

Up With Downs

by Earl Downs



Tenacity

I first met Andy when he received the Spirit of Wiley Post Award on January 28th of this year. When Bob Kemper invited me to attend the awards ceremony, I had little knowledge of who Andy was. As the award presentation unfolded I found out the award was about special aviation people, not necessarily heroes or wildly famous pilots, just "special" people. I featured Andy's story on the front page of the March issue of the *Aviator* because Andy reminded me of what the words dedication, tenacity, and love of flying are all about. Originally from Australia, Andy adopted the United States to chase his dream.



Andy with the Wiley Post Spirit Award

In the world of aviation records, only the Russians have built an aircraft that holds all four performance records for a particular class of aircraft. Andy wanted to match that record in his unusual little Autogyro, named "Woodstock." On March 20, 2005, Andy achieved his goal.

Even though Andy does not live in Oklahoma, the *Aviator* has bestowed the title of "Honorary Okie Aviator" on Andy. We have kept in touch since he received the Spirit of Wiley Post award and he was kind enough to write about his record flight and allow me to share his story with our readers. I hope you enjoy Andy's story as much as I did.

500 kms In A Hurry

by Andy Keech

There is not a great deal to setting an aviation record except just doing it. There is a lot of preparation, of course, and it is a form of mental rehearsal. But

when the day comes, you go fly and that's that.

I had thoughts of Tom Cruise strutting across the ramp with his F-14 Tomcat hulking in the background, chanting, "I feel the need...for speed." It seemed so cocky and silly at the time. The truth was, I also feel that need. After setting the transcontinental speed record in *Woodstock* (the LW5 Autogyro designed by Ron Herron of Little Rock, Arkansas), and later, the world distance, altitude and time-to-climb records in the same ship, it was now time for an assault on a closed-course world speed record held by my friend and mentor Ken Wallis. Ken has held all 5 speed records over distances from 2 km out to 1,000 km for several decades. If *Woodstock* acquired one of these, she would be one of only three aircraft in all of aviation history to hold class records in all four categories of performance (speed, distance, climb and altitude.)

To involve you for a moment in the detail of planning: since the planned course would take between 3.5 and 4 hours to fly, fuel was a consideration. The LW5 has more than sufficient internal tankage to handle this, so there would be no drag penalty from bolt-on tanks. Weight of fuel is obviously another factor, and still another is wind. I had painstakingly laid out five different circuits with the intention of leaving on the most advantageous one at the most propitious moment.

But no such moment presented itself, or if it did there was always some detail left undone, and the days meanwhile continued to parade onward. By mid-March, with winter on the wane, wind was becoming progressively less predictable. Daily guesswork with variable wind directions and closed courses had turned into a game, like playing chess with invisible pieces. In the end I chucked all the fancy calculations up in the air, saddled up *Woodstock* and launched.

The new plan was to do a series of five out-and-back flights between Little Rock and a sleepy little village about 35 miles to its east called Hazen. This would be ten legs and by my best guess (I had stopped using the term "calculation") each leg had to average no more than 25 minutes in order to stay on the required speed and accomplish the record.

At 6:06 A.M. on March 20, with dawn beginning to light the eastern sky, I lifted off North Little Rock Municipal airport and aimed *Woodstock* into the rising sun. I knew that I was flying into a quartering headwind but one of unknown strength and uncertain direction. The whole venture had more the feeling of a barroom brawl than a meticulously-planned attempt at a world aviation record. There was an atmosphere

Ask the Doctor

by Dr. Guy Baldwin, AME



Your Medical is Out

Publishers note:

The good Doctor is on vacation for this issue so I pulled up a "pearl from the past." The regulations of holding a FAA medical are almost as important as passing the medical. The Doc made some good points with this one, so here it is again.

A question that comes up regularly in my office was also asked during a recent Warbirds conference I attended in Phoenix, AZ: "When does your medical truly expire?" In that instance, the question concerned an airman who had a valid medical certificate but, sometime prior to its expiration date, had visited an Aviation Medical Examiner, only to find he also had a medical problem that required further tests. The questioner asked if the airman could continue to fly until the expiration date of his current medical certificate. There was some

confusion in the meeting as to the correct answer. I thought I knew the answer, which was later confirmed by Dr. Warren Silberman, Chief of the FAA Aeromedical Branch in Oklahoma City.

Under normal circumstances, a medical certificate is valid until the last day of the expiration month at twelve o'clock midnight. For example, if your medical is due in April, it is valid until April 30th at midnight. However, if you visit an Aviation Medical Examiner on April 15th and, as a result of that examination, your medical is put on hold, you really do not have a medical at that point.

The reason is that, once the new medical examination is started, the current medical is technically null and void, even though you still have it in your possession. I have not seen the FAA take action against an aviator who has continued to fly after that point, but it certainly could happen, especially if an incident occurs during that period. Also, if you were to be involved in an accident, your insurance may, in fact, be null and void as well.

If you have any questions regarding when your medical really expires, talk to your Aviation Medical Examiner, the Aeromedical Board, or to one of the support groups such as Pilot Medical Solutions, the AOPA, or the EAA. Of course, you are always welcome to contact my office at 918-437-7993.

of reacting to one surprise after another, rather than holding the reins of the situation in a confident hand. It was a nice morning for flying, and there was no reason not to relax and enjoy the ride.

Little Rock lies at the foot of the Ozark Plateau, and by the time one is east of Little Rock he is over the Mississippi Delta, a wide swath of flat farmland that stretches 120 miles to Memphis and the Father of Waters. Even at

six in the morning, there was an endless line of traffic on the arrow-straight Interstate 40, east and west bound. In some ways the experience of watching them from my perch in *Woodstock* was like being invisible, watching openly without being seen.

