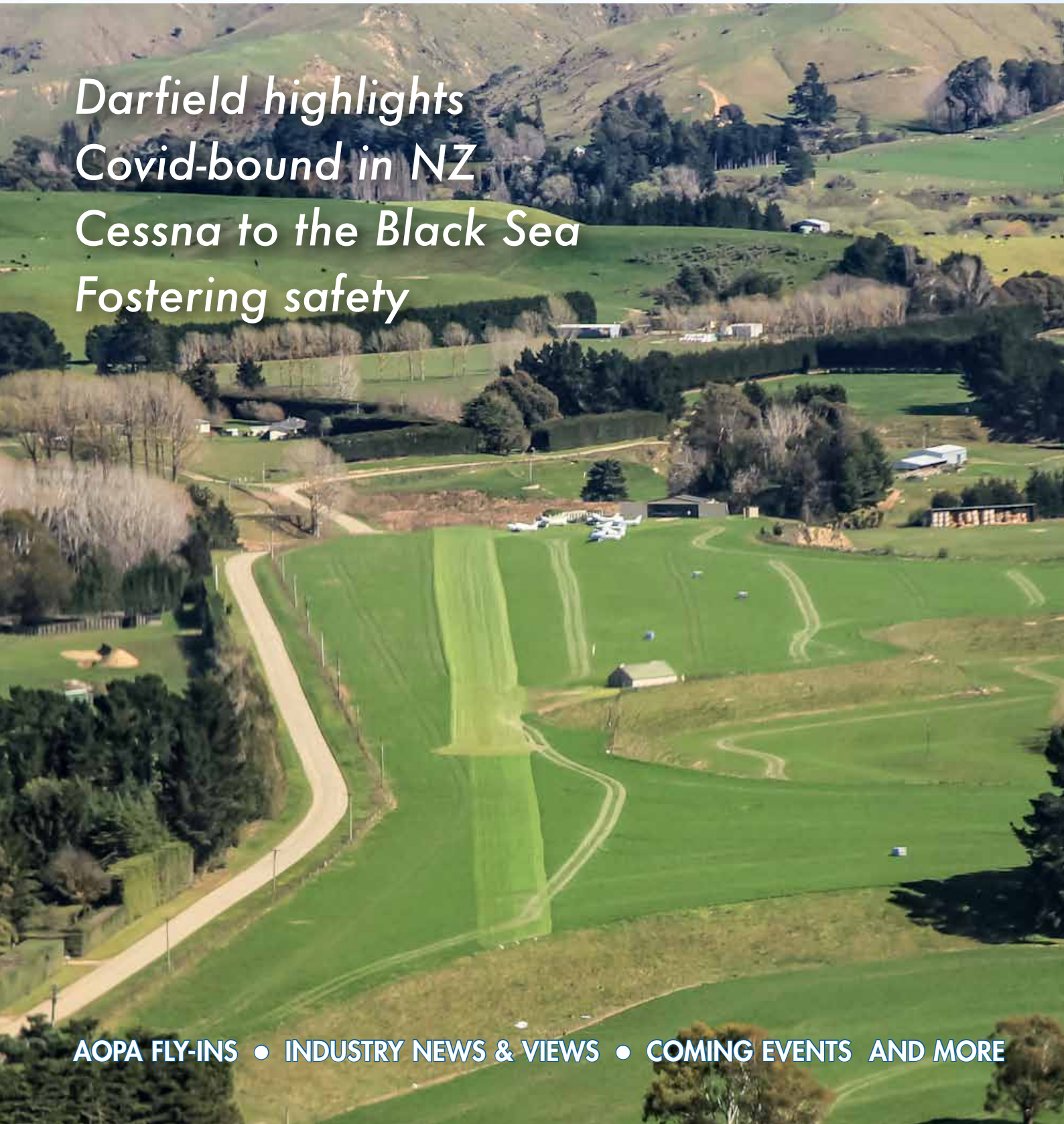
Approach

THE NEW ZEALAND AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS MAGAZINE
SUMMER 2020



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Q & A: Ross Edmondson

By Andy Hintz

Wandering around 'Warbirds on Parade' airshow at Ardmore Airport earlier this year, I met Ross Edmondson, who was flying his rather unique Cessna 182R, N9953H, around the world. He'd just arrived from Australia and was about to face border closures due to COVID-19, bringing his journey to a halt.

