

September Southbound

By Stu Simpson

“You ready, Baby?” I asked Tina.

“I’m ready,” she replied.

“Okay, let’s go then.”

I pushed the Cavalier’s throttle in, released the brakes, and we were off. Not very quickly, mind you, but we were rolling. With my wife beside me, and our luggage in the cargo bay, the Cav’s usual sprightly acceleration was instead somewhat sluggish along Kirkby’s grass runway. It took a lot longer to get the tail up, too.

But, as I knew it would – and as it always has - the Cav got us airborne off runway 16 with plenty of room to spare. Gary Abel waved to us as we went by. I kept the nose lower than usual to build airspeed, and once through 90 mph I banked into a gentle climbing turn to the southeast and pulled up the flaps. We were on our way.

Southbound

Tina and I had talked for quite a while about a big trip together in the Cav, but a variety of factors prevented us from pulling the trigger on it. Now, though, a few days after the Labour Day weekend, we were making it happen.

I’ve long wanted to visit Memphis, TN. I didn’t know too much about the city before we departed, but there were some things I definitely wanted to see. Elvis Presley’s Graceland was one, and the Civil Rights Museum was the other. Tina wanted to visit Beale Street due to its musical history. We had no idea where we’d go from Memphis, but that’s a nice freedom to have.



Stu and Tina southbound in September in the Cavalier. By Stu Simpson

We delayed our departure from Kirkby's by a day due to heavy smoke in the Calgary area, but the forecast claimed the smoke wouldn't be quite as bad this day. As we climbed up to 4500' I was glad we waited. Visibility was about eight or ten miles. Not the usual unlimited vis we're normally used to, but much better than the couple of miles the previous day.

We had no clouds and only a light wind from the southwest which allowed us 125 knots over the ground. Our first stop would be Swift Current for a top up with gas, then on to Williston, ND, to clear customs.

Shortly after we passed Lake Newell south of Brooks, visibility started to deteriorate substantially. It dropped to about four miles, as measured by the section lines of the farmland below. I wondered how long it would last.

Turns out it didn't last much longer at all. It soon reduced to only three miles.

The bad visibility persisted along the southern edge of the Suffield Range and all the way to Swift Current. We had a long way to go this day, ideally all the way to Bismarck, ND. How long would the smoke haunt us, and how bad would it get?

We fueled at Swift Current and I called to file a trans-border flight plan. I asked for a trans-border squawk code even though the preferred practice is to get one in the air just before crossing. Doing that has been troublesome in the past. And on this day, due to the smoke, there was a really good chance I wouldn't be able to get high enough to radio for one along the route.



The Cav on the ramp at Swift Current. By Tina Simpson

Fortunately, I was able to negotiate with the flight service specialist to get a code for the whole leg from Swift Current to Williston. He understood my plight and quickly got me some numbers. A big relief, that.

As we put Swift Current to our rudder the visibility improved to five or six miles and I climbed to 4500'. Within minutes I was starting to lose sight of the ground. I told Tina we had to descend to 3500'. It was disappointing that I couldn't show her the landscape. She was concerned about the poor visibility and the subsequent possibility of a mid-air collision. I assured her there were unlikely to be any other planes up on a day like this and how the Cav's ADS-B can give us a huge safety advantage.

It was getting bumpy, too. I was using my autopilot, which is only single axis, but it will track a GPS course. Quite bluntly, if I didn't have it, I would have turned us around.

It was one of those situations where I questioned whether we should continue. I looked at it from a risk management perspective. What was the risk? If the autopilot or EFIS failed, could I still fly safely? The answer was yes. I could still see the ground, the terrain along our route is flat and familiar, we had 3 miles visibility, no clouds, and no impending weather or darkness.

I also had a total of three GPS's on board, two of which were then in use. Everything was working well, and if there was a sudden electrical power loss, I could still get us easily and safely to an airport where we could land using the back-up battery power in the EFIS and the GPS's. We also had lots of gas.

I decided to continue, albeit with regular risk assessments as we proceeded. That basically consisted of judging the visibility in the smoke versus the Cav's operational performance.

We crossed the border and Tina peered down to see if she could spot anything more telling than the simple fence line that exists there. She couldn't. We were now into the northeast corner of Montana.

About half an hour from Williston, it hit me that I was flying primarily - and quite comfortably - mostly using the Cav's instruments. I looked out the window occasionally, but mostly I concentrated on what the Dynon EFIS, the nav display, and the autopilot were telling me.

