

I am a PPL who started flying in the 70's with a RAF Flying Scholarship – let my licence lapse in the 80's then came back into flying in 2006 via microlights here at Redhill. When the CAA changed the regulations that acknowledged previous flying experience I took my Skills Test in 2010 with Islam at Redair and returned to the world of Group "A" aircraft.

The co-pilot in this story is a current student at Redhill Aviation – my daughter Amy who first went up with Dad when she was 12 in a two seat Shadow from Redhill.

She has yet to go solo – University got in the way! – But she still goes up whenever she is able.

2016 marked a bit of a watershed – two big birthdays - my 60th & Amy's 21st, so how to celebrate? Go Flying! What else?

But where to go and what would be a trip to remember?

I often thought it would be nice to own your own aircraft – but could never seem to afford it. Then one day in the classified section of "Pilot" I read an advert for "Pilots' Paradise".

"Fly "your" aircraft from a base in Florida and go where you please!" Now that sounded interesting...

Question to Daughter - "Do you want a Big Party or 20 days with Dad in the USA with a week flying our "own" aircraft?"

No brainer really..... So that was last December

So how do you actually *do* this?

Well you need to find a reputable operation in the States who can be supportive in the process.

We were lucky – when we met Tony Pool the CFI at the base in Sebastian, he looked at my log book and muttered "Good God "BOSO" and "Whisky Oscar!" We had by pure chance managed to find an operation which had as its CFI an old boy from Redair who not only knew some of the characters at the club but had also flown the same aircraft as myself. Small world or what.....

But before that first meeting you need to do some "housekeeping" and this process – the paperwork before you go – really isn't onerous.

Anyone with a current EASA / Part-FCL licence can "piggy back" that across and obtain a US Airman's licence. Once done, that US Licence is valid for life as long as your EASA licence is valid.

So this is what you do:-

Ask the CFI at the Club very nicely (© Thanks Laurance!) to countersign two copies of your EASA Licence and Medical Certificate.

Complete a CAA form SRG 1160 which is entitled "Application for Verification of a Licence Issued by the UK CAA" and send this and one set of copy licence / medical certificates off to the CAA at Gatwick.

Download from the FAA website a form 8060-71 "Verification of Foreign Licence, Rating and Medical Certification" and send that form and the second set of certified copies of your Licence and Medical certificate off to the FAA in Oklahoma City USA.

Then wait whilst both Authorities talk to each other

About two – three weeks later (this could be longer) you receive a letter from the FAA that you need to take with you to the States. It confirms who you are and yes, you actually do hold a UK CAA Licence!

Make sure your medical is valid for the period you want to fly in the US and make sure your EASA Licence will be valid whilst out there – either by a skills test or by experience – before you go.

So, you turn up at the airfield then what?

The first thing to do is go and see an Examiner in the US who basically does the paper work and provides you with a Temporary Airman's Certificate. Your US operator will arrange this meeting for you and take you to the examiner. This is not a test of any sorts but a validation process of your UK Licence, letter from the FAA, etc. so that he can log onto the FAA website and apply for your US Licence. He issues you with a paper licence and then 3-4 weeks later your lifetime, credit card sized licence is posted to your home address.

THE FLIGHT REVIEW

With temporary licence in hand we then head back to the airfield for the check flight. With us it was a 1 hour 35 minute "Flight Review" from the home base (Sebastian) flying west, inland to Okeechobee for three touch and goes then back over to the coast to St Lucie for another touch and go then north back to Sebastian. No surprises and the CFI will be looking for a basic standard of airmanship and the ability to put the aircraft down without bending it. More akin to a club check flight than a skills test.



The joining procedure in the USA is a little different from over here – no overhead joins but a 45' join to the downwind – but you soon get the hang of it.



R/T is also a little different – Redhill's frequency of 119.60 would be read back as "one niner point six" so somewhat clipped but it works. Also there is Unicom... which can confuse if you are foreign! How about one frequency used by a dozen or so local aerodromes where there is no Tower? That's Unicom. The idea is that you blind call on this frequency to let other pilots know where you are, who you are and your intentions – again the system works so long as you prefix the call and end the call with the name of the aerodrome where you are landing / taking off from. On a couple of occasions we heard a downwind call and couldn't see anyone downwind! – We then realised the caller was 20 miles away at another aerodrome! Another difference is some aerodromes have the ability to transmit ATIS by three clicks on the transmit button on the home frequency – a neat facility.



So you have completed the check flight, tied down the aircraft and have been passed the keys to "your" very own PA28! Where do you go?

That is a problem - in the sense that there is so much to do in so little time! Also we had to be flexible because the weather could favour a coastal trip one day as opposed to flying inland to the Gulf of Mexico. It was a case of checking the weather the night before and flight planning before turning in for a dawn start.

THE FLIGHTS

We ended up flying 1,524 nautical miles in 17 hours over a six day period with a day off because yours truly became dehydrated and had to recover– it is HOT over there – in the cockpit before engine start we reckon it exceeded 100° so do drink plenty of fluids!

Day one, North West to the Gulf of Mexico (Fort Myers)

(Hire a car and go to Sanibel – the Lazy Flamingo Bar has some of the best seafood around)



Approaching Page Field, Fort Myers.

Page Field was home to P51 Squadrons in the 1940's - an example being suspended in the beautiful Art Deco FBO!



We timed it close to sunset to return to Sebastian; beautiful sunset though!

