

October 30, 2012 - To Okeechobee and the Landing Strip Restaurant with "The Girls"

Of all of the flying trips that I take around south Florida, the absolute shortest would have to be the 30 mile flight between my home field at Indiantown and the nearby city of Okeechobee. It is about a 20 minute flight, usually done at 1,000 feet, which gives a nice morning view of the large lake for which the town is named. Today's trip was made with our two Yorkies who, while they do enjoy flying, seem to like the ham steak that they get at breakfast, even more.

Because of the very high engine noise level in my home built air-plane, I purchased each a set of "Mutt Muffs" which offer a degree of protection against ear damage. Although the dogs seem to tolerate these well, they tend to fall asleep as soon as I get airborne. You can see from the upper photo, they sometimes doze off immediately after the earmuffs are put in place.

There is a always lot to see on this very short flight. Of special interest to me is FP&L's Martin Power Plant, located right on the northern edge of Lake Okeechobee. While its natural gas generating units makes it the largest single fossil fueled plant in the US, producing over 3,700 megawatts of power, what really makes this plant unique is its 500 acres of solar panels installed alongside the twin stacked steam plant. There are almost 200,000 large parabolic panels, each capable of being deflected on its axis, so as to follow the arc of the sun as it rises in the morning and then sets in the afternoon. Having worked in the power industry with my testing and consulting business, I find it paradoxical that these 500 acres only produce 75 megawatts of total power, or just about 2% of that facilities generating capability. Yes, it is "green energy", but certainly not the most cost effective way of producing power. The solar plant cost almost a half billion dollars to build, and it will take over 100 years of fuel savings to pay back just its construction cost. And, given normal operational maintenance and panel replacement it is estimated it will take over 2 1/2 centuries to break even. As witness to this type of plant's cost effectiveness, as of this writing, no additional concentrated solar plants are planned for Florida.

Another place that I enjoy flying over, on my way to Okeechobee and points West, is the very large (some 660 sites) RV resort where I have stayed with my motor home. Consisting of travel trailers, motor homes and permanently mounted "park model" modular homes of 500 Sq. Ft. or less, it is quite the attraction for the "snow birds" from the northern states who wish to spend the winter in a more amenable climate. It is operated as a condo association and the grounds are well cared for and the various mini-homes well maintained. There is even a large club-house with an indoor pool along with a nice sized lake.

But, of course, the real purpose of today's flight was to take our dogs out to breakfast at the Landing Strip restaurant right in the terminal building at Okeechobee airport. While I chowed down on a waffle, eggs and bacon, the two Yorkies shared the aforementioned ham steak. What better way to spend a midweek morning...eating and flying with my Girls!



The Yorkies with their ear protection in place



Martin Power Plant's 500 acres of solar panels



An Okeechobee RV resort where I have stayed



Awaiting B'fast on the Airport restaurant patio