

## The Tehachapi Trifecta

Per the Dictionary, trifecta (tri-fect-a): Any achievement involving three successful outcomes.

We went to Tehachapi today, and it **was** our third successful flight together, I'll get to that later.

Soni came into my life a few months ago via an email, like some of my other flying friends have in the past. We met at my hangar on Sunday 8/8/2010. She liked what she saw, so we went flying. It was her first time in a private plane. I flew my SoCal tour route and she loved that whole experience.



She wanted to go again and so a week later, we met after work on a Monday. She had come from an interview wearing a pretty beige dress and heels. She wanted to change, so for privacy I ushered her into the hangar, showed her where the light switch was, and closed the hangar doors (from the outside). After changing, I gave her a night flight to give her a second new perspective of this area. We just flew around between Corona and Temecula. Maybe 100 miles, nothing much.



When we returned, I presented her with her AOPA First Flight Certificate that I owed her from the first flight. She insisted in helping clean the hangar and grabbed the vacuum cleaner / blower. I noticed that she seemed to favor black and pink, and pink and black.

Soni was born and raised in England so her British accent is noticeable but her heritage is from India so I get a sense of confusion because what I hear is not what I am looking at. It is wonderful fun to me. She is also one gracious lady and she invited me to her home to meet her mother and share lunch with them on Sunday 9/12/2010. I had a blast. There were even Blue Cans available.



Soni with her mom, who is an awesome lady

Then things changed. Sure a few emails here and there, but her work schedule got so different that she couldn't plan anything. No flying. She would be out of state for a week at a time and always my weekends were work days for her. I flew with some other people. Soni and her team returned from Nevada and then they went to Arizona for a week. I almost forgot about flying with her. Then at 9:43 PM, an email arrived on November 11. I think it is OK to share it with you.

Dear Ed,

Finally I am home this Sunday if you're interested in going on a fly?

Well, you know the answer. I wrote back - "You're on." Poor gal, she worked almost 12 hours the day before, got home around 2 AM, and still met me at 10 on Sunday. She gave me a big smiling welcome. The weather was perfect with temps in the 70s and blue sky stretching forever. We chatted to catch up with everything. I had some coffee with me. John and Dave landed and taxied up to the hangar next door. We all chatted for a ½ hour. They left and then my friend and fellow Mooney pilot Joe Z. drove up and we chatted some more. Soni and I were having a ball and we hadn't even gone flying yet. Friends and neighbors, that's what a small airport is like. You're invited to join me sometime.

As there were no planned fly-ins that day, we had to decide where to go. I explained a few ideas and we decided on Tehachapi. The city had built a park inside the airport complete with trees, green mowed grass, an in ground stone fire pit with firewood nearby, picnic tables, tableside / table height charcoal BBQ grills, a port-a-potty, and airplane parking spots right there. I still remember the fun I had there with the Vintage Mooney Group 2 years ago and I wanted to go back. I had some ideas.



My 2008 file photo showing the fire pit and the proximity to airplane parking



Back to today, it looks like black and pink is in style again



I showed her where Corona was on a Sectional Chart by pointing my pen at our airport

We had so much fun that it was 2 to 2 ½ hours before we ever got in the airplane. Fred waved as we finally taxied past his hangar. We were off for an adventure! The past three days of Santa Ana winds had cleaned the air and we could clearly see everywhere in the LA Basin, a rare event.



Once over the San Gabriels, the High Desert was beautiful and offered us a relatively smooth ride

