

EAA CHAPTER 1128

Two Harbors Helgeson Airport

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Winter shows no sign of fatigue at the lake tonight but the extra daylight holds promise.

Our next meeting will be on **Thursday, April 6 at 6:00** in the cozy **Community Room** at **Two Harbors High School**.

Last Meeting

The first order of business for Mike was to introduce Top Gun pilot LCDR Gary "Blackie" Black. This world class pilot was also an excellent communicator and his presentation held us all in rapt attention for the evening. He was among the first to participate in the Top Gun program and shared his inside perspective and personal anecdotes from the beginning of the program on through today. He flew the F-14 Tomcat and told some great stories about that airplane and many others has flown. He had great power point photos and even a pair of tiny fighters on batons that he maneuvered to demonstrate dog fight tactics. It was a very informative and even entertaining presentation and a pleasant evening. As Gary hung around to chat, Krista reported \$3515.00 in chapter coffers and also collected some dues. Mike asked about builder's progress and thanked Mike Shannon for the Blue Moon chili fly-in. Seth reported on hangar access through the ice.

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I don't have anything to report from our sister chapters but I have a newspaper clipping reporting on the Aviation Training Scholarship being offered by the Arrowhead Eagles Aviation Organization. The scholarship offers \$2,500 to the successful applicant for training with a CFI or with an accredited aviation curriculum. I think it's a great idea.

ETC.

I have been noticing a little increase in the activity at our favorite airport and I'm hoping this is a sign of spring. Jim Brown and Steve Merrill flew in Saturday to visit with Mike. Dave had a couple of visitors looking for some air time in his C140. Most importantly for me, Rooby slipped the surly bonds for the first time since November. What a thrill! The temperature just made my minimums but the sky was clear and the passive solar cabin heater was sufficient. I'm sure Rooby was a bit perturbed for being ignored all winter so I spent some quality hands-on time renewing our relationship and inspecting her fitness. When I rolled her out into the sunshine she seemed to swell with pride and I knew she was ready. Apparently, her little battery didn't mind the winter because I had to crank her through three or four short starts before I got enough prime in the cylinders to keep her running. I had checked the AWOS broadcast several times and it went from calm at about noon to 350 degrees at 11 knots by the time we were ready to launch. I knew the direct crosswind would be a challenge but I convinced myself the winds would ease as it got later in the day. I really wished that the crossing runway had about three feet less snow on it. As we taxied down toward the departure end of 06 I became re-acquainted with the feel of her controls, the view ahead, the sounds and even that 'new plane' smell.

With only 8.9 hours on the Hobbes we were still suffering some of that 'first date' awkwardness but I could tell she was going to treat me well. After doing the mag check and reciting my pre-take-off mnemonic we rolled onto the runway. On the first test flights last fall the propeller pitch was so low that she accelerated like a slingshot and was literally off the ground before the throttle hit the stop. Of course that meant cruise speed was anemic so during the winter I installed new pitch blocks and expected a more sedate take off experience.

Surprise! She still shot off the ground like a paper kite and was roughly manhandled by the gusty crosswind. I was immediately fully engaged in the act and grinning like a lunatic. A quick scan of the gauges told me the propeller pitch change had indeed reduced my revs and increased my speed so I just relaxed into the controls and we began to dance. We blasted through pattern altitude quickly and as we leveled off I took in the scene. The big lake was deep blue against the stark white shoreline and the roads were black hairs in marshmallow. A rust-red ore boat heading for the docks was the only other color. Flawless new Lexan windows allowed a super sharp focus and I felt like I was seeing it all for the first time. The bumps became routine as we floated and turned experimenting with new dance steps. A short burst of full throttle pushed her past 80 mph in level flight then we played with the bottom end of the airspeed indicator. At about 35 she began to shudder a little so I knew if I kept her over 40 on short final we would be alright. I remembered to make all my radio calls in the pattern and set up for a three pointer on 06. The closer we got to the ground the more we were slapped around by the crosswind and after dipping and ducking half way down the runway I finally powered up for a go around. I watched the windsock snapping this way and that as we climbed out and wondered what I had gotten us into. Rooby looks like a standard bush plane but she weighs about half what a loaded Super Cub would so we felt every swirl and eddy in the breeze. On the second approach I took pains to get established early but I was still stirring the paint with the stick and pedaling like a bicycle thief. Eventually one wheel touched rather gently during a moment when I had her going straight and by the time the other came down we were almost stopped. We tip-toed back to the hangar.

The forty hour Phase I test period exists to make a measured, comprehensive assessment of the controls, systems and performance in the safest manner. It is also flight training. The pilot has to teach himself to fly an airplane that nobody has ever flown before. The pilot needs a better teacher. When I started doing first flights and test flights 30 some years ago I wouldn't even consider launching unless it was nearly calm. Thirty years of experience has made me dumber. The part of my brain that was all excited about the first flight of the year just barged right through the part that knew better. Lesson learned.

Fortunately Sunday was a much better test flight type of day and we spent an uneventful hour getting acquainted. I feel comfortable and safe in her cozy cabin and content to just cruise. Miss Chaos insists we rip and shred the sky but Rooby is her own girl. I am really looking forward to discovering her full personality.

.....Happy Landings!.....