I should have been tending to business, or else this would be nothing more than a sightseeing tour above the Bible

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Andy Keech and his Autogyro, "Woodstock" go for the record

500 kms in a hurry

continued from p. 4.

belt. According to the GPS the ground-speed was distressingly low, far below that necessary to accomplish this mission, and therefore all my planning about the winds (including a detailed briefing from Flight Service immediately before departure) may as well have been a dance of worship before an unappreciative deity.

How boring aviation could someday be, should we ever learn to predict weather with absolute accuracy.

It was with this thought echoing through the hallways of my mind, while staring into the endless distance across the vast delta, that I managed to fly a half mile past Hazen before realizing where I was and making the turnaround.

This made the first leg 31 minutes long, or six minutes slower than target speed, which was a pretty dismal way to open an undertaking such as this.

But as they say, for every headwind there is an equal but opposite tailwind. By the time I was turning around on leg two back at NLR, I had made up four of those minutes. Tailwinds may be equal but they do not work for as long as the headwind penalizes a pilot. Now the race was truly on.

A speed flight is a demanding cliffhanger from start to finish. That much is evident, and thankfully it is evident early on. In transcontinental flying, the mind is attuned to endurance and the principal challenge is to be able to cope with the unexpected. In distance flying, patience is the name of the game because there is little to do but watch the scenery go by and keep track of fuel burn. For altitude and climb records the eye and brain are pretty much glued to the indicated air speed, location, and dealing with air traffic control.

With speed flying it's: *faster and cleaner*. When you're behind you have to make it up, and when you're ahead you have to keep amassing minutes to draw interest in your "time" bank account. You are focused for speed. You

feel a genuine need for speed that Tom Cruise never quite communicated, the whole purpose of this flight.

The next NLR-Hazen leg was 50 minutes exactly. Right on target, except we were still two minutes behind. Ditto for the third leg.

But we were lightening up as Woodstock burned off her fuel load, and we made leg four in 48 minutes. So we were beginning the fifth and final lap even with the board, and now the whole record attempt was hanging this last leg.

One more time east on I-40. I felt I had flown it a hundred times now instead of just four. I could call all the landmarks by their first names, as if they

are cousins of mine. Hello, Lonoke. Hi

Carlisle, you old bomber base with your long concrete runways, now the home to a squadron of crop dusters. Good morning all you catfish farms, where the cafes along this stretch of I-40 get their fish to fry up and serve with hushpuppies to hungry truckers out chasing their 47 cents per driver mile as fervently as I am chasing Ken Wallis' speed record.

We made the big swing around Hazen, Woodstock and I, we who have flown so far and high together. We pivoted around Hazen with Woodstock's blades almost completely perpendicular to the surface. This whole thing about turning points is an art in speed flying—you tend to deliberately overshoot in order not to cut too fine and disqualify your record attempt. There are nine turns on this attempt and all are wasteful of time and speed but right now we were feeling the need. Wind is penalty enough with the difference between upwind and downwind speed at 35 knots on these circuits. Insurance overshoots cost more time so we have to do everything exactly

right. Speed comes not just from power but also from flying the shortest distance between two points and staying right down the middle of the course line. Speed comes from accuracy and finesse, seconds saved here and there. I scrambled for all I could get.

Little Rock was once again visible, the moment we completed the turn. It was a Sunday in Arkansas, and on this day most people who are outside their homes will be in church. Little Rock is still a small southern city, a pleasant and unhurried place, modern and metropolitan in all the ways it needs to be but yet a small town at heart. I fancied that it was drawing me to itself, somehow trying to help me win this contest I was having with myself.

The feeling might have been fanciful, but the GPS said it was happening—we were making up the minutes, and by the time we crossed the highway that lead to the big C-130 training base north of North Little Rock Airport, it was evident we had won. Woodstock completed the last circuit in 47 minutes, meaning we had surpassed the old record.

A victory roll would have been fun, but that's a realm of flight where Woodstock is out of her depth.

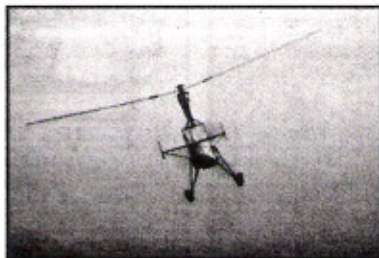
There were no bands playing when we landed, but our reception was not without some fanfare. Kris and Ron Herron, Woodstock's designer was there, as was Zane Anderson, who is a person of standing in Little Rock's aviation community, and finally Ted, the NAA witness. Amid the smiles and handshakes, it began to settle in my thoughts and this little flying machine, in which I sat for a lingering moment, is now the holder of every possible type of performance record that can be set with any class of aircraft: speed, range, altitude

and time-to-climb. It was time to call home with the news.

At this writing, I only know that we exceeded the old record held by Ken Wallis by four percent (pending final verification by the NAA). Looking back into my GPS like Hansel following the breadcrumb trail, I found that we covered 602 km where 576 kilometers were to count. Turns and overshoots were expensive. Had I become more alert earlier in the game, we would undoubtedly have done better. All flights are learning experiences. We will certainly do better next time.

A final footnote—as I said at the beginning, only two other aircraft in the world ever held all four performance records for their class. It happens that both were Russian. Woodstock is the first aircraft from the west to accomplish this feat. She is the only rotorcraft, ever to do so.

Zon Herron has good reason to be pleased with his creation. If there is a David and Goliath story here it would be that of an Arkansan country boy designer vs. the design bureau of a super power.



Woodstock and Andy, alone and in a hurry

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