On the ground and taxiing back to the FBO in the last gleaming of the sun

Day two, south past Miami at 500' just off the beach down to the Florida Keys (Key West)

(The FBO will arrange a cab to town then walk to the "Southernmost Beach Café" it's the most southerly café in the USA and is, as the name says, right on the beach!)



We were cleared to pass under Miami International so not above 500' and clear of the shore line – a little strange descending down to the sea and then levelling out with tower blocks on the shore above you.



We then continued south at 500' until we were out of Miami's airspace before being cleared to climb



Stoke the Stowaway tried his hand at the controls, but he couldn't quite get the hang of this flying thing - so we suggested he try navigating!



We approached the last Key – Key West - and were passed onto the controller at Key West Naval Air Station, again seamlessly, with no formal request or exchange of info as you would with a MATZ penetration in the UK



Our route took us directly overhead the Air Station which had a variety of aircraft out on the apron. Key West civil airport is in the distance on the last island in the chain.

Day three and a beautiful early morning start. We took off and headed north past Daytona with its famous racetrack and beach onto St Augustine



St Augustine is one of the oldest Spanish Settlements in the USA – a visit to the museum (and the chocolate factory!) is a must. We discovered O C White's Seafood & Spirits on the bay – couldn't have been more helpful.





That morning we had asked for permission to fly down the Space Shuttle recovery at Kennedy Space Centre but were advised it was closed till later that afternoon. On the way back we asked again, explaining we tried earlier and if it was now open could we possibly have permission? After a wait of around a minute (it seemed longer!) we were advised Kennedy was closed but the Controller had obtained permission for us to fly the approach! I was so surprised I responded "Say again Miami – I have permission?" they replied "Yes Sir, don't touch the runway, don't fly above 500', stay clear of the danger area to the east (the Falcon 9 rocket was due to take off to the ISS Sunday) and enjoy!"



NASA Assembly building with the Falcon 9 Rocket on the launch pad in the background – with two happy aviators!

Last day and south west to the Everglades and Everglades City

You have to take an airboat ride! We hired two bikes from the Airpark – a 10 minute cycle to town and you see so much more. Go to the "Island Café" for local fare and yes we ate 'Gaitor burgers! The FBO in the last picture is on stilts so that when the sea surges in a storm and covers the runway the office remains dry and operational afterwards!



Apart from the amazing views the attractions and differences in flying in the USA are many!

FBO's

The term "FBO" refers to Fixed Base Operator and there is usually one such establishment on each airfield, although there can be more. These provide fuel, internet and terminals, telephones, faxes, showers, rest rooms, lounges and complimentary drinks and sometimes snacks! They are really helpful and will assist in hire cars, taxis, bicycles; nothing is too much trouble and every FBO we visited had a "can do" attitude to GA.

ATC

You do not have to contact ATC – you can go from place to place via Unicom – but the service is first class and you would be frankly stupid not to use it. We had a situation when under "Flight Following" (a sort of enhanced Basic Service) with Miami control; we could hear another aircraft 10 miles away from us on a reciprocal heading. The controller asked our own and the other aircraft's height then instructed us to descend immediately by 500 feet. This we did and despite two pairs of eyes in our PA28 we didn't see him till he was nearly right above us and passing by – an aircraft approaching head on with a converging speed of nearly 250Kts is very hard to see – believe me. That's what ATC are there for, to help you. Don't be afraid to talk to them and they will help you in all sorts of ways if you ask.

The way ATC hand you over from one controller to another is also very slick – you are told to contact so and so on such a such frequency and you acknowledge with a standard read back. But when you make contact you just state the aircraft Registration – and that's it! The new controller acknowledges your Registration and gives the area QNH – confirm the QNH and your Registration and you are in the system. Easy.

The only occasion we didn't contact ATC for a "Flight Following" service was coming back from the Everglades – we went down to 500' and saw the area up close – but there was nothing in the area – either on the ground or in the sky! When we resumed a course home we then asked for the service and they followed us all the way home – even asking us if there was a reason why we appeared to be off track – there was, we had to divert south around a thunderstorm – but it felt good to have that second pair of eyes looking after you.

FLIGHT PLANNING

We did when going down to the Keys as a fair amount of the route is over water. Lockheed Martin operates the service. Make a telephone call giving details in a standard format, including a/c registration, type, colour, POB, pilot's details and route. Once done they have you in the "system" and you then get a full and friendly synopsis of the weather and any restricted airspace on your intended route with recommendations re VFR or IFR on-route and at your destination. Once done the plan is good until you activate it when airborne.

WEATHER



We went in July when it starts to get hot. By the end of September it's *very* hot and you run the risk of tropical storms. Despite this we had to go when we did due to term times, etc. and in a way I am glad.

You may recall your books on meteorology with a storm cell and rain underneath? I think we all know the theory but to actually see individual cells with lightning within the rain band is something else!

The words of the CFI came to the fore "just fly around them" Oh, yeah, right! But after a while with the experience of flying out there, that's exactly what you end up doing.

If you are able to obtain a US Airman's Licence give it a go, it will add another dimension to your experience and flying is a true joy – the USA really is geared up for and in favour of General Aviation.

But even if you don't try flying in the States, Amy and I would urge all pilots - both student and qualified PPL's – to take your log book and licence with you *whenever* you go abroad on holiday. Why? Well with a bit of research you can normally sneak in a trip to a local airfield (family permitting ☺) and go up with an instructor –airfields we have flown from include Barbados and Malta and what a way to see a holiday location.

Now that's what we call using your PPL!

Barry & Amy Irvine - 2016