

***“Well, you’ve got your slow landings sorted out!” – Ron***

*Piper’s classic Cub trainer in the Florida sunshine*

Some years ago, I found myself travelling frequently to the US on business, either to Orlando, or to Arlington, Texas (midway between Dallas and Fort Worth). As the trips were often for ten days or more, I managed to squeeze in some flying in both locations. This is a little tale of my experiences flying a Cub in Florida.

I drove north from Orlando out past Apopka and found myself driving next to a light aviation field called Orlando Country Airport (now known as Orlando Apopka Airport). I pulled in and soon found myself having coffee with the two ladies who ran the place. Country charm personified, they answered my question of whether there were any tail wheel aeroplanes available to hire with the response “Have you seen our runway?” from one of them, and “Would you like to buy a tee shirt?” from the other.



*Tim Preston’s Aeronca O-58 at Bob White Field*

The tee shirt said “I survived the cross-winds at Orlando Country Airport”. The runway was a concrete strip, just 28ft wide running at 45 degrees to the prevailing Floridian wind – no, there were no tail wheel aircraft for hire, or even based there!

They told me to continue down the road and turn left at the intersection with the orange flashing light (Jones Avenue) and look out for signs to an airstrip on my right. This turned out to be Bob White Field (now known as Potter Airport).

This had a single east west grass strip and four hangar blocks full of interesting aircraft,

with a notably high proportion of Stearman biplanes. On asking, I was told that Tim Preston would rent out tailwheel aircraft. When I eventually caught up with him, he said that he had an Aeronca O-58A, a J-3 Cub and a Stearman. The Stearman he would instruct in, dual only, for \$100 an hour, and as far as the other two were concerned, “If you show me you can fly them, then you can fly them”.

He also explained that most of his tail wheel checkouts were either “for airline pilots who’ve decided it’s time to buy a Stearman” or for FAA examiners, who’ve never flown a tailwheel aircraft and “need to check out airline pilots in Stearmans”. The Stearmans were being rebuilt to a fantastically high standard on a private strip at Zelwood, a couple of miles away.



*Classic Yellow Piper J-3 Cub in the Florida sun*

I got checked out in the Aeronca O-58 and the Cub and also had an hour of crosswind landings in the Stearman. I flew the Aeronca to a nearby airfield at Eustis (now known as the Mid Florida Air Service Airport) and had a bit of trouble getting it started again – Tim preferred one to swing the O-58 prop whilst standing behind it (so that you could reach the throttle inside the cockpit), which I found distinctly uncomfortable.



*The warm and sunny conditions are ideal for flying the Cub with the window open*

When I first flew the Cub, he sat me in the back (normally this is the solo pilot position, or the instructor position for dual training), saying that as most people he taught wanted to fly Stearmans, it was best they got used to a lousy forward view from the outset. After we'd been flying for a few minutes, Tim said "You're doing fine, I'm happy with the flying, but you are tense on the controls and I'm waiting for you to relax". This was fair comment; as the fine Florida weather was setting off multiple thermals and the Cub was getting bounced around.

door open and the window up and a big empty space in next to you. I've flown 65, 90, 105 and 150 hp Cubs and have always found precise trimming difficult (they use a handle on the sidewall of the cockpit to change the angle of incidence of the fixed part of the tailplane to change trim).

I quite like the Cub and, at least in Floridian conditions, it's great to fly along with the

The other notable feature in Florida was that there was almost always water in the fuel due to the enormously fluctuating temperature and humidity – Tim was completely unfazed when I first pointed it out. He just said "That's why we check it before every flight".

Tim duly sent me off by myself; I said that I would fly around Lake Apopka and then "fly round the pattern a few times when I get back". He said two things in response. The first was "Watch out for the TV masts". Florida is so low and flat that the Apopka TV masts were about five times higher than the highest piece of terrain in Florida, which is 'Mount' Dora at all of 300 feet. He also said "Make sure that you flare properly and get the stick right back on landing; if you do a little hop on the roll out, I'll know that you landed too fast."



*Florida – flat, fine weather and full of alligator-infested lakes*

After I landed, I taxied over to the aircraft's bay in the open hangar structure and started to put it away. As I did so, Tim came over and said "Well, you've got your slow landings sorted out". We walked together back across the runway and met the field owner Bob White on the other side. He looked at me and said "Son, that was a

sloooow landing. Hell, it was so slow, that if you hadn't liked it, you could have got out and walked!" I walked off, laughing, with some happy memories of Cub flying in Florida.

On a subsequent trip, I took a work colleague, Gary, flying in the Cub for a couple of sorties. Afterwards, we had a late lunch in Mount Dora, which we had been recommended to as the sort of place the locals go to for relaxation (and to avoid the tourists).

Whilst we had been flying, I had explained to Gary that one did not fly over the many lakes in the area because of the alligators. I had learnt this after being given a ride in a locally-based Luscombe and being told off for cutting across the corner of Lake Apopka. The pilot then proceeded to drop to a lower height and fly round the lake spotting and pointing out numerous 'gators – quite a salutary experience.



*I finished my hour's flying in Tim's docile Stearman with one of my best ever landings*

After lunch, we were sat by a small lake in Mount Zion watching people sailing and looking at the ospreys (birds – not tilt rotors) flying overhead. Gary said "Do you really think that there are alligators in this lake?" I replied "Well, there are plenty of people sailing, but I can't see any swimming and, if you look to your right, there's a baby alligator on the bank. Where there are small ones, there are also big ones!"

This caused Gary to send a postcard back to the office saying that 'It was an absolute privilege to fly with Ron, in such an old aeroplane ... over alligator infested swamps!'