

# AOPA

February 1995 Training Topics

## In Training

### Air Race Classic

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She sat at the long table in the classroom, chart spread out before her, equipped with plotter, E6B, pencil, and flight plan. She was a thorough student, proud that every space in the plan would be filled in before she left the building to preflight the airplane.

Across the table was a classmate who thought that filling in all that information was a waste of time. This student had a keen eye, a good ear, a mind that quickly converted ground speed, wind direction, and heading to fuel burn and estimated time of arrival (ETA) without using pencil and paper.

The instructor asked a colleague, "How can I really challenge these two? I need to find a way to put all their learning together, build their confidence, and let them have fun, too."

The colleague handed the instructor a flyer and said, "Would this help? It just arrived in the mail."

#### ATTENTION WOMEN PILOTS!

Cahokia, Illinois (St. Louis) to Columbus, Ohio

Air Race Classic June 22-25, 1994

Race Route: 2427.76 statute miles

Air racing is one of the best ways pilots - student, new, or experienced - can practice cross-country flying skills. The Air Race Classic (ARC) offers a good introduction to proficiency air racing, as the race rules and procedures have evolved over nearly 20 years as the ARC, and many years before that of participant involvement in other races.

The race route varies each year, but it is usually about 2,500 statute miles long and divided into eight legs. Racers are usually given four days in which to finish the race, navigating by any means they wish. (Pilotage or GPS - Global Positioning System - it makes no difference.) Racers fly under visual flight rules (VFR) during daylight hours only.

Although student pilots may fly as passengers, pilots must have at least a private pilot certificate, and one of the team members must be instrument-rated. The team divides flying and navigating responsibility to take advantage of each other's strengths. Special events planned at beginning and end, and media attention along the way, add to the fun.

The all-women's Air Race Classic began in 1977 after the Powder Puff Derby ended. Five Powder Puff racers, who believed that the learning experience of air racing should not end, started the Air Race Classic with 27 participants its first year.

Throughout its history, safety has been a primary concern. For example, a "Mother Bird" program is in place, assigning an experienced racer with a first-time team to answer questions about race preparation, what to pack, and to provide a safety

sounding board along the route. Safety seminars provide instruction on performing the fly-bys correctly, as well as point out local weather and geological features that might be troublesome. Filing flight plans before each leg is required.

Not only is the FAA advised of the route, airport personnel often are brought into the planning. They look forward to being a part of this annual event, which helps to boost awareness of general aviation. Airport officials often compete for the fun of having Air Race participants stop at their airports.

Normally, the route allows racers to practice flying in a wide range of VFR conditions and experience the special considerations of different parts of the country. New Englanders, for example, learn firsthand to avoid flying across the desert in the afternoon, when turbulence abounds. They learn how to read the clouds over the Rocky Mountains to avoid mountain waves and turbulence. Density altitude is no longer a classroom concept.

Westerners learn to study VFR charts carefully when flying in the East to identify checkpoints in hazier conditions than they are used to. All racers learn to listen to their airplanes and watch temperature gauges more closely, and gain a better understanding of the limits of the machines they fly.

In addition to a little bit of luck, winning takes a combination of sharp pilots and piloting, a good-performing stock airplane, and an understanding of the weather. Airplanes are given handicaps depending on their type, engine, and expected performance so that a variety of airplanes may race.

Overall and leg prize winners are those who have done the best job of bettering their handicaps. Navions, Skyhawks, Wacos, and Cessna 310s are just a few of the types of aircraft that have been entered in recent years. Pre- and post-race, airplanes are inspected to see that all Airworthiness Directives (ADs) have been addressed, that each has a current annual inspection, that the equipment works, there has been no tampering en route, and there have been no unexpected modifications to give anyone an advantage.

Pilots should be in good health, as this is a rigorous event - long days, sometimes intense pressure, constant decision-making in unfamiliar territory, and often very high ambient temperatures. Pilots need to know when and how to navigate through or around all classifications of airspace, and know the communication and equipment requirements of each.

Pilots must also know the whereabouts of both natural and man-made obstructions. And they need to know how to identify checkpoints - electronic or otherwise - to gauge their progress along the route. Fuel awareness and management is critical; strong headwinds could mean an unanticipated stop before reaching a race timing line.

Weather plays a major part in the race. Since it is flown in VFR conditions only, waiting for the weather to improve sometimes tests racers' patience. Planes will go faster at different altitudes on a given day on a given route; the advantage goes to the team which is smart enough to figure it out. Faster planes have the advantage of being able to wait out bad weather a little longer because they can catch up, but then they may encounter other risks, such as flying into a setting sun where the airport is suddenly lost in the haze.

The Air Race Classic can be the ultimate long student cross-country or a brush-up experience for those with a number of hours in their logbooks. One thing is certain: Any who participate will return better pilots and with new friends.

Join 1995's Air Race Classic that starts in Reno, Nev., and finishes in Huntington,

W. Va. For more information, contact the Air Race Classic Ltd., International Airport, 318 International Drive, Corpus Christi, TX 78406-1801; (512) 289-1101.

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