

AVIATION *News* JOURNAL

Vol. 17 • March / April 2009

Complimentary

Proud Sponsor -
Cross Canada
Century Flight



In this issue...

- CFI Insights
 - IFR Proficiency Corner
 - Cross Canada Century Flight Update
 - Student Pilots and Grumpy Old Men
 - Vintage Wings - Boy in a Hurricane
 - Jet Setters in the Caribbean
 - Pilot Career Corner - New!
- ... and more

WEST COAST FLYING

by Christian Bohm

Vancouver Island ADVENTURE



For me as a pilot from Germany, to experience this country by plane is a freedom to look forward to. For sure, there are some differences in procedures, radio communication, and rules. Initially, to get a good introduction, I decided to go to Sea Land Air at Boundary Bay Airport. They offer an LSA, Light Sports Aircraft, called a Sport Star. In Germany Ultralights are very common – they are fast, highly sophisticated, and have good performance. Last but not least they are more efficient.

After some instruction and a nice round trip over downtown Vancouver, we looked forward to some days of good weather. As Michael Peare, the Chief Flight Instructor of SLA, had told me, 'the weather could be very different on the island'. I experienced that during my road-trip, sitting on the Pacific beach at 10°C while Vancouver had 0°C in steady fog.

One thing should be observed when oper-
Page 26

ating these airplanes – the maximum Take-Off weight. I got used to it as an Ultralight pilot from Germany. There, every UL has a legal limit of 472.5kg, while the structural one is a bit higher. Most of the empty weights are around 300kg, so only having 170kg for two passengers with luggage and fuel for a long trip is not much.

The SportStar has 754lbs BEW and 1,213lbs MTOW, giving a 200kg useful load; a bit more than German UL's. So I had carefully planned the fuel stops taking into account having an acceptable landing weight, especially for the take-off from the beach.

We planned from Boundary Bay to Pender Island, up to Nanaimo, Qualicum Beach, Port Alberni, the Alberni Inlet to Ucluelet, from there along the coast to Tofino and Vargas Island, finally over the mountains to Courtenay – overnight there and back to Boundary Bay. The perfect day for this was Friday the 13th with blue skies and the forecast for the next day also good.

Total flight time the first day would be 3h, so I took 4h of fuel with me, landing with 2h=10USG on the beach. For the cross country and the short cut through United States airspace, filing a flight plan was necessary.

We got the Point Roberts Departure, and we requested 4,000ft for the crossing. (edit: 4,500 feet would have been the correct request VFR)

Upon crossing Pender Island we requested 2,000 ft along the coast line and were below Victoria Terminal airspace. The airport of Nanaimo has to be circumnavigated at that altitude, but to make a radio call and tell them what you want to do is always a good idea.

At Qualicum Beach we followed the road to Port Alberni to see Sproat Lake.

From our ground trip we knew that there was a good chance of fog, but today it was quite nice. We looked for the big fire-fighting planes located at the Sproat lake and found them.

Thereafter we followed the Alberni Inlet via some nice little Islands to Ucluelet on the western side of Vancouver Island.

On the way to Tofino there is "Long Beach", an almost 16 km straight long beach. May be that would be the best place to put the SportStar onto the sand. But as when we visited it before, there was a good chance of pedestrians making extended walks there, and even the dogs running around. Landing on a beach is

continued on page 28



Cox Bay (left): Christian Bohm and wife Nadine (above)

VANCOUVER ISLAND

continued from page 26

not prohibited in Canada. We let other aircraft know our intentions.

For crossing Tofino Harbour there was another frequency change necessary and we crossed that area above 1,500 ft.

For everyone, regardless of experience, it is highly recommended to get a thorough introduction into the known procedures – and SeaLand Air did a good job.



Approaching the Island I tried to figure out the wind direction by means of rising smoke or the sea. Tofino reported NW wind with 10 knots, so not too strong to figure it out by looking at the sea.

So as on every safe landing with no advice from the ground, I overflew the landing-spot. In pre-planning I also looked to a tide-table showing the high and low levels of the sea. At 3 PM there was low tide. The difference in high and low tides defines the width of the landing surface and allows a landing in the firm sand. Beyond, on the dry side, was the possibility that there could be unknown garbage or soft sand blocking the wheels. On the water side the water hitting the wheel could also produce a spin around the vertical.

To figure everything out, I made one low-

pass, examining the landing area and defining a touchdown point. Also comparing the Ground Speed with the indicated one, crab angle and track compared to ground to get an idea of the wind.

So it was blowing from the sea into the curved landing area, having the advantage that there will be always a bit low wing necessary to cover the wind and curvature.

The pattern was flown with flaps in the mid position and stabilized speed while using power to make fine adjustments in glide angle, and speed. Because of

unknown terrain, there will always be the possibility of animals running into one's path, so it's good to be prepared for everything, even while flaring to touchdown. That was made with minimum speed and steady stall warning until touchdown.

The area was better than a grass runway, but the water lines perpendicular to the direction were causing some bumps. During roll out I kept looking out for stones and deeper bumps that could cause the prop to hit the ground.

I extended the roll out to prepare for the take-off. Usually if I don't know the surface, a good option is to taxi down the runway. Also I turned into departing direction to get prepared for a quick one.

On the ground I defined the direction and

estimated the take-off roll. The estimate of the wind direction from the sea was correct. I placed a stone on the edge of the waterline to check if the tide was rising.

After preflight preparation, I stabilized the engine at full power, checking the instruments. As I had learned, it would be a good idea to extend the flaps shortly prior lift off to get the benefit of clean acceleration. Performing the same steps as during landing; unload the nose gear, and taking benefit of ground effect.

We left the Island and flew back to Tofino. Now we could see the mountains, rising up to 6,000 ft on a direct course to Courtenay. For a European it's amazing to see the ocean and the mountains so close together!

Approaching Courtenay, we dived into the lake Comox, and flew under the mountain ridge. The airport was hard to see and it was important to respect the CTR of Comox. As at every airport without anybody on ground, we transmitted blind, and checked the wind and traffic.

Courtenay Airpark is a nice place to stay. Everything is within walking distance. There is a room for flight preparation with computer, and internet. Overnight parking is just \$5.

Departing the next morning we routed back via Nanaimo to North Pender Island. I requested 1,000 ft, below Victoria's airspace, to take a closer look as I knew there is a landing strip there. The landing area and rising terrain allows only landing uphill. Below 200 ft there might be no chance for a go-around and there were animals on the strip. But a visit would be a nice idea for our next excursion.

Arriving again over Point Roberts, we entered the busy area of Boundary Bay. We had to follow instructions in speed and altitudes to establish separation, finally landing on runway 30.

The entire trip took about 4.5 hours. I can't remember when I have crossed such diverse geography and scenery within such a short time.

What a great flight!