



Sport Aviation

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It's a labor of love for many EAAers

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The Gannet, an odd British Cold War warrior

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LAURAN PAINE JR.

COMMENTARY / PLANE TALK



Hayward Air Rally participants. 2014 marked the 50th anniversary of the air rally.

Air Rally to Oshkosh

Cruising coast-to-coast in one of the best U.S. navigation contests

BY LAURAN PAINE JR.

HOW MANY AIRPLANES FLEW to AirVenture 2014? Roughly speaking, 10,000 or so. How many airplanes flew in a coast-to-coast (nearly) navigation contest to AirVenture 2014? Twenty-five. Why would someone do that, you ask? I'll answer that for you: aviation pride and proficiency. Who are they? They're all a part of what's called the Hayward Air Rally.

I've written about the Hayward Air Rally before, in September 2011 to be exact. It is the longest running air rally in the nation. You've never heard of it? Primarily that's because it's based on the West Coast (Hayward is near Oakland, California) and all its activities to date have been held on the West Coast. So here's the new deal: For the 50th anniversary of the rally, these hardy aviation souls—come one, come all—flew from Hayward, California, to Madison, Wisconsin. The last leg to Oshkosh was flown non-competitively but in a very detailed fashion, with 45-second staggered departures and arrivals.

Now, before I go one step further, let me point this out, right here, right now: The Hayward Air Rally is not a race. It's an exercise in proficiency involving flight planning to include navigation, timing, and fuel-planning accuracy. That's what's being judged. It's not how fast you do it; it's how well you do it. You can enter using a Baron or you can enter using a J-3 and beat the Baron with the J-3. There *are* different

navigational classes of airplanes, depending on the airplane's installed equipment. If you have all the whiz-bang glass-gizmos and want to use them, you're entered in the Digital Class. Scoring penalties are higher for planning and navigation errors in the Digital Class as a compensatory handicap for those competing in the Analog Class. (It's kinda like a golf handicap.) In the Analog Class, GPS is out. That's what I'm talking about! Just charts and an old-fashioned flight log. You challenge yourself by competing old school. So when the Baron pilot decides to go analog (no fancy gizmo stuff), then he's on an even competitive keel with the J-3.

This year the rally flew from Hayward, California (HWD), to Silver Springs, Nevada (SPZ), then to Wendover, Utah (ENV), for an overnight stop. Day one. On day two the course was from Wendover to Lander, Wyoming (LND), and then to Rapid City, South Dakota

(RAP), for the next overnight. Then it was Rapid City to Montevideo, Minnesota (MVE), and Madison, Wisconsin (MSN), for the final day of the competition. Mind you, *each* leg is being scored for navigation accuracy and the meeting of pre-submitted ETAs and fuel-planning estimates. The competition is flown VFR, and each airplane has assigned race numbers and uses a race number call sign.

Here's a broad-brush on how it all works. Each day crews are briefed on their route. Then they plan that route. Before they leave they hand in their timing and fuel estimates. Basically, the ones coming closest to their pre-planned estimates win. But there's a lot more to it, too. Along the route there are checkpoints that must be identified, e.g., a small airport, a small town, a water tower, etc. Each pilot/crew must identify what the checkpoint is and record it. Of note: Each airplane has a GPS tracker onboard that records the route flown. That tracker is downloaded at the end of the rally and can be (and is!) displayed on a screen at the awards banquet. So, if you circled a checkpoint a time or two to identify it, everyone knows that. Too, circling messes up your timing and fuel estimates. Penalty points are assessed. Again, like golf, low score (fewest penalty points) wins. (There are allowances for weather deviations and such, as there must be.) Bottom line: Planning, precision, and accuracy wins. It's pilot stuff!

I know, I know, you say, "Sure! Yeah! Charts. What about the guy with the portable GPS stuck in his sock?" C'mon! This is not about cheating; it's about pride. Pilot pride. Play fair or don't play. Camaraderie, learning, and safety are the most important takeaways.

As you can imagine, there is a lot of overall preplanning by officials long before the rally actually takes place. Chris Verbil is the Hayward Air Rally committee chairman. And he's amazing: energy and talent and people skills all rolled into one. The myriad details that he handles are unbelievable: the Rally Crew Handbook (very thorough and professional); ensuring ground crews are at each arrival point; monitoring en route and arrivals; making sure fuel pumps are carefully

calibrated; contacting various EAA chapters and local airport officials for support; coordinating philanthropy (and there's lots of it—the rally has awarded numerous EAA Air Academy scholarships), to name just a few of the balls that he has to keep in the air at the same time. Of course, he doesn't do it all alone, and he is the first to tell you that. He relies on a small army of volunteers, very EAA-like, to ensure the rally moves smoothly across the United States. Bless 'em all!

An offshoot of 25 airplanes flying across the United States in a navigation competition? Favorable publicity for general aviation. The *San Jose Mercury News* gave them a send-off article; the *Nevada Appeal* did an article on them while they were at the Silver Springs Airport, featuring a local student who was interested in aviation; in Lander, County 10 radio conducted live interviews with rally participants in conjunction with an airport open house; KOTA radio, in Rapid City, did much the same. This is just a smattering of the publicity they received. It's all good for general aviation. Anytime we can get people to the airport and have them meet and greet regular people who are enthusiastic about aviation is win-win. Not to mention fuel sales and motels and meals purchased at destinations. General aviation is made up of good people who contribute to America. The more people who get that word the better.

