

Oct. 31, 2019 - Keep **OFF**.... This means **YOU!!** - The **Old Farts of Florida** at Sebring

First an explanation as to why nothing has been posted to my blog for more than half a year. As an airplane nears its engine's half-life it usually will require some extra inspection effort and maintenance. Having reached the 10 year, 1,100 hour mark on my Highlander, I knew that this year's annual inspection was going to lead to some extra ordinary follow-up work. However, I DID NOT expect what turned out to be more than a 5 month effort to correct those deficiencies! Two cylinders had badly burnt exhaust valves and some erosion at their head coupling to the cylinder flange that would require extensive welding and machining to again provide a satisfactory mating of these two surfaces. As it turned out, it was more efficient and less costly to order in brand new heads from their Australian manufacturer. However the down side was a 2 month backlog delay, and once they arrived, sans any valves, we still were faced with cleaning and machining of the existing valves from the old assembly. We found that the exhaust side valves were way too worn for an easy rework and had to order a replacement from the Jabiru engine manufacturer, also an Australian company. Another backlog and a one month wait. Two other cylinders had cracked, damaged or misaligned piston rings which required those components to be removed, disassembled and refit. The original engine's exhaust system had some extensive wear and erosion leaks as well, which required major rebuilding by a machine shop with a myriad of fitting and re-fitting rework necessary before it could be re-installed. The end results being almost 6 full months of my airplane being out of service and a final bill that was astronomical. During this time, of being without what has become a major diversion in my otherwise mundane retirement life, I looked for an alternate interest. We decided to get back into RVing, which is something that I had done previously for over 3 decades with my business travels. So we purchased a new Winnebago Navion, which is built on a Mercedes Benz Sprinter chassis and took off to see the lakes and mountains on a one month sojourn of the southeastern states. This spring we hope to take the motorhome out to Sedona, AZ to see their beautiful "red rock" formations.



Now for this blog's storyline. I have previously mentioned my desire to hold off my "retirement" from flying for one more year so that I will be eligible to join an organization known as the "**UFO's**". This is an acronym for the **United Flying Octogenarians**, and membership is open to anyone who acts as "pilot in command" at the controls of an aircraft on or after their 80th birthday. Once a member, you are in for life, even if you never again fly. I thought that this would be a fitting and appropriate departure from my 6 decades in private aviation. There is another local organization with far less stringent requirements for membership. They are the **OFF's** or the "**Old Farts Flying Club**", whose only requirement is that you be of a senior age and able to make some of their Thursday fly-in lunches to various local South Florida airports. There are no dues, no meetings, and no formal membership. Just show up. Today's luncheon was to be at the Sebring Regional airport, a mere 45 minute flight from my home base at Indiantown. It was a beautiful flying day and I looked forward to meeting some fellow "old farts" at my first luncheon with this



group. I had, inadvertently, attended some of their other gatherings and I had always been impressed with the 40 or 50 airplanes that showed up for the event. So, I was somewhat taken aback, once I had landed at SEF, seeing only a dozen or so aircraft parked on the ramp. "Oh well," I thought to myself, perhaps I am early and others may still show up.

That was not to be as, once I entered the on-field restaurant, I would find out that this luncheon had been cancelled... something that, had I checked my e-mail more often, I would have easily discovered.



There will be many more opportunities to make the **OFF's** luncheon fly-ins and hopefully I will be able to even make one or two of the **UFO's** regional events once I am eligible to join that organization, after which time... who knows?

However the month of October 2019 was not to end without some memorable flying experiences logged. As I mentioned I had been almost 6 months without being in the air. Once my Highlander was again certified airworthy, at the very beginning of October, I began the extensive engine break-in procedure. This requires some very high power settings for a minimum of 10 hours, in order to set in the new piston rings. This meant a lot of short flights, over known territory with flat terrain and a sufficient number of airports... just in case! Actually I was able to log almost 15 hours during this month, including today's flights. Presumably the engine is, now, optimally performing and I don't have to worry about major discrepancies or costs for another 10 years. **LOL!** Actually I only expect to remain active in aviation for another year... two at best. To me, flying is not only an enjoyable pastime with awesome daily adventures, it is also my personal barometer for my physical, emotional and mental health. As long as I continue to be able to handle the physical tasks of balance, co-ordination and delicate finesse required to maintain altitude, direction and maneuvering of the aircraft, and can still perform the mental calculations involving aircraft convergence and spatial orientation which produces a successful approach to a safe and smooth landing and can calmly react to unexpected situations involving aircraft traffic or sudden flocks of birds and the stress of pop-up adverse weather, then I know that I am well prepared to handle the remainder of life's many challenges. You see, flying is much more than a chance to punch holes in clouds or taking a short trip to enjoy the camaraderie of fellow pilots over a breakfast. It is more than a low level cruise along a sandy Atlantic beach looking for sharks, manatees or dolphins. It is more than the practice to perfect one's bank and turn, climb and decent and landing performance capabilities. It is even more than a twilight flight to enjoy a beautiful Florida sunset (which I did this evening). It is a way of life... it is my way of life!

