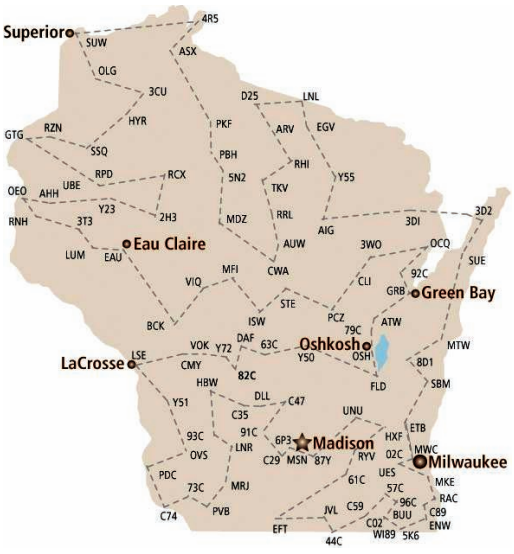
One Day, One State, 104 Airports

by Matt McDaniel



Planning & Executing The Romp Around Wisconsin – A Record-Setting Charity Flight

Good: Jumping into a Cirrus and heading out with a favorite flying buddy for the day.

Better: You set a U.S. national aviation record by landing at every paved, public airport in your home state over the course of the day.

Best: You did all of the above AND raised thousands of dollars for sick children in the process.

That is exactly what Dr. Bruce Kaufman and I did on June 20, 2006, using his late-2002 SR22. It was truly one of the best experiences I have had in aviation. But, it didn't just happen overnight. Like most very rewarding experiences, copious work went into turning our ideas for this charitable flight into a reality.

Marked as a silly idea about three years ago, it festered and grew in our minds. Quickly, we decided that we didn't want to do such a flight just for bragging rights. We wanted to have a real reason to do it – a cause.

In time, that cause became clear to us. Dr. Kaufman is the Medical Director of Neurosurgery at the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin (CHW). He sees the ravages of neurological disease every day. At the time, my brother-in-law was dying from brain cancer. He was a husband and father, a mechanical engineer, an instrument-rated pilot, an airport manager and a great friend. So, we both had motivation to make our flight serve a greater purpose. Our goal was to highlight the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, and to raise over $10,000 for the benefit of those affected by neurological disease.

Cassville.

Northwest Wisconsin, leaving the rain behind.

Planning & Execution:

The planning process started simply by identifying all the airports in Wisconsin. Using the Wisconsin State Aeronautical Chart and DOT's airport guide, we decided the goal would be to visit all 102 paved, public airports in Wisconsin IN ONE DAY. We also decided to try to obtain permission to land at the only paved, military-only airport in Wisconsin (VOK – Volk Field ANG Base); after extended communications, permission was granted. We later added one private airport (WI89 – Lake Geneva Aire Estates), a private fly-in community and home of one of our sponsors. Our flight would begin and end at Milwaukee-Timmerman Field (MWC), the original home of the EAA.

Matt, Doug and Bruce at MWC.

Prairie du Chien.

The lights of Milwaukee.

Bruce used Flightsoft flight planning software to help determine the shortest routing (although an initial route plotted visually on the Wisconsin DOT map was quite close to the final route). He then went through a series of route modifications to fulfill other safety requirements, such as landing at unlit airports during daylight hours. Thankfully, that planning had us experiencing only one "black hole" airport – the very first landing on a small, isolated, dimly-lit runway, five miles from departure.

With the shortest route defined, it quickly became apparent that we had to minimize our time en route to accomplish our goal. The minimum number of quick-turn refueling airports (and alternates) needed to be determined, and climbs between airports had to be limited. My job was to determine minimum safe altitudes between airports, real-world fuel burns, aircraft performance, and procedures for increasing time efficiency. Bruce and I practiced a variety of approaches, all starting from a full-speed entry. Straight-in, base-to-final, and overhead 360 approaches were combined with slips to landing. We defined the two power settings we would need: Full power (ROP in climb/LOP in cruise) and idle (for approach/landing). With practice we became comfortable with when and where to select idle power. LOP cruise operations were a must and allowed us to limit fuel stops to three; ROP operations would have required four, or possibly even five, fuel stops. The "big pull" method of leaning was used upon each of the 104 separate level-offs.

During both testing and the real flight, we made extensive use of Emax monitoring to determine fuel status. I pre-flew segments of our route and determined our fuel burn was a fairly consistent 15 gph. Adding two minutes per airport to our software planned time matched our actual time trials. I tested tailwind landings, as I knew they'd often be the most time efficient if winds were light, and determined which runways were too short for a tailwind touch-and-go. I also determined the ideal runway at each airport based on the courses to/from that airport, but obviously, winds and traffic did not always allow use of that runway.

Bruce combined this information into a spreadsheet, complete with color-coding to denote things like controlled fields, and fuel stops. This spreadsheet also helped him to define how best to use the 4 COMM windows in the dual Garmin radios, to minimize the amount of frequency loading/flipping between the many CTAF and ATC frequencies we would use – truly necessary when some legs were mere minutes in length. That led to him making detailed and user-friendly leg-by-leg "nav logs" used throughout the flight. They had all course, altitude and communication information on one page, with sectional and photographic representation of the airports on the opposite page.

