

Knocking the Rust Off Feb 2011

And boy - is that an understatement. What with my airplane in for brake maintenance, the holidays, the Corona airport flood, me getting sick, and the rascally Santa winds, it has been a week shy of two months since I have gone flying. My thanks to Tamara for indirectly setting up this opportunity. A quick phone call to Charles and we set up for a Sunday flight together.

I had done several high speed taxi runs down the runway with my mechanic to check the brakes and I still wasn't sure if they were where they should be. Sure they worked but what if I really needed brakes someday? So Joe did me a favor and flew her because he also has a M20J and he flies a lot. He would know the brakes feel. He confirmed that I have brakes but he confided that his are better.

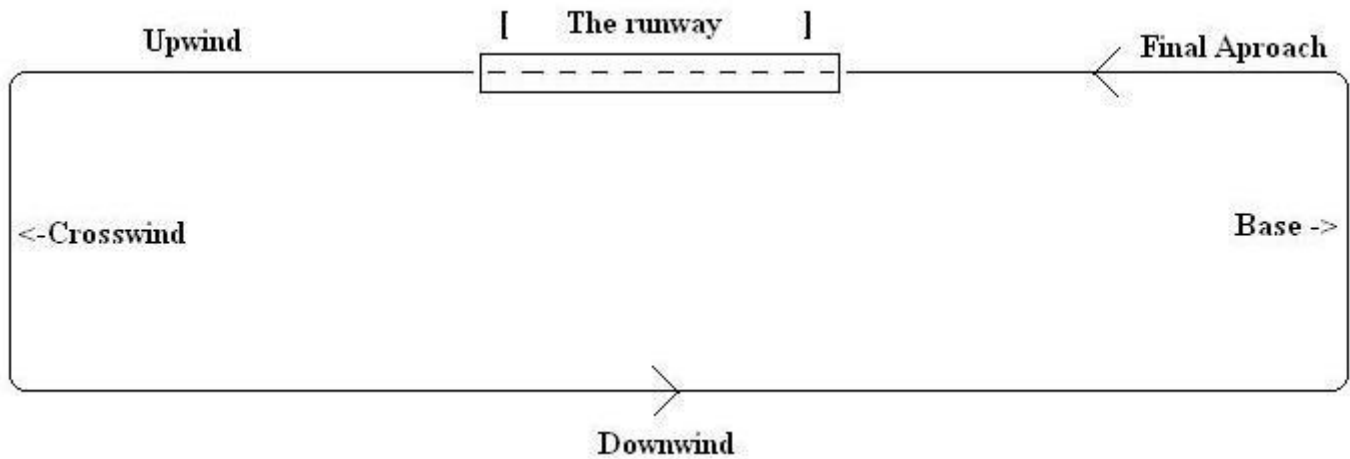
Between my feeling a bit rusty and the uncertainty of the brakes, I came up with a plan. Charles and I flew over to Riverside (KRAL) because they have a nice wide and long runway. I remained below 2,700' on the way over to stay clear of Ontario's Class C airspace, listened to Riverside's ATIS, and configured the Mooney for landing. The tower instructed us to report downwind abeam the tower for runway 27. I did. The landing and braking were uneventful so I taxied back to have another go of it.

Before I became a pilot, I lived near a Sears store in Riverside CA in the mid 80's. Always, when I went there during the walk from the car to the store, I would hear and then see an airplane flying low overhead. I could see them so much closer than normal. It was always exciting. Now I understand why. The standard turn to left base is right over the Sears store. I looked down and saw this today.



This image is courtesy of Google Maps but it is the same, except there were more cars there today.

The second time around, we flew a 'closed pattern' which means we took off, turned left crosswind, turned left downwind, reduced power, turned left base over Sears, turned final, and returned for another landing. The whole thing takes maybe 4 - 5 minutes. The brakes were OK so I taxied back to do it all over again. I was feeling better about things. The airplane was performing great and I was back in the groove. Rusty feelings went out the window. Sears is right under the word 'Base' below.



The segments or 'legs' of a standard airport traffic pattern have names as depicted above

Charles has flown my airplane many times before. So when the tower said "Mooney 5807T runway 27, cleared for takeoff", I said to Charles on the intercom, "Go ahead and take it.", so he did the takeoff and departure. In fact he flew it for most of the rest of our flight together. We headed west for a few minutes, then turned south to stay away from some green hills, then a slight turn to the right to climb and aim for our next destination, Catalina Island. Work part was behind me, fun part ahead.

