

Feb. 1, 2018 - Flying... there are good days and there are bad days

Weather and home chores permitting, I try to fly every day that I can. And, by and large, every day that I fly is a "good day". Today I decided to make my "milk run"... a 20 minute, 32 mile trip over to the Okeechobee County Airport. OBE is a place that I go to quite often. It has two intersecting runways, which pretty much covers any and all wind conditions, and it has an excellent and inexpensive restaurant. *The Landing Strip Cafe* opens for breakfast as early as 6 AM and features luncheon until 2 PM. It has no control tower to deal with and no landing or parking fees. Today's flight was to be for an early lunch... which, by the way was excellent. But what makes a "good day" is more than the aviating, the weather or the meal. Flying to other airports might offer the opportunity of meeting a fellow pilot and may lead to some enlightening conversation.



Today that opportunity came up upon finishing my lunch and while heading back to my airplane. A young couple wandered over and the gentleman inquired about my *Highlander*. I mentioned that I had built it back in 2007 and that I apparently must have gotten all of the parts in correctly since after 10 years and almost 1,000 hours it was still flying. The young man introduced himself as Marco Freund and handed me his business card which showed him to be a **CAPTAIN** flying the Boeing 777 for Emirates Airlines, based out of Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates!



Now this was mind blowing. I don't think that he was even year 40 years of age and here he was flying one of the most modern of airplanes for one of the most prestigious of commercial carriers. As he continued on with our conversation, I was to further learn that he had only soloed a mere 15 years ago at this very airport and that he had recently arrived from a flight from Dubai to Orlando International where he rented a small Cessna 150, (which has about the same amount of room as speed as my Highlander) and flew it over to Okeechobee with one of his flight attendant crew members to show her where he got his start in aviation. To me this was truly amazing. It generally takes 25 or more years of toil in the right seat of smaller and less sophisticated aircraft, working one's way up through the ranks before reaching the lofty goal of Captain of a 600 MPH, almost 400 passenger, 300 million dollar airliner. This aircraft is capable of flying, non-stop, for 12,000 miles and did so on a 22 hour test flight (no passengers) from London to Hong Kong back in 2012. Marco admitted that he was lucky in having achieved his goal so quickly saying that timing was good in that, after achieving his coveted Airline Transport Pilots license, he found employment with a regional carrier in his native Germany.



Captain Freund was truly a friendly, down to earth type of person who was both enjoyable and enlightening to talk to. Here was the consummate success story in aviation which makes me glad to be part of this small and specialized fraternity. While I never had aspirations to join the ranks of commercial pilot, I can truly say that I have enjoyed this 60 year long avocation more than anything else that I have done with my life thus far. I have learned so much in conversations with professional pilots such as Marco and the retired airline captains that I meet for breakfast, almost every Sunday morning, at Okeechobee County Airport, and which I have written about in a blog posting of just a few months ago.



However this particular encounter was made even more pleasant when I had the opportunity to interact with the other crew member accompanying the Captain on this rental airplane journey. She, if my memory serves me correctly, was introduced to me, as Pyro, a very attractive South Korean flight attendant for Emirates who was on Marco's "Triple 7" flight from earlier. He suggested that I pose with her in front of my Highlander while wearing his "official" airline clip on tie and Captain's cap. But he cautioned me to be sure to give the tie back as it was the only one he had with him and that the Emirates number one rule is "no tie, no fly" (he said with a grin). So, I guess, with this tie and cap, I am now "officially" Captain of my own airplane.

This particular blog piece is entitled "Flying...there are good days and there are bad days". So what, exactly, contributed to this possibly being a bad day. Well, on the way back to my home airfield and while on my landing roll out, I saw something out of the corner of my eye that, at first glance, appeared to be a small "go cart" or midget racing car off to the side of the runway. Upon taxiing over to it I discovered that it was a crumpled up auto-gyrocopter which had apparently recently wrecked. I later found out that this happened while the machine was preparing to take off in gusty winds, and although the aircraft was a total loss, the pilot, thankfully, was not seriously hurt. So, for him, at least, it was definitely one of those "bad" flying days.