Fast forward five months to mid August, I'd just refueled DXK in Rotorua, and looked up to see Ross getting ready to depart for Nelson. It was a great opportunity to catch up, and sowed the seed for a Q & A session on behalf of AOPA members.

Tell us about your Cessna 182…

N9953H is a 1981 Cessna 182, R model, purchased early 2018 with the round the world trip in mind, but I also wanted to explore the United States and Alaska. I was looking for a somewhat late model aircraft with large fuel tanks (92 gallons standard), WAAS GPS and a 2-axis auto pilot. The engine is a Continental O-470 with the previous owner doing the O-520 'Pponk' upgrade (520 cylinders fitted to the 470 engine), without fuel injection and providing approx. 270hp. The engine had close to 80 hours when purchased, with approximately 3500 hours on the airframe.

The C182 is a very versatile aircraft that fitted my needs and could be configured to allow a flight of 2100nm – the longest leg of my round the world trip. Additionally, I wanted an aircraft I could take in and out of unimproved grass airstrips. A high wing aircraft allowed greater visibility, easy photography, shade from 50-degree sun in the Middle East and cover from rain in Asia.

The C182 is type certified to fly up to thirty percent overweight for ferry operations. After working out the longest leg of the round the world trip, all up-weight calculation came in at approximately twenty percent over max gross weight; still well within the limits, especially with the engine having fifteen percent additional power over standard. The aircraft performance at twenty percent over-weight sees a 600–700 ft/minute climb at sea level with a cruise speed of 120 knots.

British accent, aircraft with an N tail reg and you're flying around the world: what's the story?

Originally from the UK, over the last three years I've spent half my time in Iraq working as a project manager in the oil and gas sector, and the other half flying.

I originally sat my pilot's licence in the United States, training to the European syllabus, but later converted the PPL to a US licence. I gained my private licence after exactly fifty hours, completed over five weeks from start to finish while living in a trailer next to the airport in Florida. The weather was fantastic, with only a few non flyable days during the five weeks. Around five years later I decided to do my instrument rating. I had the hours, so it made sense to complete the commercial flight test to gain my FAA CPL. The US pilot licence is heavily tailored to light aircraft, with one written exam, an oral exam and a flight test once respective hours are achieved, and many private pilots also hold an instrument rating, which is great from a safety aspect.

I've now been flying for fifteen years, during which I've accumulated 2800 hours, flown throughout sixty countries and landed at around 900 airports and counting. I hold ratings for single engine piston aircraft, high performance for aircraft over 200 HP and a complex rating for aircraft with retractable gear and constant speed propellors.

When I was young I'd spend hours and hours on flight simulator, so by the time I passed my pilot's licence I had three big adventures awaiting. The first was to fly coast to coast across the United States, which I completed not long after getting my private licence at 150 hours, VFR, with a fold-out road map and a couple of sleeping bags. Each day the weather was checked and a point on the road map was selected, with the aim of getting to the West Coast of the US and back again in five weeks.

The second adventure was to fly the length of Africa from London to Cape Town, which I completed over four months in 2013, flying a Diesel Cessna 182 at 800 hours with a CPL license and instrument rating. I ended up flying a British doctor around Africa so she could conduct medical training to combat maternal mortality in childbirth, which was one of the millennium development goals set by the UN. Getting a full four months off work for this project would typically be difficult, but the company I worked for approved my working remotely during this period, with laptop in hand the journey started.

The third adventure is the round the world trip I'm currently undertaking. This was the largest flying adventure I could think of. Very few people have done it and it seemed like the ultimate aviation adventure.

Any advice for prospective aircraft owners?

My first aircraft was a Cessna 172 I found on a Government website running an online auction. I put in a random bid and woke up the next morning as an aircraft owner. I was lucky: it was an ex Civil Air Patrol aircraft with a fantastic maintenance history. I definitely do not recommend this method of purchase!

When I saw the Cessna 182R for sale, I jumped on it. A lesson I've learned is when you see a good one, don't delay. Good honest aircraft are getting harder and harder to find, but the sale was contingent on passing a pre buy inspection.

What modifications did you make to your C182 and why?

I got straight into the annual inspection and in the first four months, I fitted a Garmin G5, USB charging ports and Flint Tip Tanks, providing an additional 23 gallons of fuel, in preparation for a six week trip to Alaska and Canada. During this trip I went up to Eureka, 600nm from the North Pole. If you see me flying around New Zealand, ask about flying over brown bears on the beach then landing to camp for the night…

After that trip, another Garmin G5 was fitted, allowing the vacuum system to be removed, to ensure instrument reliability. Wing tips with high intensity LED lights were also fitted, allowing ease of landing at airfields with no lighting.