Of course, there were lots of personal experiences and stories as the rally moved across the land. That's to be expected; aviation is all about meeting challenges. Take Mike and Katie, father and daughter in Race 42. Katie was an EAA scholarship winner in 2013. She started flying shortly thereafter and soled in December. The demands of school intervened for a bit, but she still completed her private pilot rating on July 12. Two weeks later she and her dad launched across the country in a navigation contest with the Hayward Air Rally. That's what you call *family*. And know this, all people in the rally become family.

Now take Mark and Gregg in Race 17, a PA-22. At Brigham Airport (an alternate fuel stop), the starter wouldn't engage. Oops! Bill, the local mechanic, had to drive to Ogden to get a new starter, after


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Rain shower en route to Oshkosh.

which he drove back and installed it. Rather out of the rally by now, Mark and Gregg filed to Casper, Wyoming. En route they called flight service. No response. Then they noticed the transponder wasn't blinking. Then, closer in, they tried to call Casper. No response. They then pulled out their handheld and called

Casper again, and Casper answered. (Good case for carrying a handheld, huh!). They landed, and a local mechanic determined that the generator was not charging the battery. Mark and Gregg went to the hotel. The next day the mechanic had worked on the generator and said the generator was now charging the battery. They launched again and arrived in Madison about 20 minutes before the rally group took off for Oshkosh. That's perseverance; it's a necessary characteristic of aviators.

Of course, Mark and Gregg's experience wasn't over. After leaving Oshkosh, they had the whole radio/transponder fail/use-the-handheld thing again. This time, at Willmar, the local mechanic found one of the generator brushes had come loose and ground against the commutator. They ordered a new generator. Generator fixed, but now the battery was dead. Got a new battery. Mark's comment at the end of his story? "It was quite an adventure."

Now consider Scott and his daughter, Michelle, in Race 77. They were first-time entrants. They're a close family, and there has been an ongoing discussion about adult daughter Michelle learning to fly. She is the type of daughter who listens to her parents. She decided to go along with her dad on the rally. She became, in her dad's words, "an all-star navigator!" She later said the trip "was a life-changing experience." She's now an aspiring pilot. Now that right there is good stuff!

At the "end of the day," at a rally banquet held at AirVenture (during a "wonderful" rainstorm that had many worrying about their tents), an entertaining debriefing was given along with many shared stories. These people really are all-for-one and one-for-all. There are awards for first, second, third, and fourth and such, but that's not the entire point. All arrived safely so all are winners in an

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event like this; they're winners for participating in an event that improves the flying skills of every one of them. That's the really commendable part. The spirit part of the awards is fun: Tail End Charlie (self-explanatory) went to Race 5; Most Lost, for being 2,478 miles away from a checkpoint, went to Race 9; and Best Rookie Racer went to Race 77 (Scott and Michelle). Okay, truth be known, each of us is capable, at some time or other in our flying, of winning any of these awards. One participant wanted to, well, participate but didn't want to compete. He used the call sign Race Tourist. He was welcome. Who won? Tom and Bob in Race 71 (in a Digital Class airplane). Chris Verbil was awarded the Jean Stroobant Service Award for his tireless effort and dedication to the rally. Well deserved.

New for this year was the Stenbock CAFE Award. It recognized the most

efficient airplane in the rally—the one that used the least fuel per max gross weight. Twenty of the airplanes were evaluated. You ready for this, homebuilders? First place went to an RV-10. As did fifth place. The rest of the airplanes were “store bought.” Just sayin’.

A few more factoids from the rally participants: 10.33 mpg was the average for all the participants in the flight; one participant reported his fuel cost as 38 cents per nm flown; another reported highest fuel cost at \$6.43 a gallon and lowest (discounted) at \$4.86; one reported 28 bottles of water consumed; a report was also given that the average temperature in the right footwell was 30°F over the left footwell; “wrong airport used for landing” was noted as...one; a final comment was, “Real cost of trip: priceless.” These people keep track of things!

The takeaway from all this? Twenty-five pilots took and met the challenge of flying

across this great country in a navigation competition, and all arrived safely at Oshkosh.

I think I said it in 2011, but I'm going to say it again: If everyone took their flying as seriously as the Hayward Air Rally people do, the general aviation accident rate would plummet. That's a bold statement, I know. But think about it. These pilots challenged themselves, and they're better pilots for it. They were not at show center with smoke; they were not shooting sparks at night; they were not in multimillion-dollar airplanes. They're doing what most of us do every day: flying our little airplanes somewhere. But they're doing it with a wonderful precision. And they spread aviation goodwill along the way. Hats off! *EAA*

Lauran Paine Jr., EAA 582274, is a retired military pilot and retired airline pilot. He built and flies an RV-8 and has owned a Stearman and a Champ. Learn more about Lauran at his website, www.ThunderBumper.com.



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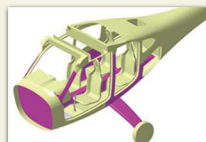
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