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Sky Polaris: A Record-Breaking Global Flight

North and South Pole
Flying Solo

*Image of the total flight route created with
<https://www.freeworldmaps.net/printable/>*

*Inflight Tracking Screenshots: www.spidertracks.com
Weather Maps Screenshots: www.windy.com*

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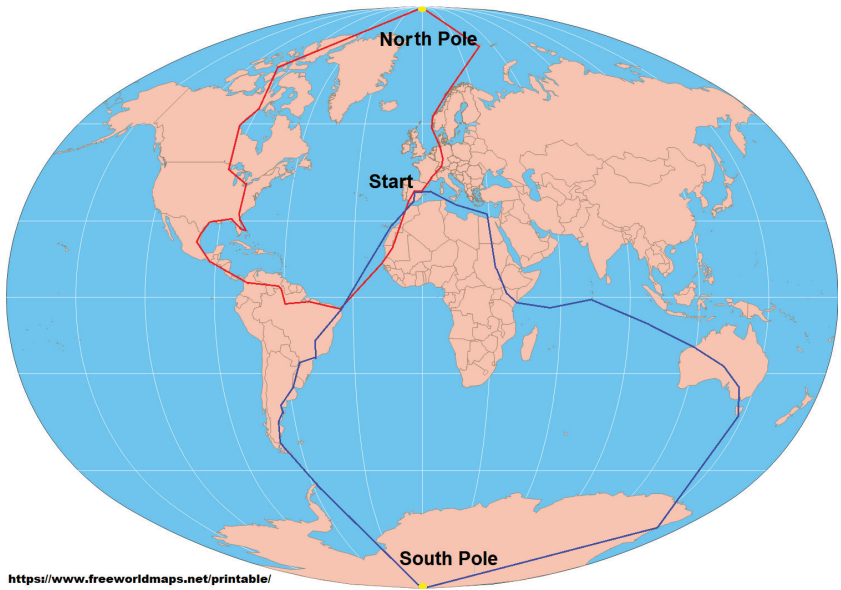
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Flight route around the North and South Pole in the shape of an eight

On a non-stop flight: Above the eastern USA

Sky Polaris managed to avoid a landing in the USA, and with the overflight of Lakeland in Florida the FAI recognized this mandatory point. To refuse Michel the low overflight over the assembly of the EAA was absolutely incomprehensible. This would have been, at least, a small compensation for his disappointed friends on the ground, whom he could have greeted in this way!

Michel left Freeport, Grand Bahama Island, at 13:58 Zulu at 28 degrees Celsius for a non-stop flight over 994 nm to Windsor, Canada, opposite to Detroit, USA. There are few small aircraft that can easily cover such a distance. If it could not, Michel would still be stuck in Mexico. In Windsor the temperature was 0 degrees Celsius—on the ground. It should get exciting once again!

Blessing in disguise, my friend José del Peso managed to send the parachute of Softie Parachutes, which was sponsored by Paraphernalia, to the Bahamas. With the help of his friend Dirk it arrived in Freeport with a King Air, just in time. Thanks, José and Dirk! There I was at the airfield waiting for the parachute while I supplied my plane with fuel, oil and everything else it needed. What I was missing was the big flare gun that Don had brought to Lakeland. It was a 25 mm bore flare gun with ammunition that would penetrate the skin of a polar bear and give a chance against polar bears if they were too hungry and intrusive. However, there was no way to receive the gun here.

The big issue was still to fly over the USA to Windsor in Canada without a stopover. From the Bahamas I could fly over water, away from the ADIZ, to St. Johns in Eastern Canada. The second non-stop route would be similar in length but along the U.S. East Coast. The long range of the RV-8 would make this possible. Nevertheless, the threat of punishment by this supervisor in Texas had far-reaching conse-

quences for me that the guy could not have foreseen and that he probably would not have cared about at all.

I chose Windsor as my destination airport because it was the shortest distance from the Bahamas to Canada. The weather along the route was good in the beginning, but 300 miles before Windsor I had to expect strong headwinds, not very helpful! The front moved quickly eastwards, so a later arrival was better. But landing later would also mean: in darkness. And without daylight I could not see clouds and avoid the danger of icing. The weather forecast was still disillusioning: moderate to heavy snowfall. But there should be some chance to reach my destination without freezing to a block of ice. I hesitated for a long time with my decision, but I finally had to make it!

No time to rest. Already at 3 o'clock I was awake and could not fall asleep afterwards. What would happen? Would I have no problem to get clearance through the USA? Did I land in the Bahamas because it was the decision of a controller or was it in agreement with a standard procedure?

"EC XLL, ready to copy?"

"Go ahead for EC XLL."

"EC XLL cleared to destination Windsor, via BR62V, climb and maintain 6000, after takeoff, turn left and when reaching 1500, call approach on 126.50."

