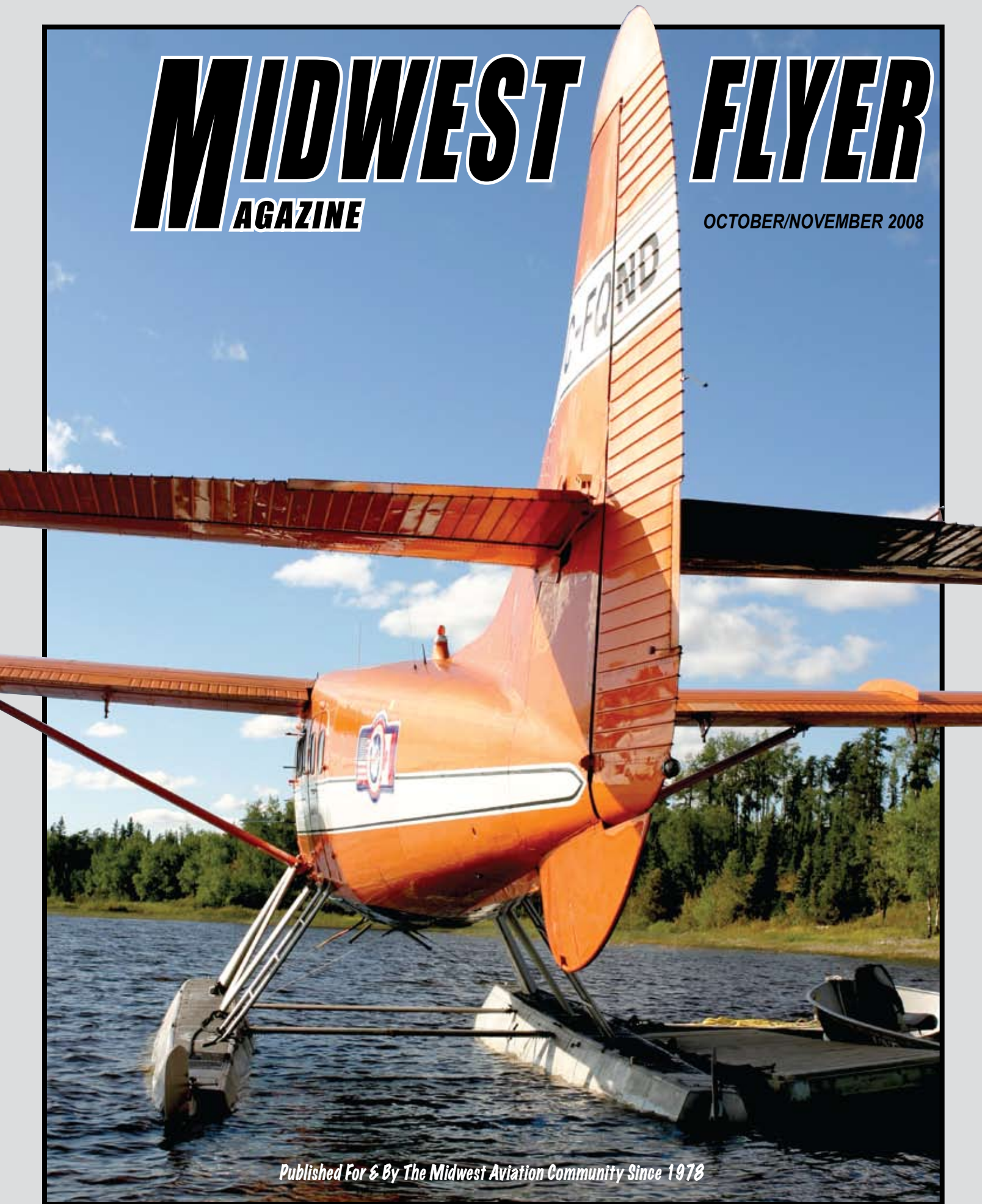


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WATA *Difference*

WISCONSIN AVIATION TRADES ASSOCIATION

Marathon Run To Private Pilot

by Woody Minar, CFI



Staff Sergeant Robyn Sveback with her flight instructor Woody Minar.

It was mid-April when I walked into the office of Osceola AeroSport at the airport in Osceola, Wis. (KOE) when co-owner Carolyn Johnson exclaimed, "We got an email from someone in England who wants to get her Private Pilot license in three weeks!" I am always up for a challenge, but I was not sure what to expect.

After several phone calls and numerous emails across the pond, it was obvious that I was about to experience a high like never before.

Staff Sergeant Robyn Sveback, a 26-year-old resident of Amery, Wis., and now an eight-year veteran in the U.S. Air Force stationed at RAF Mildenhall, England, was coming back home on leave to run in Grandma's Marathon in Duluth and then start her flight training.