Tina made an interesting comment then. "I can see why you use the autopilot," she said. "Flying in this without it would be absolutely exhausting!" She was right.

We landed at Williston, cleared customs and swapped sim cards in our phones. Since our cell provider charges outrageous US roaming rates, we purchased US sim cards for \$30.00 each. That gave us US telephone numbers, unlimited calling and texting all over North America, and a bucketful of data usage. It wound up saving us about \$200.00 over the course of the trip and we can use them again in the future.

Then we hit a frustrating and unexpected delay. The US flight service contractor, Leidos, has made it nearly impossible to talk by phone with a briefer anymore. This was a vast difference from the trip Bob Kirkby, Carl Forman and I made to the US earlier in the summer.

Basically, you now have to set up an account based on your cell number and do all your filing and closing online. It's absolutely infuriating and I wonder how many lives it's going to cost as people avoid filing flight plans and getting briefings by voice over the phone.

After many minutes on hold, I finally got to speak to a briefer to file for the last two legs of the day. That evening, though, I grudgingly built an account, which mostly worked well for the remainder of the trip.

I had no intention of paying Williston's fuel prices, so we headed out for Watford City, 25 miles southeast and with lots cheaper gas. After that, there was only 135 miles to go.



The Missouri River seen through the smoke south of Watford City, ND. By Tina Simpson

We were making good time, but we were knackered. We'd lost an hour, too, due to that part of the US being on Central Standard Time, not Central Daylight Time. At least Bismarck was only a little more than an hour's flying time from Williston, and less from Watford City.

I was very glad to set down on Bismarck's runway and taxi to the ramp. I creaked and groaned my way stiffly out of the cockpit to tie the Cav down for the night.

Executive Air's staff treated us like royalty, like nearly every other US FBO does. I was well used to it, but Tina was simply blown away by the experience. They even loaned us a crew car for the night.

On the way to our hotel we passed a sign advertising a joint-pain relief clinic. Tina said I should ask if they have a drive-through. Funny girl, that wife of mine.

Day 2

We left Bismarck behind a TBM 750 turboprop with hope the sky would be clearer. It was for about five miles, then frustratingly socked back in to about three or four miles visibility.

It was, however, a nice smooth morning with no bumps and a light tailwind. Things sure could have been worse. We slipped unseen past Aberdeen, SD, and I thought of the times that Bob and Carl and I have stayed there while flying to destinations further east.

While filling up at Madison, SD, we were approached by fellow in beat up coveralls who was totally smitten with the Cav. He was very excited to see it and asked all sorts of questions. As many Cavalier admirers do, he compared the vertical fin to that of a Maule, and was totally surprised to learn the Cav is made of wood. He was a wonderful fellow to chat with and a former professional pilot. He said he'd flown a Piper Aerostar around the world many moons ago. I could see him wistfully recalling his past flying adventures as Tina and I were living out ours. When we taxied out past his hangar he saluted us and gave us a little prayer bow. We waved back, smiling happily.

We finally outran the smoke about half an hour north of Des Moines, IA, our destination for the day. It's amazing it extended so far south and east. We could finally see more of the farms beneath us, their various crops, and other land uses. Combines and other equipment worked busily beneath us and we pondered what crops they might be harvesting.

I studied the airport info and com procedures for Des Moines from the Cav's nav display and got myself comfortable with the upcoming approach.

DSM's approach controller couldn't see us on radar when I made my initial call. I recycled the transponder once, with no joy, then squawked ident and he found us. I began the descent about fifteen miles out. Closer in we switched to tower who soon cleared us to the left base for runway 05 as a business jet landed there ahead of us. The controller cleared us to land and asked me to keep it fast and tight due to a Cherokee inbound from the south.

I kept my speed up with only one notch of flaps, carved around to short final maybe a third of a mile back, forward slipped a bit, and bled the last 20 mph of speed coming over the threshold. Runway 05 at Des Moines has a nice little upslope to it, which helped a bit, too.

"Experimental Bravo Quebec Romeo, exit right on Papa 4, give way to the taxiing Airbus. Then turn left on Papa and a right turn to the Signature ramp."

I read back the instructions, waited as the A319 rolled by, waited a few more seconds to avoid the jet exhaust, then taxied to the ramp.