Uuuuf, the first step had been successful! Now there was a little breather, time to fly and wait and see what would happen later when I reached Ohio. It was true, it was incredibly windy and the headwind started as predicted. I tried to enjoy the scenery, but I was too stressed and anxiously awaiting what was yet to come. Many frequency changes and stunned controllers who did not understand how an RV-8 could fly such a long distance. The expected low temperature was another problem. There was not enough space in the plane to put on extra clothes. When I left the Bahamas, I was sweating of course, prepared for maybe minus 5 degrees Celsius. The further north I went, the more the temperature dropped, perceived at rock bottom!

Miami, Jacksonville, Atlanta, Charleston, Cleveland, and Detroit ATC followed my flight path and were cooperative whenever I requested a change of altitude or direction. At times, I was guided away from my course with vectors 80 degrees away from the destination course. To be honest, I didn't like this at all because it was different from what I expected.

The headwind component already rose to 50 knots and my speed over ground dropped to a meager 100 knots. Occasionally, I even saw 67 knots! During the flight my estimated arrival time was delayed by two hours. Over Georgia the wind was light to moderately turbulent, extremely uncomfortable! Then the clouds appeared in front of me: Soon I would learn more about my future route and my fate.

As expected, I managed to stay clear of clouds at 12,000 feet. At first, I had tried to fly beneath, but the minimum IFR altitude did not allow for this. So, I had no choice but to climb. But—to climb meant lower temperatures! I would be able to tolerate those, no doubt! Wouldn't I? Wrong again: The temperature in the cockpit was minus 17 degrees Celsius, and I started to cool down quickly.

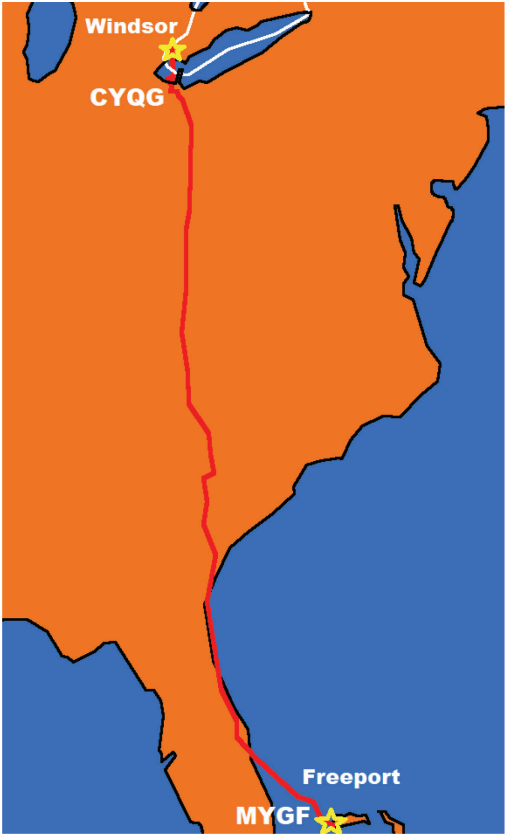
Because of the low temperature, the autopilot stopped working and the engine monitor display gave an alarm: overvoltage from the generator! I solved the problem of the autopilot by switching it off and controlling it manually. But also the manual steering was tight. Switching on the pitot tube heating as a power load consumer solved the problem with the charging voltage. In the cold my legs started to shake so much that the vibration was transmitted to the whole aircraft. So, I took my feet off the pedals, and in that way the flight became smoother. About 70 miles ahead of the destination, I discovered a big opening in the clouds below me. I tried to change my flight plan and, to my surprise, this was approved. Now it was high time to descend to layers of air with slightly higher temperatures.

When I dived to 3000 feet, I was again and again surprised by snow showers of the same color as the clouds. The white columns looked like turrets of palaces or castles. Turrets that had to be avoided, of course! Getting through now really became extremely difficult.

On the ground everything was covered with snow, looked white and beautiful, but orientation, therefore, became more than tricky. I finally crossed the Canadian border and was overjoyed! The weather got noticeably better, the sky opened up, the ground was not only white anymore. I felt liberated and very relieved! The landing was not exactly my best, but I was there: in Canada!

It was clear as daylight, one last problem existed. The Canadian customs actually demanded to be informed two hours before a landing. I had called customs several times the day before, from the hotel and before the flight, but had not reached anyone. Paula, Andres, and Don, my ground crew, were once again called in to help deal with this difficulty while I was flying. When I turned off the engine, customs appeared; my ground crew had been successful!

The officials in Windsor welcomed me in a friendly manner, wrapped everything up quickly, and took me into their warm office because I was still shivering with cold. They handed me a cup of hot coffee and a warm blanket. There I was at last, tired but happy. Now I can fly freely again and land wherever I want. Or can't I???



<i>Flight route</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Leg, nm</i>	<i>Total, nm</i>
Freeport–Windsor	Apr. 10, 2016	1007	10,568