I offered no guarantees. BUT, if she was ready to pass her knowledge test when she returned to the States, then pass her physical, grasp the requirements of flying, memorize and understand the multiple possibilities of questions for the oral, understand airspace and weather

requirements, study during her remaining waking hours, and if the weather cooperated (we're talking summer in Northwestern Wisconsin), we might be able to get it done before she returned to England.

We agreed to give it a try. I mailed her all the study materials and training aids I could find. This was the start of our instructor-student long distance ground training.

On June 23rd she showed up for her flight training. It was obvious she had studied hard while in England; after all, it was something she committed herself to complete. We had our first lesson that morning and the mid-day thermals were at their peak already.

That first flight in the Cessna 150 was one neither one of us will never forget – the rocking, rolling, and pitching from the thermals, not to mention her death grip on the yoke.

Her verbal exclamations of perceived fear calmed down somewhat when we started the ground reference maneuvers and initial aerial work.

That afternoon she passed her physical. Later that evening we had



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a glorious, half moon, smooth air night cross country to Eau Claire and Rice Lake and did the required 10 night landings. Two days after the summer solstice, getting to bed at two o'clock in the morning felt good! Her daytime fears of terror turned to a calm bliss that night... until we did stalls the next day.

Robyn soon got used to the bumps in the sky and the conversation turned to one of jovial enjoyment... until she did spins, barrel rolls, loops and unusual attitudes with co-owner Dick Johnson in his Decathlon. Once on the ground, whether she was delirious or not, she wanted to do them again. ... and again after we did stalls the next day! Was she nuts?

A week went by and we were working on the maneuvers hard and trying to get the landings down well enough to solo. I was about ready to call it quits for the day as it appeared she was getting tired. So we made one more landing which was pretty good. "Let's quit on a positive note." To my surprise, she said, "Can we do another?" "If you want to, we've already done ten, though." So we departed and she greased the next landing. I never saw such a big smile on anyone's face. She said, "I got it! I got the sight picture you have been telling me about!" We did five more landings and they were all perfect!

The next day, we went to Rush City, Minn., because the wind was favoring Rwy 34. We did a half dozen landings before we were both ready for her first solo. She greased the first one in front of a waiting 172 at the hold short line. "Very nice!" was heard over the radio from the pilot. Some crosswinds came up after an hour or so and she handled them well, but it was time to return to Osceola.

The flying Gods were with us the following day – beautiful, sunny, calm winds, and no thermals. After three more hours of supervised solo and a lunch break, I sent her on her short cross-country. Jubilation! The next day the weather was the same. Just two days after that first solo, she went on her long cross-country of three hours. Thinking she might be tired, we had lunch and we were going to do some ground. Instead, she said "Let's do the tower landings today." Off to Anoka we flew. I'm getting tired just watching her, but she has the common sense to know when enough is enough and she showed no signs of fatigue.

It was now time to think about the checkride—all her requirements were met in ten days. Two weeks after she started, I called the DPE in Superior and the checkride was scheduled for a beautiful day four days hence. Robyn's checkride maneuvers were "spot on" as they say in England; she was ready.

The day before the scheduled checkride, we did one last simulated test. Whoa! What person invaded YOUR body? Nothing went right; I mean nothing. Checkride jitters – on both our parts. OK, let's take a break, regroup, and do some ground.

Meanwhile, Mark Nelson from Rush City called me

with a question. I took the opportunity to put him on the speakerphone and asked him "When you take your students up for a simulated checkride the day before the big event, what are their maneuvers like?" "They suck!" I think that's all the confirmation Robyn needed. I told her to have fun with this – flying is fun; have fun on the checkride. Her maneuvers were spot on after going back up for the final time that afternoon!

We met at 7 a.m. to prep the plane, finish her checkride cross-country planning, and cover any last-minute details. Not a good day for weather, though. If one could believe the TAF for Duluth, we were supposed to run into heavy rain on the way to Superior, clear up, and then start raining around noon with storms coming. Good; the checkride would fall right into that window IF the TAF was correct. When was the last time THAT happened?

The checkride got off to a late start, but once going, she was doing well and there were little or no signs of nerves from her or me. Then the flying – off she went taking off into some light rain (a new experience) and acceptable ceilings. I waited for more than an hour like an expectant father. Having taken students to nearly 40 checkrides in the last five years, I was just as nervous for this student as the first one.

Robyn and the DPE came in for the required landings; they took off and I never heard from them again. Where did they go? I didn't know what to think. Well, they had landed, parked the plane out of sight on the other side of the gas pump, and walked around to look at some other planes before nonchalantly strolling in to give me the good news.

Eighteen days from start to finish! Robyn Sveback, who had never taken a flight lesson before, completed her mission with a week to spare. And, as with every other pilot who has taken a checkride, she asked, "What's next?"

Oh, and besides running a personal best time in her fourth Grandma's Marathon of 26.2 miles, she found out during her training that she was promoted to Tech Sergeant. Congratulations Robyn! □

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