I dialed up SoCal on 135.40 and informed them who we were, where we were, and about our intentions. They gave us 2022 as our squawk code and Charles dialed it in on my transponder. We climbed to 6,500' which would put us over Santa Ana's Class C airspace and yet under LAX's Class B airspace. We headed to the ocean. Yes, I took some pictures for you, and here they come.



Arriving at the shoreline, it was just so neat out there with Catalina right at the horizon.



Looking to the right, we saw a beautiful beach, but then what are those three round things?

While everything seemed so peaceful, and the scenery was fantastic, and the ride was super smooth too, ATC piped up and informed us of **"Traffic, 7 miles, 12 o'clock, opposite direction, 7,000 feet, a Boeing 737"**. That got our attention as I replied "No joy", pilot speak for "I can't see it yet". We peered as hard as peering gets and no airplane was in view out there. We both knew that we had a jet airliner bearing down on us and we could not yet see it out the window. Charles mentioned that it was probably still in the clouds ahead. **"There"** blurted my eagle eyed friend as many thousands of pounds of shiny aluminum came into sight and grew exponentially larger with each second. Our combined closure rate was probably 400 to 500 MPH. It was too late to grab the camera and turn it on. At 500 feet above us and maybe 500 feet to our right - WHOOSH happened in my mind. It was over in less than 10 seconds. My TCAD showed it to us on my instrument panel and we knew that a deviation was unnecessary but what a rush (pun intended) that was. We flew on.



We settled back to a calmer routine as we glided past KAVX, Catalina's airport with cliffs at both ends



This beautiful part of the island is known as Two Harbors, and what an apt name that is



We happened upon McGee Lake held in check by an earthen dam with a spillway on the right side



There she is, my first ever glimpse of the city of Avalon clear across the island from us but how about those awesome vertical rock cliffs on this side of the island dropping an easy 1,000' to water's edge?



Avalon, closer up, wasn't that a 'picture perfect' picture? I thought so

We made another left turn and headed back home to the mainland with nary a Boeing in sight and ATC was pleased with our new cruising altitude of 5,500' MSL. As MSL stands for 'Mean Sea Level', we actually were for a while.



Coming back, my Garmin 496 kept me in step with reality as we veered right of course on purpose



The Oh - So - Mighty John Wayne airport (KSNA) seems more like a Mom & Pop stop from up here

A minute later, an important piece of Orange County's history slid by. Two enormous hangars used in the 1940s to house blimps that were used during WWII. They are just south of the corner of Red Hill and Edinger, and these mammoth wooden structures survive to this day.



Coming up on just about the end to a perfect Sunday afternoon, Charles veered left to clear the higher parts of the Santa Ana mountains so we wouldn't have to drop back down too quickly. When we got as far north as hwy 91 and around 6 - 7 miles west of Corona, Charles graciously handed over control of the airplane to me. I reduced power and popped the speed brakes to keep our speed down as we slid down closer to earth.

Once at pattern altitude, I raised the nose but I kept the speed brakes popped up for another 20 seconds to drop another 10 knots of airspeed. I got my approach speed so low on final that I felt a slight 'sink' and throttled back up for 5 seconds to arrest that. The descent angle, height, and speed

were 'nailed' right on target as we whooshed by at around 80 MPH over the airport fence with the engine pulled back to idle. We settled on the runway and the braking action was again good enough for us to turn off of the runway at mid-field. Back at the hangar, Charles got out with my hangar keys to open her back up. I jotted some numbers down and then dragged my old bones out into the warm sunshine. There was Dave with Charles, already discussing the day's flight.

With the hangar doors and the refrigerator door open, Charles brought forth 3 Blue Cans for the 3 of us. A good gab session with plenty of technical details thrown in ensued for the next 20 minutes. 'Hangar flying' is almost as good as actual flying and the fuel cost is lower. (We were just running on Blue Cans now). This actually is a big fallacy. I just ran the numbers. Avgas at Corona is \$4.599 per gallon these days and Blue Cans are \$6.375 per gallon. Enough abstract math for tonight.



My good friend and student pilot extraordinaire, Charles

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