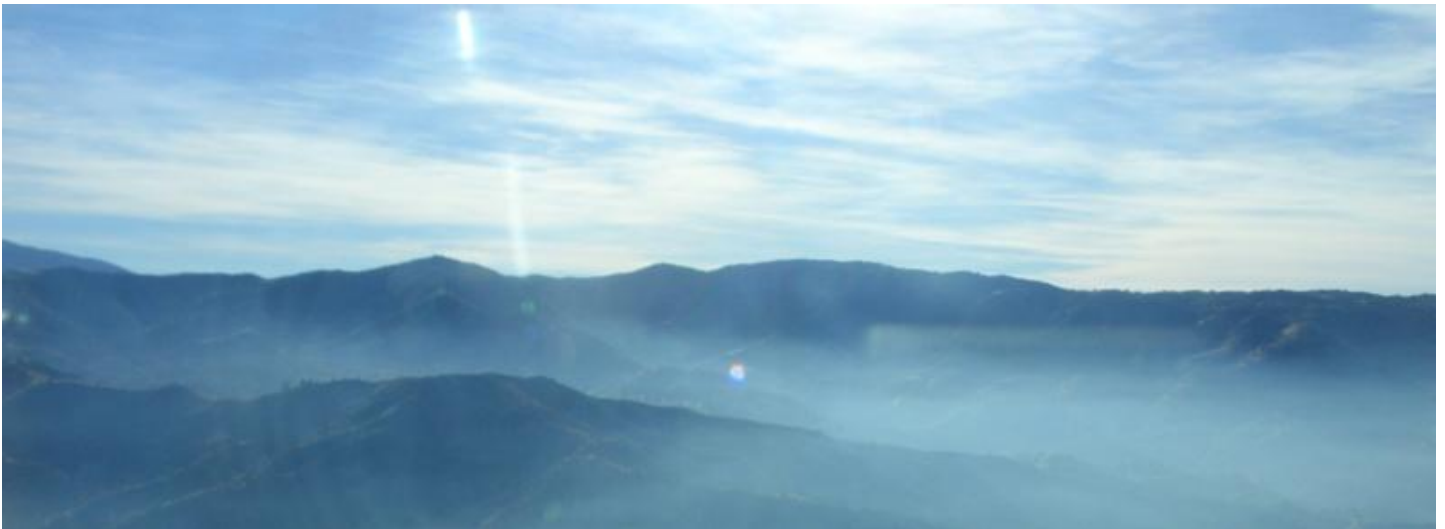


Backing up, often I wonder if anybody cares about these flight path graphics I have been including to give everyone a sense of where the flight departed and where we landed. I enjoy the fact that the blue flight path is a straight line, compared to the highways going around either side of that mountain range. That whole green colored area between Glendora and Palmdale is a mountain range.

We were being monitored by Joshua Approach Control once north of the crest of the mountains. They watched us the rest of the way after we were handed off by SoCal Approach Control. As we were being continually monitored, we behaved ourselves as if you were watching us. ☹️ 😊 ☹️

Coming into the area we saw the major wind farm of striking white towers with three huge blades each, slowly turning to produce electricity, similar to the ones just west of Palm Springs. I told Joshua that we would be extending a ways past Tehachapi for sightseeing. We went on to the railroad loop.

Something slightly disturbing caught my eye as I started descending from our cruise altitude of 8,500 feet. In the pass ahead, the sky was gray near the surrounding hills. It was clean a little higher. Over to the left, there was a lesser mountain range and whiteish smog was spilling over each low saddle in the topography. I could see that the hills to the north separated the clean air we were enjoying from the junk surrounding the people living a bit to the north. Poor Bakersfield people.



This is an idea of the haze lying in the low areas to the north

As I have discussed the Tehachapi Railroad Loop in my previous flying stories, I shall concentrate on the pictures that Soni took then. I kept saying "Take some more." My camera holds 1600 pictures so not to worry if she takes one more. I delete 80% of most days' pictures anyway.





More info and pictures at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehachapi\\_Loop](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehachapi_Loop)



We headed back to the airport and lined up for a landing getting one more glimpse at the rows of white windmills a few miles south. Rolling to a turnoff at the north end we stopped at an open area of the ramp. I parked in an unmarked area near where I thought we would find a pedestrian gate.



The sunshine was brilliant and the local air was severe clear with awesome visibility - then

No, I did not forget to retract my flaps, this just helps remind fly-buddies to avoid stepping on them while disembarking. You will notice that white stripes do indicate designated parking - for cars, but those were empty and it was Sunday. Our plan was to have Soni walk a few blocks to the Apple Shed, a well known deli - café, gift shop, and tourist attraction. The temp was in the 40s under a bright sun but the wind was blowing at 10 to 12 creating some wind chill. Soni promptly covered her black T-shirt with a (you guessed it) pink jacket. I did OK in short sleeves. She found the gate and soon she walked out of sight to obtain some lunch for us. She absolutely refused my money.