Once more we had unbelievable FBO service, this time from Signature Aviation. They even offered to house the Cav in their cavernous hangar – free of charge - because they didn't have any available tie-downs. Then they drove us to the airport terminal so we could rent a car, and returned it to the agency for us the next morning. I love flying in the US!



Signature Aviation offered us overnight hangar space for the Cav. By Tina Simpson

Day 3

I hoped this would be a pretty easy day. We only had two legs to get to Memphis. We'd scoot through Missouri and stop at an airport called Vichy Rolla. Bob and Carl and I stopped there on our return flight from Washington and Nashville in 2014.

We taxied out behind another Airbus A319 and did our run up as the jet thundered off ahead of us. As soon as we were airborne a few minutes later I called the tower.



This is the American Airbus A319 we followed out of Des Moines. By Tina Simpson

“Des Moines tower, Bravo Quebec Romeo. Can we get a right turn to get offline of the jet?”

“Bravo Quebec Romeo turn right to 070, climb and maintain two thousand five hundred.”

There was likely no wake turbulence danger, but I didn’t want to take the chance, especially fully loaded and with precious cargo.

We were soon cleared out of the zone and on course. I asked Tina what she thought of the whole experience at Des Moines, which was the largest and busiest airport we’d flown into together. She was impressed that we could mix with jets and other traffic so easily and she complimented me on how well I managed it all, too. I spent the rest of the morning glowing from her compliment.

The smoke was back, cutting our visibility to about four miles. However, once we crossed into Missouri things cleared steadily, bumping the visibility up to 10 or 15 miles. This was more like it.

There was more cloud cover, too, which morphed into a complete overcast. The forecast showed little inclination for rain along our route, but there were some build-ups forecast for later in the day. ADS-B weather showed storms to the west of our route, but they were moving slowly and wouldn’t impact us.

One thing that got my attention was the temperature dewpoint spread, being 17 and 13, respectively. Of course we were higher and cooler, and thus in a

narrower spread range. I kept a close eye on the carb temperature gauge. At one point, I thought I felt the engine miss just ever so slightly. I didn't hear it, I felt it. Well... I think I did. I pulled on the carb heat and left it on until we landed at Rolla.



A radar image from ADS-B showing light precipitation along our route over Missouri. The round symbol toward the bottom of the photo is another aircraft. By Stu Simpson

Gassed up and going again, the landscape changed quickly from tree-bordered farmland to much more heavily wooded hills. I decided to climb another 2000 feet for some extra time and radio range should the unthinkable occur. There were some spots where we could have set down if needed, but not a lot of them. Then for about 15 minutes or so, we were above the most heavily wooded area of what's known as the Mark Twain National Forest. There were no roads or open fields there and Tina and I both remarked later that we were nervous being over that region.

We put Missouri behind us and coasted across the very northeastern tip of Arkansas where the land spread into broad fertile river bed farmland. The sky cleared, the sun shone, and the Mississippi River wandered lazily beneath us. Slow moving barges, shoved along by trundling tugboats, ambled up and down

the river. Surprisingly large sand bars tempted me to land on them. Pure folly, I know, but I was still tempted.

How lucky I am, I thought, to be here in the middle of this adventure, especially when I get to share it with Tina.



A tempting sandbar on the Mississippi River. That's Arkansas to the right and Tennessee to the left of the picture. By Tina Simpson

As we hit Memphis' Mode C veil I called approach control and received regular instructions through the north and east side of their airspace. Approach handed us over to Olive Branch tower. Olive Branch is a small city just across the Tennessee state line in Mississippi. Tower vectored us onto a left downwind for OLV's runway 36 with another request to keep it tight and fast. It was no problem for me and the Cav.

After landing, Olive Branch Aviation directed me to the general aviation parking ramp where we unloaded and tied the Cav down in the afternoon heat. I looked around to check if there was anyone nearby or anyone who could see us. There wasn't, so hiding behind the Cav's fuselage and tail, I quickly slipped out of my pants and into a pair of shorts. Tina laughed at me at first, but within a couple of minutes, she did the same thing. It was only then we realized that while no one at ground level could see us, the tower guys would've had a completely unfettered view of the whole thing. We laughed our asses off over that for the rest of the trip.

Days 4 & 5



Visiting Graceland. It's pretty cool that we flew here in our own plane. By Stu Simpson
We spent the weekend in Memphis and saw what we came for. We went to Graceland, the Civil Rights Museum, ate terrific southern barbeque, and toured Beale Street. By Sunday evening, I was itching to get back in the air again.

