

A Vintage Taylorcraft Ferry Flight

Our airport manager Peter and I have been partners in our Comanche 260B for a few years now. Over the last year Peter seems to have been giving more and more thought to what sort of flying he will do when he retires. The Comanche is a premiere vehicle for transportation, but as Peter puts it “I want to move from transportation to something more simple and FUN!”

When we have talked, my experiences with my 1946 Taylorcraft keep coming up and over the last winter Peter determined that a Taylorcraft would fit his needs well. Peter is not a total stranger to vintage tail wheel Aircraft. His brother owns a vintage Cub and he owned and flew a Maule for a few years. In truth, the Maule flies more like the Comanche than the Taylorcraft, but the idea of a tail wheel aircraft was within reason.

So he started watching Barnstormers and Trade-a-Plane. I hooked him up with a few of the experts on the internet Taylorcraft forum at taylorcraft.org. In January, and add went on Barnstormers for a “46 Taylorcraft”. The specs sounded good. A new rebuild with fresh Ceconite. An older engine but with a fresh top overhaul. New struts. There were a few pictures.



A few things jumped out, corroborated by some of the folks on the Taylorcraft forum. The cast nose grills and cowl trim showed that this was a scarce “Deluxe” version. The three-hinges on the elevator showed that this was one of the lighter more desirable pre-war models. As it turned out, the add was inaccurate. Rather than a fairly common post-war BC12-D, this was a scarce and desirable 1941 Taylorcraft BC12-65 Deluxe!

Now the question was, what is the condition? A few queries on the Taylorcraft forum located an A&P in the eastern Tennessee area with Taylorcraft experience. He looked it over and gave it an accurate and critical review that it was not a show plane, but seemed to be a solid flyable plane. To me, the most telling item was that he trusted it enough to get in it and fly it around for a bit to check it out. He reported a nice flying plane.

Although Peter was tail wheel legal from his prior Maule ownership, his insurance would not let him fly the plane without a CFI checkout. I, on the other hand am current and my insurance will cover me in another Taylorcraft. So at the end of February, Peter and I headed off to the Great Smokies in eastern

Tennessee to look at the plane. The plane was housed on a private airstrip a little under 2000 feet long in a lovely valley owned by a fellow who flies locally there and helps sell planes for his friends. An hour or so going over the plane showed that our A&P was accurate. It isn't a show plane but seems to be a fairly complete and nice '41 Deluxe. With a flip of the prop, we started it and I flew it around the patch a few times. Then Peter got in the right seat and we went up so he could try the plane. It was indeed a deluxe model and a fine vintage non-electric airplane.



Returning to Los Alamos, Peter agreed to buy the plane. It was a good deal! But now that he had the plane, how was he to get it home to New Mexico? His vacation was all used up and he has this thing called a job that keeps him tied close to home. Looking over my direction, he suggested “But Skip, You are retired...”

Near the end of May, I flew commercially back to eastern Tennessee and to that wonderful little grass strip in the Great Smokies. I was lucky with weather. The big river of moisture and thunderstorms that had been rolling up the Appalachians broke the night I arrived and at 6:00AM on May 22nd I climbed into the little '41 Deluxe Taylorcraft.

A short takeoff roll and I was off to the west. Cruising at 2500' is very different from what we experience flying out of Los Alamos at 7200'. The open side windows with the hills going by was a wonderful experience. The plane and I made friends quickly. At that low altitude I was getting about 85 mph true out of it and with headwinds managed 70 to 75 over the ground. Although this was a non-electric airplane, I did bring my iPad and a hand held radio. Despite these modern marvels, the flight was a good exercise in old-fashioned pilotage and following roads.



The first fuel stop a little over one and a half hours and 127 miles west was at Jamestown, TN. I needed to see how the cork-float gas gauge floated and the head winds kept the first legs short as I got used to the plane. Past Jamestown to Dickson, TN was another two hours and 140 miles and another 8 or 9 gallons. By noon I was tying down in Dyersburg, TN right on the Mississippi river at the west end of Tennessee. It was a good first day and the next day's weather looked good.

The little plane had performed well and with hand propping had started on the first swing either hot or cold.

