

Dec. 8, 2012 - The River Ranch Resort at Yehaw Jnct.

I have been to River Ranch several times before today's flight. Back in the late '60's I took my former wife there in our Cessna Skyhawk to spend a long weekend. In the late '80's I flew my ex-infantry over for a day of events followed by the evening rodeo. Afterwards we flew back to West Palm Beach at 7,500 feet above a full moon lit undercast. The IFR controlled descent through those clouds, lit from below by the urban lights, only to break through at 1,000 feet to the full glory of the luminescent city was a memory that lives with me to this day. A couple of months ago we drove my motor home over to the resorts very upscale RV park to spend an extra long weekend with our two Yorkies.

Today's trip was by myself and much of the hour flight was conducted at 500 feet altitude. This, because of FAA regulations, is something that I am not often able to do. But because much of the flight is over unpopulated cattle grazing land, today I would be legal at this low altitude. It is always an enjoyable experience being so close to the ground, which is passing by at 90 MPH. You get to see so much being "up close and personal". The only thing that a pilot now needs to be aware of is the ever increasing number of cell towers that dot the landscape... along with those ever circling turkey buzzards. When they are flying in flocks I always attempt to stay well clear of their flight path.

River Ranch is now a part of Westgate Properties, a very large timeshare conglomerate. It still retains its upscale Western Dude-Ranch motif and still has its Saturday night rodeo. But because my Light Sport Pilot Certificate excludes flying after sunset, I could not avail myself of the evening's big event. However I did see a group of cowgirls testing out their horses in the big open field adjacent to the rodeo grounds.

I landed on their 5000 foot long runway and was the only plane there on what turned out to be a beautiful Saturday morning. Just adjacent to the runway is the resorts rustic tent camping area. These sites are without facilities, but there is nearby water faucets and a modern bathhouse/toilet is a short walk away. These sites seem to attract church youth groups and scouts and on this particular day was packed with a hundred young people and their guardians. It is a 10 minute walk from the airpark to the marina where I was going to have lunch. The walk takes you past the rental cottages and golf course, alongside the skeet/trap shooting range and rodeo stadium. You pass by the Saloon which features western style entertainment after 5 PM and pass by the "old town" area which has a small grocery store, an ice cream parlor, a post office and several small shops. There is also a large motel style accommodation here, along with the swimming pool and a Koi fish pond in a secluded garden setting. The main lodge check in and the privately run RV check-in buildings soon follow and before you know it you are at the marina, which provides direct access to the major Kissimmee river canal. This leads to Lake Kissimmee, just outside of Orlando, to the north and the big Lake Okeechobee to the south. Once in these lakes you literally have access to either the Gulf of Mexico to the west, or the Atlantic Ocean to the east.

After lunch of a soup and salad it was time to head back to the airport for my 50 minute return flight home, having spent a nice day seeing another one of Florida's interesting fly-in attractions.



View of RV resort, marina, main lodge & rodeo



Main lodge check in point for the entire resort



Cowgirls practice for their evening rodeo event



Relaxing after lunch at the garden Koi fish pond