Day 6

After returning the car, and getting a ride back to OLV, we loaded and fueled the Cav. We'd decided on St. Louis as our next destination, a 230 NM flight to the north. We would use Creve Coeur airport, a satellite field at the west end of the city, and only 7 NM from St. Louis International.

Olive Branch was busy with training traffic on such a nice sunny morning, and runway 36 was active in the light northeasterly breeze. We taxied out and got cleared for the straight-out departure. At the edge of the OLV's zone I switched frequencies.

"Memphis departure, Canadian experimental Golf Bravo Quebec Romeo, two thousand off Olive Branch, runway heading."

"Experimental Golf Bravo Quebec Romeo, where are you headed today?"

"Northbound to St. Louis, sir."

"Roger, maintain present heading and altitude."

"Maintain present heading and altitude, Bravo Quebec Romeo."

Happy to be back in the air, we watched the city go by and noted just how spread out it really is.

Approach bid us goodbye at the edge of the veil and I thanked him for their help. We were over the Mississippi again, and its adjacent riverbed farmland. We soon passed back into Missouri and the sky steadily filled with mid-level cloud. It was almost a carbon copy of our leg through the area a few days prior. We found a bit of rain this time, but hardly enough to even wet the windshield.



Some interesting patterns in the sand as we cross the Mississippi back into Missouri. By Stu Simpson

The landscape below wasn't as comfortable to traverse as I'd like. It was largely wooded, but with enough open spots to use should we need one. I know my concern for forced landing spots is a byproduct of all my years flying two-stroke ultralights. My caution and subsequent anxiety aren't bad things, but sometimes I wish I could shake them.

ADS-B radar told a colorful story of showers and growing thunderstorms north of St. Louis. Good thing we weren't planning to challenge the sky in that direction.

St. Louis approach guided us into the downwind for Creve Coeur and cleared me to change frequencies. An RV-12 pilot announced himself doing circuits for the grass runway immediately beside the paved one. I made my calls and dropped into the right-hand downwind for runway 16, turning final north of the Missouri River. Final approach paralleled a pair of enormous girder bridges which were actually a little distracting.

Tina approved my landing and we rolled in to the fuel pumps. A fellow who identified himself as Jim greeted us. He was very friendly and thrilled to see the Cavalier. A FedEx pilot by profession, he once owned a Cavalier project. He eventually sold it, but stated he actually saw my airplane in Regina shortly before I bought it back in 2012.

Soon another guy showed up who was just as friendly as Jim, and who had an Emeraude project in his hangar. It was wonderful chatting with them about wooden homebuilts as I fueled and secured the Cav. Tina was busy arranging ground transport for us.

Once the Cav was tied down and covered up, we were on our way to the car rental place.

Day 7

We enjoyed the day in St. Louis, seeing the famous Gateway Arch and taking a paddle boat trip on the Mississippi River. One thing I can tell you about that city is that it makes Calgary's roads seem like a billiard table.

Day 8

Today's goal was to reach Minneapolis, MN, another big city on the Mississippi. I very much like Minneapolis, having flown there in the Cav on a couple of adventures alongside Bob and Carl in Kirkby's Cherokee. I was looking forward to showing the place to Tina.

We left Creve Coeur departing southbound and making a sharp right turn northbound as soon as we had enough height. I was careful to stay well below the Class Bravo floors around KSTL as we scooted north. We planned our first stop at Cedar Falls, IA.

We were over southern Illinois when I noticed the voltmeter on the Dynon EFIS acting strangely. The voltage occasionally jumped up and down from 13.8 to 14.5. Then it settled down to its normal 14.1 or 14.2. I kept a close eye on it but the variations seemed to be getting worse.

We were about 35 minutes into the flight, about five miles east of Quincy, IL, when I decided the errant voltage needed attention. I turned hard left, started the descent, and switched to Quincy's frequency.

I assured Tina there was no danger, and we just needed to make a precautionary landing to figure out why the voltage was jumping around. I wasn't worried about our safety, but I was concerned there might be a problem with the alternator. It's a difficult one to find and replacing it could mean a lot of hassle and delay. And of all my airplane maintenance knowledge, electricity is my weakest area.

We set down easily on Quincy's runway 31 and rolled out past a couple of well worn MiG-29 fighters on the ramp. The FBO's ramp attendant actually brought a rolled up carpet over and set it out for Tina when she exited the plane.

