

February 4, 2021 -- X-58, Indiantown Airport.... always something going on!

It's been 10 years, a full decade, since I first brought my Highlander down to Florida and began housing it in its own T-hangar at the Indiantown Airpark. While X-58, (the FAA's designation for this privately owned 6,300 foot long grass runway airfield), is not the closest airport to my home in Tradition, Florida, it is probably the easiest and quickest for me to drive to and one that I can afford with its \$500 per month rental rate. While strictly a VFR, daytime use only field, with my current Light Sport Pilot's limitations it works out just fine, and with no control tower to contend with it allows me more freedom's than closer-in airports would. As a result I can fly more often and with fewer delays, and I tend to do so. One of my "milk run" flights is over to the nearby Okeechobee County Airport. I must do at least one flight there each week, and probably more, to this field with a restaurant, the Landing Strip Cafe. Today's trip produced a few more interesting highlights than usual.

My airport is on several hundred acres of property owned by a Mr. Clyde Dawson. Clyde is in his early 90's and is still a very active participant in his various enterprises. He can still be seen in his tractor, mowing the entire airfield complex several times each month. He has much of the airfield's adjacent property dedicated to cow grazing and operates his own cattle company which brings these steers to market every several months. While Clyde does not actively round up and herd his livestock, he contracts those chores out and it is always



interesting when real modern day cowboys arrive with their horses and dogs to help coral the animals to the stockyard which is located directly across from my hangar. I had such an opportunity today when I arrived at the field and was able to watch, and photo record, the activities as several dozen of the Angus cattle were driven over to the fenced in staging area that comprises the Fort Dawson feedlot pens.





Cows are inherently curious and even friendly animals and will come up-close to anyone who attracts their interest. I have always enjoyed interacting with them and it makes me kind'a sad to know that those cute little creatures will shortly wind up on someone's dinner plate. I try not to think about it when I chomp down on a medium rare hamburger every once in a while and, perhaps, I should really give one of those new plant based meats a try-out one of these days.

As I parked my car in front of my hangar I noticed that there seemed to be a lot of activity behind my 8 unit T-hangar building and walked around to see what was going on. There had been talk of adding a brand new building to the 4 already existing at the field. This meant that there would be a total of 40 airplanes that could be handled in their own individual T-hanger in addition to the many larger rectangular buildings located on the property that served either as multi-plane buildings or as stand-alone business locations. We have a multitude of these commercial activities currently going on and they range from an aircraft maintenance shop to one that only rebuilds existing aircraft engines once they have achieved their useful lifespan. We also have a business that does maintenance on old WWII war-birds, most notably the P-51 Mustang as well as the Army's Air Force T-6 (AT-6) "Texan" combat trainer. There are several other ventures located on the field as well, one dealing with small boat manufacturing and even one that builds camper tops for pick-up trucks. I was delighted to see that progress on the new hangar building was coming along nicely and that concrete would soon be poured.



However, it was now time to get the Highlander out of its hangar and ready to fly. On my taxi out to Runway 31, I noticed a new addition to the limited outside tie-down area. A beautiful Ercoupe Model 415 was shining in the morning sun. This is an airplane that shares a special place in my heart as it was the first airplane that I owned, shortly after I married in the mid-sixties, and one which I immensely enjoyed flying.



Although no faster than what I now own and limited to two seats, as is my current Highlander, it allowed for flight with the canopy side windows down, much like the Triumph TR-3A roadster that I owned back in the day. This type of aircraft does not have rudder pedals as the yoke is interconnected to the two vertical rudders at its rear. All turns are, thus, automatically coordinated and except for the single brake pedal beneath the pilots feet, the floor is completely clear. All cross wind landing approaches are done with the nose crabbed into the wind and touchdown is accomplished at an angle that would seemingly cause the wheels to be torn off of the gear's vertical housing. That airplane was purchased, in 1963, for \$2,400 from the same airport in Totowa, NJ from which I obtained my pilots license and was used during the one year of training that I took from their instructors. At the end of that one year I gave the airplane back to that same dealership for a brand new 1964 Cessna Skyhawk, a 4 seater that was listed for \$10,900 and for which they allowed me \$2,250 as a trade-in. The only problem was that since the Ercoupe did not have rudder pedals, I had to undergo an additional 10 hours of training with the Skyhawk to learn the technique of flying with same. Of interest is the fact that, today, that Ercoupe would qualify as a "light sport" and it is the only airplane that I previously owned that I would legally be entitled to fly with my limited sport pilots license. **(photo below: Me and my 1946 Ercoupe in 1963)**



Just before my take-off I had to hold short, for a landing aircraft. It turned out to be a P-51 Mustang that was apparently coming in for maintenance at that specialty shop that I wrote about a few pages earlier. I was able to capture one quick photo as he began his landing flare literally right in front of me. As he taxied up to that



shop I noticed that he was not the only P-51 there that day. In addition to two planes that were already in the shop there was another tied outside and a AT-6 trainer was about to start his engine for departure. This is a two person maintenance facility and he never seems to be without something to work on. I understand that his fee is \$1,200 for an 8 hour work day... probably a bargain as my Volkswagen dealership gets a similar \$150 an hour just to work on my car.



As I mentioned, this is a really interesting rural hometown airport where something always seems to be going on. However, I was still not airborne and when I finally arrived at the Okeechobee County Airport, a half hour later, I was going to find some more interesting happenings over there as well.



As I parked adjacent to the Landing Strip restaurant at Okeechobee I immediately noticed two fire-engine red 1957 Chevy **Bel Airs** parked out in front. Again a vehicle that has a special place in my memory bank as my ex-wife used to own a turquoise blue model of that same collector's vehicle. When I walked up to them I found out that one was actually the **Nomad**, which was their "station wagon" version. It turned out that their owner, whom I got to speak to, was there to pick up some passengers from a chartered jet that arrived while I was in the restaurant having breakfast. He was also the owner and pilot of a Pilatus PC-12. Another *deja vu* experience as I had previously written a blog article about this 300 MPH turboprop cabin class airplane that seats 8 plus the pilot when the US Air Force was doing some performance landing tests at my Indiantown Airport back on Feb. 1, 2019. ("**It's a bird...It's a plane... It's Pilatus**")



Just goes to demonstrate that flying is never boring or dull. There is always something interesting going on and while being in the air and in control of one's aircraft is always an enjoyable experience, once you get back on the ground, you just never know what you are going to discover!