A word about hand propping: The big danger hand propping by yourself with no one around is that if the engine runs a bit fast the plane can run away with no one in the cockpit. There have been incidents where the throttle was pushed full open to clear a flooded engine, then the mags turned hot and the engine started at full power causing a run across the ramp into a building or that neighboring business jet. I swore that I would not be such a statistic and made sure that the tail (at least) was always tied securely when I had to prop the plane alone.

There I stood at 6:00 AM on the ramp at Dyersburg. The airport was deserted. I dropped off the rental car with the keys in the drop box and pre-flighted the plane. I had tied it down the night before on the ramp and it was still securely tied so I primed, turned mags hot and swung the prop. As always, the engine started easily running along at about 800 RPM. It was sitting nicely so I walked around and untied the tail. At that point I learned a characteristic of the plane that I had seen but not really noticed before. As I stood up the engine warmed to a point where it smoothed out and sped up to about 1200

RPM! The plane started to roll briskly forward. I was not too concerned as the wings were still tied to the ramp with the FBO's fine nylon ropes. As I stepped forward and was just about to grab the right rear strut, the plane rolled up and tautened the tie down ropes. It would seem that the FBO's ropes were slightly old and had been sitting in the sun on that ramp since about the time Tennessee became a state. As the plane rolled forward against the ropes, the ropes separated with a puff of disintegrating nylon dust kind of like really old dry grass. Come to think of it, a handful of dry grass was probably a bit stronger than those old ropes.

There I was. Hanging on to the right rear strut as the plane wheeled around me in a circle on the ramp. I stepped forward to the front strut and stuck my foot under the tire as a chock. The plane stopped, I opened the door and pulled the throttle back to idle. The plane sat there looking at me like a puppy eager to play again, but at idle it just sat nicely on the ramp waiting for me to go fly.

Funny thing, I wasn't afraid that I would die or destroy the plane or anything. The thought in my head was "Oh God! I hope no one is seeing this. It is Sooooo embarrassing." I looked around the ramp. The airport was still deserted. What luck. No one saw. No one will ever know. It will be my secret forever!

I untied the remains of the FBO's fine nylon ropes from the struts and flew away to the west.

That was the last time that I trusted ropes other than the nice new ones of my own that I had with me.

Across Arkansas stopping at Mountain Home (Baxter County field) en route to Muskogee OK I relaxed and once again loved flying this fine vintage airplane across the country. The slow low pressure over Arizona and New Mexico was giving a string of thunderstorms across Oklahoma and I figured that Muskogee was to be my weather stop for a few days. Muskogee is a nice town. They have a WW-II submarine on display. The airport is home to a very nice flying P-40N. It is lucky that Muskogee was a nice town because that slow-moving low pressure took 5 days to clear out. I think the greatest expense of the trip was the hotel and rental car cost waiting for the weather in Oklahoma.

As the low passed, I figured that I could get out the next day. Guess again. All that low altitude moisture had 400' ceilings in rain until noon. But at noon I swung the prop (properly tied down with my own rope and left to warm until it was smooth at slow idle before untying) And once again headed west.

Climbing to 8500 feet, with a bit of tailwind, I believe that the little Taylorcraft meets its book speed of 93 mph at altitude. Note that is almost 20 mph faster than a similar Cub. With a bit of tailwind, I saw well over 100 mph over the ground! Despite it wanting to play with me on the ramp, this is an easy plane to like! Fuel stops at Watonga OK and Pampa TX took me across Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle to Tucumcari New Mexico in about 7 1/2 hours. At Tucumcari at about 6:00 PM, I could see two small build-ups toward Las Vegas. I called home and checked on weather there and with a full tank of 100LL I decided to push on home.

The plane easily climbed to 10500 over Glorieta pass. Descending into familiar Los Alamos airspace, I performed a go-around with the right turn over the ramp so that Peter could see his new pride and joy in the air.

I taxied to the ramp into the setting sun and handed Peter his keys with both a twinge of regret and a happy feeling for Peter and his new toy. The vintage toy and I went about 1400 miles in a little over 19 hours following the roads and headings on the sectional. The only use of the radio was to listen to AWOS approaching a strange airport.

It was a wonderful adventure in lovely vintage aircraft. I hope that everyone gets such an experience some day.