Now that we were down safely, and Tina was standing comfortably on her ramp carpet, I could start worrying in earnest.

I knew we'd be peeling at least the lower cowling off the Cav so I checked with the ramp guys that doing so there would be okay. They said it would be fine. Then we headed into the FBO's briefing room and I called Gary Abel and Gerry MacDonald. Both of them advised me to check the wiring connections and the tautness of the alternator belt. I hadn't considered the belt as the problem, but it made a lot of sense the more I thought about it.

I pulled our luggage from the cargo bay, retrieved the tool bag, and we set about unfastening the lower cowl. I'm proud that Tina wasn't the least bit shy about pulling fasteners and getting her hands dirty.

I noted a few things once I started digging around in the engine bay. First, there appeared to be more oil splatter than there should be. Had the front crank seal sprung a leak again? It could also be oil from the crank case breather tube getting up there during the turbulence we encountered. That's happened before. It wasn't something that needed immediate attention, but would certainly bear further monitoring. (Later I learned the leak was from loose crank case seam bolts, which were duly tightened.)

The alternator connections had some oil on them, which I cleaned thoroughly. Then I checked the belt and found it was definitely looser than it should be. I also found a lot of alternator belt "dust". That's normal as the belt wears over its lifetime, but this was more than average. It was another symptom of a too-loose belt slipping on the pulleys.

We tightened up the alternator belt and locked it down. Then I started the engine and watched the voltage. It appeared to be normal, running steady at 14.3 volts. We were back in business and I wouldn't have to search for an obscure 1970s British-made alternator in Quincy, Illinois.

We re-attached the lower cowl and loaded up the plane when I stopped to do a mental inventory of everything we'd done. Then I realized I forgot to re-tighten the alternator hinge bolt. Aaaargh!



Stu awkwardly checking for faults beneath the Cav's panel at Quincy, IL. By Tina Simpson

Frustrated, I apologized to Tina and we used another half hour to remove the cowling again, tighten the bolt and put the cowling back in place. Then we loaded the plane, got some gas, and used the bathroom. Now we were ready to file and fly.

Annoyingly, it took nearly another half an hour to get through to file a flight plan thanks to the new system punishing those who don't file online. After about three hours on the ground, we finally taxied out past the derelict MiGs, took off and continued north. The voltage was behaving properly, but I still kept a close watch on it just to make sure we'd actually addressed the problem.

We gassed up at Cedar Rapids, then pressed on to Minneapolis.

MSP approach guided us through the south end of their space and warned us a couple of times of traffic conflicts we already saw on ADS-B. Tina, as she had over the entire trip, proved very adept at spotting other aircraft, especially with help from ADS-B.

Flying Cloud tower cleared us to land on runway 10. Once off the runway, ground directed us to the FBO where we rolled in and shut down.

We were tired as we parked the Cav for the night. We had a car waiting for us which the FBO staff brought out to the plane for us. It was an Alfa Romeo SUV, which really impressed Tina.

Being so late into town, we didn't have much time to do more than get supper and take a short drive into the city. I guess it gives us something to come back for.

Day 9

“Experimental Bravo Quebec Romeo, Flying Cloud tower. You're clear of my zone, radar service terminates, frequency change approved. Squawk VFR and remain clear of controlled airspace.”

“Roger that, ma'am, and thanks for your help today,” I replied as I switched the transponder to 1200.

It was a beautiful morning leaving Minneapolis. We still had several miles to go to clear the Mode C veil, but we were well below any Class B controlled airspace. I angled the Cav a little to the right to straddle the course line for Jamestown, ND, our first stop 250 NM from Flying Cloud.

Minnesota's crops were still surprisingly green, a marked contrast to the golden colour of Alberta's and Saskatchewan's crops when we started our adventure more than a week prior. We wondered how late in the year harvest begins in this part of the world.

The miles ticked away below us while our ground speed steadily dropped. When we crossed into North Dakota south of Fargo it was showing only 100 to 105 knots. The weather prophecy had foretold this so it wasn't a big surprise, just an irritation.

On the other hand, the fact that the Cav can have a 20 to 25 knot headwind and still cover ground at better than 100 knots is pretty pleasing. We were still flying at a pretty good speed.

The bigger problem was how we were heading back into the smoke and poor visibility. When we landed at Jamestown vis was back down to about four miles. Minot was reporting only three.