As I reached in, from in front of the wing to grab my camera, my Mooney started rolling backwards, there was a slight slope there. I managed to hobble around the wingtip, get to the baggage compartment, grab my towbar, stop the rolling several times, and place it behind the front tire. Whew!

Then a lady drove up in a white Civil Air Patrol van, and notified me that I was blocking her parking space. At least I was going to roll it 15 feet downhill. Mission accomplished - towbar back in place.

Then a gentleman drove up in a white pickup and I explained that Soni had walked to town and I thought we might have lunch at the other end of the airport at the city park area. He grabbed a warm long sleeved shirt, got out of his truck, and said "Follow me." We walked past a couple of parked



busses and into a nearby building that looked like a house right by that pedestrian gate in the chain link fence, on the very edge of the tarmac. It was a modest house from the outside. It used to be the airport manager's office and residence. The parked buses obscured the green and white sign that indicated that the house is now the **Pilots' Lounge**. You pilots will not believe what's next.

We walked into a living room with wooden floors, a round wooden table with four upholstered chairs, three huge overstuffed recliners, a TV with a channel info sheet on the wall nearby, a decorative fireplace, a whiteboard with notes, a corkboard with more notes, a current weather display monitor, a flight planning computer, some take home literature, and everything was super clean. In fact, a lady was there right then with a vacuum cleaner and when we walked in, she was washing windows!

And that was just the living room! The kitchen had a fridge stocked with goodies and a chest freezer stocked with goodies, all on the honor system !!! People put their money in cash drawers located inside the fridge and the freezer. Cold cash (I couldn't resist). And a nice assortment of room temp snacks to the left. Also, there was a machine that made coffee and hot chocolate, a microwave, a kitchen sink and everything was Five Stars clean.

And that was just the kitchen! The next doorway leads one to a pristine clean bathroom, complete with a full sized shower. The supply cabinet was stocked with not only extra toilet paper and paper towels, but a complete toilet flush kit lest the potty plumbing needs help. I could live there. I suppose some have tried it. This place is a hidden gem for all pilots.

The gentleman in the white pickup that showed me around that 'Pilot Palace' was George T. Sandy, an ex Corona pilot, now based in Tehachapi. The nicest of guys, like an airport ambassador to us transient pilots. He explained that he does aerial photography and sent well wishes to his pilot friends at the Corona airport. We went back outside while I awaited Soni's return from town.



George explained that whenever he does an aerial photography gig in SoCal, he stops at Corona for fuel and good times with his friends here. We talked some more and I became concerned that maybe Soni found her way to town and then couldn't find her way back. Or worse, got so absorbed at the Apple Shed that she decided to stay there. George offered to get in his truck and go look for her. I explained that she would be easy to find wearing pink, pink, and pink. Just as his truck disappeared from my sight, pink emerged over there. George saw her too and soon we were all back together.



Their airport entrance sign has style and class, and frankly it puts Corona's new airport sign to shame

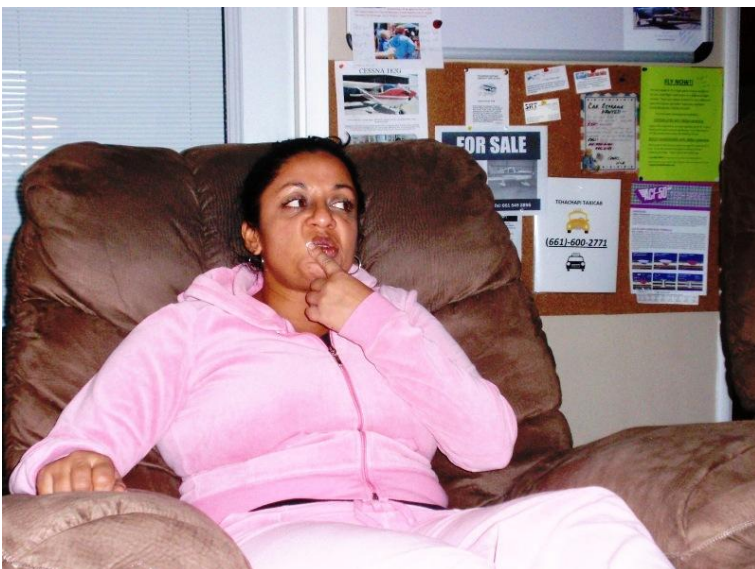


She brought back two kinds of sandwiches sliced in two so I offered to swap halves and we did. What a great time we had in that comfy place. George said farewell to us and departed. The cleaning gal had gone. We were alone in that place together. I was hungry. This was absolutely great. The sandwiches were huge and scrumptious too. I couldn't finish mine, but I already had a 'take home' box. I finished it Monday for lunch at work.



