

THE RACE

I am at great peril telling this story. At risk is the possibility of upsetting and/or embarrassing my good friend, political ally, and aerobatic flight instructor. I guess now would be a good time for my disclosure: It is not my intent, by telling this story, to come across as “insensitive”, or to hurt anyone’s feelings, or to sound like one who is “gloating”! As most people who know me will attest, I am not one to gloat!!!...However, this story needs to be told. This story is too good not to be told!! Let me further state that, throughout history, it took great courage to tell certain stories, stories that might be considered controversial, or “tough” to stomach by some of the more “sensitive” types. This is one of those kind of stories. A story that takes great courage to tell. I would also like it to be known that I am not claiming that I should receive “hero” status by displaying such “bravery” by telling this story. I feel it is imperative that I tell this story simply by my “moral” obligation to not keep this story a secret. You have been warned if you read on.

The Story:

On Sunday morning, January 25, 2009, I flew to Greenwood, S.C. to attend the South Carolina Breakfast Club in my RV-10, the “Bo Derek”. I was late arriving to the function since my departure was delayed due to the low level fog on the runway at County Line Airport (formerly known as Twin Lakes Airpark)...(My delayed departure had nothing to do with the hangover I was nursing caused by attending the party at Ed and Mary Booth’s hangar the night prior). Even though I was late arriving at the Greenwood airport, the guys in the FBO were nice enough to give me a ride to the restaurant where the function was being held. It was good to see some old friends I hadn’t seen in a while, but after a quick cup of coffee it was time to head back to the airport, where a group of us sat around for a little while drinking coffee and swapping stories about flying and any other “lies” we could think of.

When it came time to fly home, my good friend Gary Ward, who had flown up to Greenwood in his very nice F-33 Bonanza, suggested that we “depart together” get beside each other, and “let em’ rip”. Yep, the Bo Derek had been challenged to a race!! Fearing the outcome of such an event, I reluctantly agreed. We lined up on runway 9, with a fairly good crowd eagerly listening to the Unicom frequency inside the FBO, for a formation take-off. Gary was going to fly my wing. I have to admit, the RV-10 accelerates on take-off like an aerobatic plane; it really goes. I wasn’t even close to half way to rotation speed on my take-off roll when I could hear Gary hollering on the radio to “Slow down, your getting waaay ahead of me”.



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I tried to accommodate him by finally rotating the “10” with about 18” of manifold pressure with Gary’s voice filling my headset to “Back off the power some more!”. Well, it was obvious that the RV-10 (with full tanks, I had just topped off at Greenwood) was vastly superior to the Beech as far as acceleration and takeoff performance!!!...However, I was still concerned about what was going to happen when we arrived at altitude and Gary could suck the gear up and get his pretty bird “slicked-up” and I couldn’t do that (retract the gear)!!!....

In between Gary's repetitive requests for me to "slow down so he could get along side of me" he also dictated the "rules of engagement" for this event..... "2500 RPM and when I get beside you we will go "Full Power"!! Gary said that he synchronized his propeller to mine (he said that when he was directly behind me, he looked through his prop to mine and "got them in sync"How cool is that????!!...I had never heard of that....You can learn a lot from Gary) so we know our RPM was identical. I was very worried at this point as he pulled up beside me, because man that thing(the Bonanza) looked "slick"!!....Even though he had a little momentum because he was traveling faster than me as he was pulling up beside me(and we really hadn't stabilized our speed yet), apparently, he still felt like it would be the appropriate time for him to command: "Okay, Full Power!!".....I wanted to close my eyes as I didn't know if I could bear to look!!....after all, this was a Super-Slick "Bonanza".....The king of the jungle....The dream of every pilot who flies!!!! (always mine, anyway). Also, Gary used to hang around with Charlie Davis who, I am sure, taught him how to "gloat" like the best of them!!....How could I face my wife and dogs, or even my flying buddies from the Pea Patch or County Line (formerly known as Twin Lakes) if this Bonanza starts to dart out in front of me??....I couldn't bear to peak over at him!!...my nerves couldn't take it (perhaps, that nervousness was a by product from the Booth party the night before) so I just stared straight ahead and tried to maintain a constant heading and altitude.

It only took a few seconds of this before the next transmission I hear from Gary was "Man, your walking away from me!!!"... What??... ..Huh.. ..Just then I realized....I had done it!!...We (Bo Derek and I) had "de-throned" the King, the "Mercedez"!!!!.....The "Bonanza"!!!!...Ha,Ha!!...Gary stated "I am showing 176 knots across the ground on the GPS, and then he inquired from me, What are you showing????.....I looked down and the 430 proudly displayed 184 knots!!!!

Well, to Gary's credit, he tuned in the Greenwood frequency and conveyed to all of the guys sitting on the edge of their seats back at the FBO, the information that had to be tremendously difficult for him to divulge....He told the truth!!....And meanwhile, I was thinking to myself, Somewhere up there, Charlie Davis was looking down laughing hysterically!!! ..He wasn't laughing so much by the outcome of this event, but merely from the competition itself!!....It was a great moment!!!

Back on the ground at County Line(formerly known as Twin Lakes), I had to call Ed Booth before I could even put the airplane in the hangar. I had to tell him what a fine airplane he had constructed!!!

Ooooooh the dilemma.....Should I re-nickname the the RV-10 from "The Bo Derek"tothe "Bonanza Smoker"?????!!!!!!...What to do...What to do?????!!!

So there you have it. A story, that perhaps should have been kept quiet in order to preserve one's feelings, but was just too good not to tell!!! So, if any of you have the courage, and feel compelled to tell this story, you have my permission!!!

Sincerely,

Greg Connell,
Race Pilot for RV-10, N708GC; the "Bo Derek"