We fueled, filed and pottied at Jamestown and lit out for Estevan, SK, where we could land to clear customs. Tina and I both now have CANPASS, which allows pilots and crew to clear at a greater number of CBSA approved airports. Not having CANPASS proved to be troublesome in June because it prevented Bob and Carl and I from clearing at Lethbridge. I recommend getting it since it's only about forty bucks for five years.

The smoke worsened as we continued northwest, so did the daytime turbulence. The wind remained consistent, though, still giving us an average ground speed of 103 knots.

South of Minot, skirting their control zone, we saw a target on ADS-B. It had a different call sign than the typical registration number or airline designation that most US and Canadian aircraft have. Tina was a bit bored and set about trying to find the plane up above in the smoke. It was 3000 feet higher and I told her she'd be lucky to spot it in such poor visibility. Undeterred, she leaned forward, splitting her attention between the display screen and the windscreen while I concentrated on flying.

"There it is!" she announced pointing excitedly. "It's right above us. I think it's a B-52!"

"It might be a KC-135 tanker from Minot Air Force Base," I replied. I peered up to the right and saw it quite clearly.

"Oh, you're right," I exclaimed. "It is a B-52! Is that ever cool!" I've only ever seen flying B-52's three times in my life, and two of those times were that summer. For an airplane nerd, that's pretty cool. I'm also pleased that this airplane nerd's wife recognized a B-52.

The enormous bomber, its flaps deployed, tracked 90 degrees to our course, obviously on a left base for the runway at Minot AFB. Would we get any of its wake turbulence? I wondered. In all the thermal turbulence we had, would we even know the difference?

The Canadian border neared and I was again happy to have gotten a trans-border squawk code before leaving the ground. A few minutes later we landed at Estevan in a gusty west wind, but at least it was straight down runway 26. Good thing Regina has an east-west runway, too, I thought.

As we pulled up to the fuel pumps a couple of CBSA officers appeared from the airport lounge building. Clearing with them was easy and pleasant. The airport attendant, Miles, was also really helpful, loaning me his phone so I could close our flight plan, and helping me fuel the Cav for the last leg to Regina. This is one of the few general aviation airports in Canada I've encountered where, a) service exists at all, and b) service is as good as US FBOs. I recommend stopping at Estevan.

We swapped phone cards back to our Canadian ones, filed for Regina and were back in the air. Tina and I were happy to be back in Canada and happy, too, that our day would be over soon.

The visibility steadily improved as we flew northwest, easily back up to 10 miles or better. Our ground speed was up a little, too, since the wind had taken a more westerly tack instead of being right on our nose like it had been for most of the day.

I monitored Regina tower from about 20 miles out as the controller landed and departed planes on runway 31. She advised the wind was 260 at 22 gusting 30 knots. Why weren't they using runway 26? Hmmm...

Of course, I dialed up the ATIS and almost wished I hadn't. Runway 26 was closed. I was looking now at landing us with a minimum 20 knot crosswind component. The most I could recall landing with in the past was about 17 knots on a slippery runway at Kirkby Field.

Inside the control zone, tower had us do a pair of 360 turns for spacing with other traffic, then she lined us up for final approach.

"Bravo Quebec Romeo, cleared to land runway 31. Wind 260, 24 gusting 32."

"Cleared to land, Bravo Quebec Romeo."

Okay, I'm going to just outright brag here. My approach and landing were excellent in that damned wind, easily and ironically, the best one of the whole trip. I had the controls to the stops at touchdown, but I set down with a whisper touch and only a little bit of fish-tailing. It helped that I only used one notch of flaps. It's cool that Tina was impressed, too.

I retracted the flaps as soon as the wheels touched and concentrated on keeping the left wing down and the tail straight.

"Bravo Quebec Romeo, can you expedite clearing the runway for traffic behind?"

"Negative, ma'am," I replied. "I have to keep it a bit slower with this wind."

She didn't sound surprised as she instructed me to turn right on taxiway Mike and contact ground. The Cav wavered a bit in the wind as we finished with the runway, then I made the turn and switched to ground.

We soon had the Cav tied down and secured outside the Regina Flying Club, then we were on our way to our hotel. One more day to go.

Day 10

I was definitely looking forward to home. We had only a couple more legs to get there. Bob Kirkby texted the previous night asking for details of our last day. I let him know we planned to be at Swift Current by 1130 for a bit of gas, then we'd burn for CFX8. Bob promised to join us there for the last leg. I thought that was great.