She showed me a couple of pictures she had taken at the Apple Shed, a place where you can spend \$7 on a jar of preserves. A busload of European tourists were inside with her so that held her back.

After lunch I showed Soni all of the features in the building that George had explained to me. A first class stop over place for pilots. I had a great time there. Then I took a few more pictures for you.



Soni deciding if she would ever fly with me again - - - I'll take that as a Yes, thank you!



More indoor ambiance and Soni photographing a special rose on a large rosebush in the 'backyard'

We 'quickly' walked back to the Mooney, it was only 50° outside and there was still a breeze out of the east. It was chilly and I 'hopped' into my airplane ASAP. Soni read the fuel gauges on the wings and gave me an update. She called out 7 in one and 17 in the other. Good, we were good to go. I really did not want to taxi over to the fuel pits and get back out for more if I could safely bypass that.

We were laughing and carrying on so much that we quickly fogged up all of the windows which made us laugh some more. I had to get out the flashlight and look all around the panel for the defroster.

I fired up that trusty Lycoming engine and we pulled out onto the taxiway heading to the south when it hit me. Remember the rows of huge white windmills a few miles south? It was not yet that dark, it was that thick gray hazy. We were pointed right at the windmills and nada. I couldn't see them in those conditions. I looked all around to see if it was still VFR there. An hour later we would have been stuck there together until 10:15 PM when the haze again cleared out. (Chuckle, Giggle, He-he.)

I knew that haze is usually a low phenomenon and in a few minutes after departure, we fly above it. I consulted the weather ahead on my GPS which has a weather download subscription and the rest of the route was good. Then I had a new experience pop up. I clicked my push-to-talk button five times and the pilot controlled runway lights wouldn't come up. An Angel promptly appeared in our headsets announcing he was 12 miles to the north, and landing at Tehachapi. I replied that the winds were favoring runway 29 and asked if he knew how to turn on the pilot controlled runway lights. He clicked slower than I did and it worked. They came on. I am still learning. I always thought "5 Clicks in 5 Seconds" meant within 5 seconds. Here, it means in exactly 5 seconds. He clicked slower.

Once we departed, I got us turned around and headed to Corona while climbing to clear the San Gabriels ahead. Soon we could again see for miles with that junk below us. I hit the button and the autopilot took over aiming us directly toward Corona. The air was smooth, the smiles and laughter persisted. Darkness fell. Some lights below were way ahead. We soon got closer.

Lancaster and Palmdale were beautiful sections of thousands of lights and then there was more darkness ahead. We kept climbing at a steady rate and soon there was a glimpse of lights beyond

the mountains over there. And then another over to the left. As we kept climbing and getting closer, the whole panorama of millions of city lights came into view. How many cities? Well over to the left was the Inland Empire, slightly to the right was Orange County, and further over was LA County. The mountains themselves were dark black but not out of sight from a pilot's perspective. We know where they are. I have GPS pages to assist if needed. Technology is great.

Like always, once over the crest of the San Gabriels, the airplane's nose gets pointed down, I retard the throttle, yet the speed increases. We inched up to 200 MPH but like always, the sensation is not of speed. We are just suspended there, smooth, comfortable, and enjoying life. The city lights below slide backward ever so smoothly.

Air Traffic Control and I exchanged a few bursts of words on the radio and all so soon I have again arrived in Corona. We rolled to a stop in front of #32. It was about 60° out with no wind. Dark, but very comfortable out. We chatted some more. A hug later, it was again time to say goodbye for now.

Epilogue:

To all of you have gone flying with me,  
to all of you who will someday,  
and to all of you who choose not to,  
there is immense fun in what I do, with the people who choose to do it with me,  
and I am thankful for you  
and to have these opportunities to share some of my life aloft with my friends.  
Also I am thankful to be able to express my memories with you.  
ed

Ed Shreffler

11/14/2010

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More of my stories are at: <http://www.mooneyevents.com/shreffler.html>