I upgraded the Garmin 430 WAAS with an Avidyne 540 as the primary panel mounted GPS. I also changed the Garmin 496 for a Garmin Area 660 and hardwired to the primary GPS with both units connected to the transponder ADS-B in. The auto-pilot is an S-Tec 30 with altitude hold, connected to the Garmin G5 and into the Avidyne 540 for GPS heading to follow the planned route. The audio panel was changed from a GME340 to a PS Engineering PNA450B, gaining Bluetooth connectivity to listen to music, which is handy on longer routes. Finally, a Turtle Tank fuel bladder was fitted where the rear passenger seats are normally located, providing an additional 150 gallons of fuel to total 265 gallons on board, which provides the range I required.

What was your chosen route around the world?

North America to Europe, then the Middle East, Asia and Australasia. It was important to me to cross the equator into the southern hemisphere, visit New Zealand and cross the Pacific Ocean for long over water flights.

How did you prepare for the long legs of your journey?

In preparation for the longest leg over water (Hawaii to California), it was critical to not only understand how the aircraft

would perform but also how I would perform. I decided to fly from Florida to Los Angeles to simulate the leg, but over land. Time in the air was 16.5 hours, distance was 2100nm and the autopilot failed, so the full leg was flown by hand, no stops. Fatigue finally set in once I had landed and shut down.

What's your best refuelling story?

Egypt was interesting. The airport where I landed typically refuelled aircraft from barrels, but they proudly informed me they had a new bowser and I was the first customer. The complication was the bowser was an old Jet A1 set up so the nozzle was significantly larger than the filler ports on the aircraft and the pumping rate was far too high, resulting in little fuel in the tanks and a lot of fuel over the wings and on the ground. In the end they reverted back to filling a barrel from the truck and using a hand pump into the aircraft, add to this the OAT of 45°C. The result was 2.5hr to get 200l of avgas into the aircraft.

Do you conduct your own maintenance?

Yes, under the US system I complete all routine maintenance between annual inspections under owner approved maintenance, including oil/ filter changes, spark plugs and general lubrication. I also carry a set of spark plugs on-board, spare inner tubes, oil filters, duct tape and some tools.

Any unexpected maintenance through your journey?

In Australia, metal was found in the oil filter with the engine time at 600hr since overhaul. Once stripped, corrosion was visible. This may well have been due to lack of use from prior owner – approximately eighty hours over four years. A bulk strip was completed, as the safest option considering the length of the legs over water heading to NZ and on to USA. I ran the engine in, completing just over fifteen hours before departing Australia for New Zealand via Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands.

Tell us about your most memorable moments whilst flying…

During my solo cross-country, some weather ahead caused me to land at an aerodrome and look at alternative options. Once on the ground, a large dog came running across the ramp directly at the propellor. I managed to shut down just in time, but thought afterwards how I would have explained a dog strike during my cross-country. Another was during my instrument rating cross-country requirement. The instructor gave two options: going either north or south of Florida. I asked if we could go east to the Bahamas for lunch. The instructor said no one had ever asked before, but it turned into a great day for all.

How have you found flying in New Zealand airspace?

Compared to the UK, New Zealand airspace is more open, the controllers are more helpful and seem used to dealing with GA aircraft. I have not had any issues with clearances into and through controlled airspace, but the more confident and competent you sound on the radio, the more likely you are to receive the clearance you are requesting.

Any questions when seeking clearance with an N tail reg?

When I was flying through Ohakea airspace, the controllers googled my aircraft tail number and had a chat to me about my world trip. Also, when I was flying through the United Arab Emirates, an Expat American controller had a chat with me at about 4am as he was curious about what I was up to.

What is your headset of choice?

Light Speed Zulu 3 – I find the noise reduction to be fantastic.

What Electronic Flight Book (EFB) do you use?

AvPlan, for no other reason than running a free trial, getting used to it and later subscribing.

Any advice for planning international GA adventures?

Just go for it! It's just one flight after another but, instead of turning around and going home, you just continue on. It's a challenge with frustrations but the reward is worth it ten times over. If you're thinking of doing a trip, search out pilots who've completed similar and get advice; that's the best place to start. I'm currently adding content to my website to document everything you may need to know to do a similar round the world trip, and will be releasing this in the coming months.

You can follow Ross Edmondson's onward adventures at his website, www.katamarino.co.uk