I told Gary Abel our plans, too, but he didn't commit to meeting us. I hoped he would.

As soon as we cleared Regina's control zone the visibility dropped once more, back down to about 3 to 3½ miles. I was well and truly sick of the smoke by this point. It had curtailed a lot of flying over the entire summer and ruined a lot of the scenery on this adventure.

We slipped past Moose Jaw's control zone, the north side of which is conveniently bounded by the Trans Canada Highway. I remarked to Tina how glad I was we were flying to Calgary instead of driving.

As we pulled up to the fuel pumps at Swift Current, something brilliantly red approached from the airport lounge building. I smiled realizing it was Gary in his redder-than-anything RV-7.

Tina wandered to the lounge because she wasn't able to just head to the back side of the fuel tanks us like boys can. As I fueled the Cav, Gary reported he'd been there an hour already and he wondered when Bob would arrive. Tina and I saw him on ADS-B from about 80 NM away from us as we neared Swift Current, so I expected him any minute. Sure enough, as Tina returned from the lounge, the Cherokee droned over from the west.



Gary Abel at Swift Current with his blazing red RV-7 while Bob Kirkby shuts down his Cherokee 235. By Stu Simpson

What a treat that Gary and Bob came to meet us. It's a pretty good day when your friends come to fly home with you on the last leg of a big flying trip.

Tina and I departed ahead of Bob on runway 31, easing into a left turn and climbing for home. Gary planned to depart a few minutes later. With his speed he could leave a half hour after us and still easily beat us home.



Bob's Cherokee 235 off the Cavalier's wing on the last leg to home. By Stu Simpson

I was happy to be wing to wing with Bob again, just as we've been for so many airborne adventures. We chatted comfortably as we flew on. I'd occasionally relay comments from Tina since her side of the intercom doesn't carry through to the radio. I started wondering where Gary was.

Turns out he had an issue with his throttle cable sticking. He texted that he used a bit of engine oil to lube it and get it sliding smoothly again. A very creative solution, I thought. He was about an hour delayed leaving Swift.

Just east of the Alberta border something strange caught my eye. The railroad track southwest of a little hamlet called Golden Prairie was filled for nearly ten miles with stationary rail cars. They looked like potash cars, but I don't know for sure. There were no engines involved, just the cars stored there for miles on end. A very unusual sight.

We gladly crossed back into Alberta, bumping and jostling in the midday thermals. Tina appreciated sitting on shaded side of the Cav's cockpit, but the sun didn't bother me any on my side. She marveled at the barren and desolate land between Medicine Hat and Brooks. There's nothing there but oil wells and gopher holes, and I suspect even the gophers have to pack a lunch.

By the time we reached Lake Newell, Gary texted that he was back in the air and making straight for his home base at High River. I asked him to please let me know when he landed. We all like to look out for each other like that.

Eagle Lake, Strathmore, Langdon – all the familiar landmarks of home eased into view as Bob and I switched over to 123.4. My landing was pretty good and I

felt relieved as we rolled off the runway and spun around to stop in front of my hangar. We'd had an awesome trip, but it was equally awesome to be home.

Conclusion

Here's the route we followed, in case you'd like to plug it into your favourite flight planner:

CFX8 500933N1111455W 500942N1103535W CYYN KXWA S25 KBIS KMDS
KDSM KVIH KOLV 1H0 395717N0910407W KUIN KALO KFCM KJMS
480808N1012603W CYEN CYQR 502731N1054732W CYYN
501149N1103747W 501437N1111919W CFX8

The trip totaled 3025 NM, 3481 SM, or 5602 km, and about 28 flying hours.

We visited 17 different airports, and flew into or over two provinces and ten states. I never totaled the fuel used, but we made the most of every litre we burned.

I can't really find the words to express what it means to me to have shared this epic journey with my wife. Tina's a wonderful copilot. She helped with things like radio frequencies, accommodations, ground transport, snacks and water en route, and even took the stick briefly once or twice. She's tremendously adept at spotting other aircraft, even if they're smaller than a B-52. She doesn't get airsick and she's also pretty funny, both of which add a lot to these trips.

I love her deeply and I'd happily fly anywhere in the Cav with her again.



Tina and the Cav at Kirkby Field. Where are we going next? By Stu Simpson