of the ice cap,

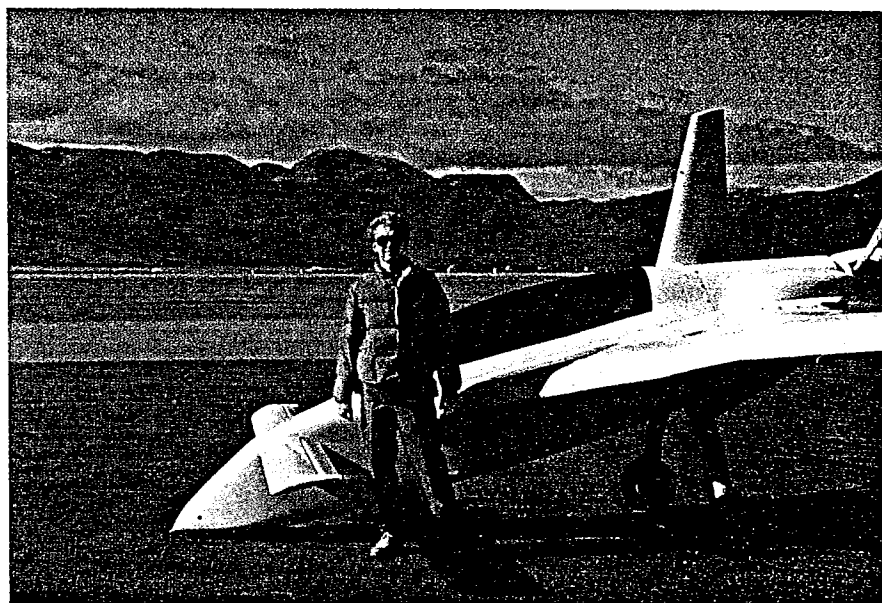
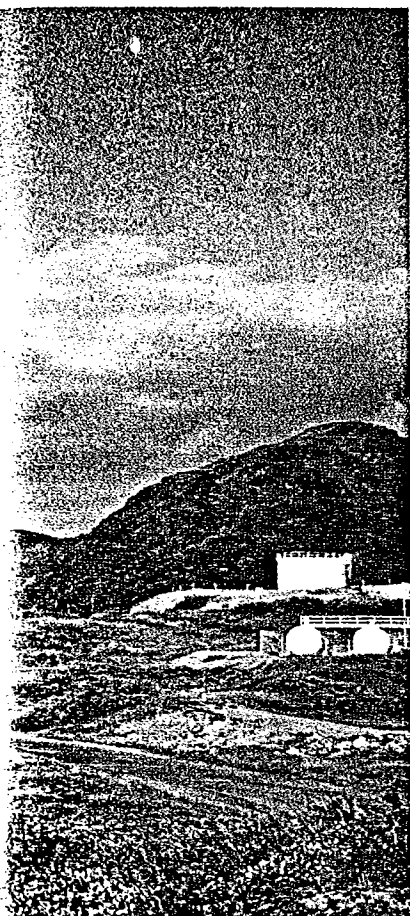
For this trip, Rivera considered the Long-EZ's fuel gauge the most important indicator on the airplane. Note the storage compartment built into the wing root/strake just above the arm rest.

and instead, headed out to sea and around the southern tip of Greenland before heading for Iceland. Once again, I got excellent service, complete with hourly satellite pictures of the weather developments. All this personal service was probably because the airliner and I were that facility's only traffic for the day.

During this leg of the flight, my only alternate airfield was Kulusuk, about 400 miles north on the east coast of Greenland. Kulusuk was reporting a snow storm, but I went ahead anyway because the satellite pictures showed a clear path all the way to Iceland.

That portion of the trip was uneventful, but very cold. I wore the immersion suit, but pulled off the top half after climbing into the cockpit. Wool pants and a down coat under

The author never did receive his Danish FAA paperwork, but he was treated like a hero by the locals during his overnight stay in Greenland (left). The airport at Narsarsuaq (right) is a welcome sight after leaving Goose Bay, Labrador, some 7 hours and 700 miles earlier.



the immersion suit were not quite enough to keep me warm. I was afraid to run the electric cabin heat because I couldn't tell if the legs of the suit were touching the heating elements or not, and all I needed was to catch my pants on fire! I was thoroughly chilled by the time I finally reached Iceland, especially since I was accustomed to the 90° temperatures I had left behind in Florida.

Iceland is supposed to be a North Atlantic radar outpost, but despite my transponder and providing the controllers my altitude and inbound VOR radial, they didn't see me until I was well over land.

If you can afford \$150 a night for a hotel, the Loftleder Hotel at Reykjavik Airport is an excellent choice. It offers pilots a discount rate and has a heated pool and seafood luncheon buffet you shouldn't miss. But I could only allow myself one night of luxury. The next day, I caught a shuttle bus over to the Navy base at Keflavik, where I spent two more nights waiting out wind and rain storms with steady 35- to 40-knot winds, and some military maneuvers that restricted low-level civil flying between

Iceland and Scotland.

Although the wind wasn't as strong as forecast on the trip between Iceland and Scotland, I purposely overcorrected to the south so that if I was off course, I wouldn't pass north of Scotland. All this put me about 20 miles south of Stornoway when I started picking up Benbecula VOR. After a call to Scottish information, I was on my way down the coast to Glasgow. Communications and radio navigation were weak down at lower altitudes in northern Scotland, but they improved after I cleared the hills and entered the valley leading to Glasgow.

Strong winds and rain delayed my departure from Glasgow the next day until nearly noon. After flying southeast into England for only a couple of hours, I began to run out of daylight, and the weather was turning into a solid deck below me. It was time to change plans and land at Tesside Airport on the central coast of England.

The next day was sunny and very windy, but I was off to Germany. I had radar service all the way across the North Sea. VFR traffic is required

to descend to 1000 feet around Amsterdam and again, I caught up with the rain and a ceiling that was lower than forecast. I had passed a small, hospitable-looking airport just inside the German border, so I called Dusseldorf Radar to say that I was heading back to land because of weather.

My wife, Peggy, drove the 200 kilometers north from Hahn Air Base to pick me up. I had to wait out a week of clear skies until the next weekend when she could take me back up for the short flight down to Koblenz, where the airport has a 3000-foot paved runway that overlooks the Moselle River. This would be home base for my airplane for the next four years.

All in all, it was a pretty smooth trip. The only real problem I encountered was the loran chain that was down for maintenance; but this was just a quirk and shouldn't be a problem for future flights. For the return flight four years from now, I'm planning to build and install a fuel tank in the back seat so I can take the Shannon-Gander route or go via the Azores. □