Morning fog.

Blue Kids One flight.

Blue Kids One touch-n-go.

While Bruce tackled the detailed and time-consuming work on the nav logs, I worked on a multitude of other logistics: ATC priorities and cooperation, FAA authorizations for our call-sign (Blue Kids One) and discreet squawk-code, FSS cooperation on briefings and NOTAM's, challenging airport procedures, special permission for the military and private airports, weather planning (before and during the flight), aircraft decals (printed and installed by Madison Air Graphics), satisfying the many NAA requirements for the record attempt, etc. Another important item was finding support crews to help expedite fuel stops, take aerial & ground photos, and to act as our "eyes in the sky" in advance of our current position. Fortunately, our COPA friends Doug and Carrie Woods and Wynn "Casey" Jones each flew their SR22's in support of "The Romp."

More challenges were encountered trying to coordinate everyone's schedules and doing the public relations (PR) legwork to ensure we met our primary goal of fund raising for CHW. The PR work was multi-faceted and continuous, with work by Bruce, myself, the PR departments at CHW and Midwest Airlines (the airline I work for), COPA, numerous local news outlets, and a variety of traditional and online aviation and medical news sources and periodicals. Most important, we established a website for donations that Bruce and I edited and kept up-to-date.

With the bonus of maximum daylight, June 20 was the day everyone's schedules coincided. The weather gods were kind; it was almost like the weather knew exactly when to dissipate for us and/or move out of our way. But there was a lot of severe weather moving toward us from the west. Fortunately, just as we got to the edge of it, our routing had us turning away from it. When our route took us back towards the weather, the severe storms had dissipated and the worst we had to contend with was moderate rain showers.

Standard FSS briefings were obtained prior to launch and at each fuel stop. We used WxWorx on Wings™ on a tablet PC to monitor the weather throughout the flight, which certainly helped to alleviate our stress (or perhaps induce it as we could "see" the weather). Our on-board weather was supplemented by routine updates from our support aircraft, who relayed FSS updates to us and overflew airports and weather areas in advance. Interestingly, we soon discovered that obtaining the latest AWOS/ASOS was much faster via the WxWorx unit than by listening via radio. At controlled airports, it was still necessary to listen to ATIS information.

We made only ONE change to our entire plan … due to fog lingering at airport number 31, we sent our support teams to airport number 32 for our first fuel stop. However, by the time we actually got there the fog had lifted from the east-end of the runway and a touch-and-go was possible. We flew on to the next airport where the support crew was waiting to refuel us.

Some other highlights of the flight were:

- Departing on time and completing the flight nearly an hour ahead of schedule.
- Narrowest Runway: 20-feet wide (Brennand – 79C, number 49)
- Shortest Runway: 2,155 feet long (Crivitz – 3D1, number 97)
- Longest & Widest Runway: 9,690 × 200 feet (Milwaukee International – MKE, number 3)
- High and Low-Speed low passes by request (Volk Air National Guard Base – VOK, number 42)
- Formation approach with support aircraft and TV News crew at Green Bay (GRB, number 51) – safely done through use of the Audio Panel's Split Comm feature
- Several loose formation aerial photo opportunities with support aircraft
- Gorgeous sunset over Green Bay and Door County Peninsula

Matt being interviewed for CBS.

Some of the stats on the flight (the unofficial numbers):

First Engine Start: 4:00 a.m.

Departure: 4:15 a.m. (wheels up at MWC)

Final Arrival: 9:10 p.m. (wheels down at final arrival airport – MWC)

Final Engine Shutdown: 9:15 p.m.

Total Time: 17 Hours and 15 Minutes (includes three quick fuel stops)

Total Miles Flown: 2,119 Nautical Miles (2,437 Statute Miles)

Average Ground Speed: 136.3 KTS (156.7 MPH)

Maximum Ground Speed: 196.5 KTS (226.0 MPH)

Blue Kids One touchdown.

The National Aeronautic Association labels the flight as "The Fastest Time to Visit All the Hard Surface, Public Airports in Wisconsin." ***On July, 17, 2006 this record was officially recognized with a calculated time of 16 Hours, 42 Minutes and 14 Seconds.*** *All expenses associated with the flight were donated by Dr. Kaufman and myself.*

One hundred percent of all donations go directly to Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. On the date of the Romp, money raised was close to $8,000 and the $10,000 goal was surpassed three days later. To date, the amount raised is over $12,000. Donations can still be made by visiting the website at www.firstgiving.com/romp. COPA

Self-portrait (Matt & Bruce) at 1450 CDT – between Boyceville-3T3 and New Richmond-RNH.

The weather gods were kind; it was almost like the weather knew exactly when to dissipate for us and/or move out of our way.

WE DID IT! Matt and Bruce with their wives, Darcy and Anna, as they celebrate their return to MWC.

About the Author: *Matthew McDaniel flies a Boeing 717 for a national airline and is an ATP, Master CFII, MEI, CSIP, and holds four turbine aircraft type ratings. He has over 8,500 hours, including well over 2,000 hours teaching in Cirrus aircraft since 2001. He owns Progressive Aviation Services, LLC (*www.progaviation.com*) and can be reached at: (414) 339-4990 or matt@progaviation.com.*