



COAST TO COAST IN MY OSPREY 2

It was the first week in May of 1984 that I started my two month tour of the United States. I had to wait until the low clouds burned out at my home field of San Luis Obispo, Ca. So at around 10:00 o'clock in the a.m., I headed east for my first stop of Apple Valley in the Mojave Desert.

I contacted Paladale Tower as transited their traffic area and George Air Force Base as I went through theirs. It was at Apple Valley that the fun began. It had a nice paved long runway north and south but the winds were West at 25 knots and no East-West runway could I see! The first pass I drifted too much to touch down. The next pass I increased my speed enough to hold the plane straight over the runway with my upwind wingtip down. I finally made it at just under cruising speed and slowed down enough to clear the runway.

A friend, Garret Van der Ziel walked out of the cafe and greeted me and suggested lunch, which was most welcome. He was flying a chater flight that day and hoped his passengers had good stomachs for the afternoon flight home to San Luis Obispo.

I called a friend, Russ Bailey in Apple Valley and he picked me up and took me to his house for an overnight visit. We had a good time chewing the rag about helping Volmer Jensen with his Sportman amphibian back in the fifties. Russ had also witnessed my test flight of a Wittan Tailwind which I made in 1966.

The next morning I got an early start without the 25 knot crosswind and headed for Imperial airport of Imperial Valley and then to Casa Grande and Tucson, Arizona for an overnight stop. The winds were, of course, 10-15 knots on the nose. I stayed at the hotel on the Tucson airport and planned an early morning start to beat the 80-90 degree temperatures of that high desert field.

The plane checked, I started up and called ground control. I could only get static! I stopped the engine and called again. This time loud and clear! I told tower I had radio problems and they directed me to the local radio shop. The shop did a thorough check of my radios and replaced a noise filter on my voltage regulator. During the taxi back to my tie down I tried ground control again and -- static! I experimented with my squelch control and Eureka! Loud and clear reception! The trouble had not been in the radio or filter but in the radio operator, me!

Approaching Pensacola Regional airport I was cleared in for a landing to the west. As I flared out for a landing, I dropped a few feet and bounced once and touched down again and crunch, the right gear collapsed! I held the nose straight with left brake and came to a stop in a very short distance, about 150 ft. I unbuckled my seat belt and hopped out in a hurry. Two crash trucks arrived promptly and aimed their huge nozzles at my Osprey. I told the tower I was ok and asked for some help getting my crippled bird off the busy runway.

The tower contacted a Pensacola mechanic Van Stumpner, who jacked up the wing, put a splint on the gear-down lock brace and told me he thought I could taxi to the repair hangar. He was right and he followed me in his van. This was a Saturday afternoon and no parts could be located until Monday so I took a weekend off and explored the Navy Air Museum at the Pensacola Navy base. The NC-4 was there!

The failed part on the gear was the rod and fitting bracing the main gear strut. It had bent 90 degrees and failed. I was able to order one by phone from Wag Aero of Wisconsin. They shipped it out air express UPS and I had the part the next day. The mechanic, Van, and I reinstalled the end fitting, repaired the fairing of the main gear and test flew the bird, including a first flight in a homebuilt for the mechanic, Van.

The FAA were on the scene shortly after the accident and after a look at the bird decided to call my landing an incident. This meant that no long reports would have to be filed.

It was too hot and stormy Sunday so I waited till Monday to start for El Paso, Texas. Monday was a good day with winds on my nose again. I climbed out towards Cochise (altitude 4186') and rode the VOR of San Simon to the Arizona-New Mexico border. At about that point dust clouds started to show up and trucks were passing me on the freeway. As I approached Lordsburg, NM I talked to their unicom and they said winds were indicating 50-60 knots on the ground. No wonder I felt like I was standing still! As the wind was right down the runway I landed with no difficulty. A very nice lady from the fixed base operation arranged for me to put my plane in their hangar out of the wind and her husband took me to a motel in town. It had not changed much since I had last driven through there in the mid 30's as a teenager with my family.

The next day got me to Ft. Stockton, Texas, requiring four hours of flying. The next two days took me to New Orleans. I had planned to land at Lakefront field on the edge of Lake Pontchartrain so that I could check out the water handling qualities of my Osprey 2. It turned out that the World's Fair opening was on that day, May 1, 1984 so I bypassed New Orleans and landed about twenty-five miles north of there in Hammond, Louisiana. (Motels were more available).

Next day it was on to Biloxi, Miss; Mobile, Alabama and Pensacola, Fl. My transponder with encoding altimeter made those TCA's a breeze and the controllers were most helpful.