

Across the Country in the DA20

Part 2

By Gwen Graham

Dear Friends,

After the factory tour, Pete and I drove to the other end of the airport where the delivery center for Diamond is located. He took me to the hangar where I "met" N408KB.

Pete showed me the preflight for a DA20. It has its own special dip stick for the fuel tank (yes, only one and not located in the wing, but rather behind the seats.) It has four fuel drains, a temperature patch in the cockpit that if it turns color it means its too hot to fly (the only Diamond with that provision) and a stall warning horn that is recessed in the wing (no more hitting your head on it during your preflight.)

The folks at Diamond catered in burgers from the Katana Cafe that's located in the same building and has one of the most interesting menus of any airport cafe I've seen. Pete said that the owner of Diamond (I believe his name is Christian), who always wants to do everything top notch, hired a famous chef from Toronto for the cafe. I have to say, that burger was the most flavorful I'd ever had not to mention the next day, I had a steak salad that was incredible.

After lunch it was time for Pete and I to fly. I had only spent about 20 minutes in the DA40 last summer when Pete first introduced us to Diamond aircraft. I was anxious to get the feel for the plane since "she" and I were going to be spending quite a lot of time together over the next few days.

We started by Pete handing me a copy of Galvin's checklist for the DA20. A well-laid out one piece, two-sided laminated checklist that I will duplicate when I return for our students and renter pilots. I've really liked it's thoroughness yet simple routine.

The start-up procedures are different for us Cessna types. With fuel pumps (one engine-driven, one electric-driven) plus an electric primer, there is a routine that you must do otherwise you'll have a tendency to flood it.

The winds at London were still gusty and crossed -- actually just what I needed for learning a new airplane. It was quite busy in the pattern that day. The tower guys were moving airplanes all over the skies, extending downwinds and sequencing all sorts. One of my longest finals, I swear, started, finally, in the next county!

We started off in the practice area. So long as we stayed within 15 miles of the airport we didn't have to file a flight plan. I just played with the plane while Pete checked systems that he needed to do for a delivery checklist. The plane felt sturdy and comfortable, even with the occasional bump we found due to the turbulence around us. We headed back for the pattern and practiced regular landings. After an hour we called it good and landed in 20 degree crosswinds with gusts to 20 knots. I was putting it on the center line rather well by then, I must say.

It felt good. One more hour tomorrow for specialty landings and emergency procedures and as long as Pete didn't ask for the keys back, I would be ready to launch westward.

Leaving London & Clearing Customs

The next day we got our other hour of flying in, yes, in gusty crossed winds. I found out what a slippery little plane 8KB is without flaps. But when you do put in the last notch of flaps, be sure you've got runway on which to land!

That evening, everything came together and I left first. Pete was picking up his own DA40 for Galvin, but this DA40 has synthetic vision in it! More on that later...

We would meet at Port Huron (PHN) just over the border in Michigan where we would clear customs.

Customs went smoothly and we had planned on trying to make it to Fort Wayne, Indiana for the night. By this time, it was after 7pm and night wasn't too far away. We agreed to monitor 122.75 as our air-to-air frequency and off we went into a beautiful evening sky.

I admit, I was nervous on that takeoff. This was it. I was on my way home in a new aircraft, still unfamiliar in many

ways yet still just an airplane. I had criss-crossed the country several times in years past, so experience was there, but so was my perpetual caution, also known as chicken pilot. I don't and won't take chances in an airplane. As the saying goes, "there are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots." I've always said I want to be an old pilot.

Plus there was the Detroit Class B airspace out there.

Thank goodness for GPS. I found Salem VOR (yep...SLM, as I recall) that if I flew direct to it, I would stay outside the class B. Just as well because when I called for flight following, they told me to stay out!

As I was passing Detroit to the west, the sun was definitely starting to sink. I'm not much of a night flyer these days and I certainly didn't want to fly at night over unfamiliar territory. I quickly located another airport off to the west called Jackson (KJXN) and decided I needed to land there. I called Pete on 122.75 and told him I didn't want to fly at night so I was landing at Jackson. I found my way there in the melting twilight. The tower had just closed so I announced to Jackson traffic, crossed the field and entered on the 45. It was a pretty nice landing, but no one was there to see it. And I mean no one.

By then it was nearly 9:30 at night. I grabbed my cell phone and the AOPA Airport Guide and found the listings for hotels. The first one I called was the right number but not a hotel. I looked for the national names and chose the next one. They had rooms but no shuttle. They could call me a cab. Fine. I just needed to get to a hotel.

The kid who picked me up in the cab couldn't remember where the hotel was so I called the gal back and handed the phone to the driver. This was not making me any more comfortable. We did get there -- a former Ramada that was being remodeled but still smelled of stale cigarettes and forgotten time.

I checked in and went to my room. The first thing I did was lock the deadbolt -- I'm fussy about personal safety. Or, should I say I tried to lock the deadbolt. It wouldn't lock. So I returned to the desk and asked for another room. At the next room, right next door, the key didn't want to work. The manager helped me and we got it open. At least the deadbolt worked. It was now 10pm, I was exhausted and realized I hadn't had anything to eat since lunch. But since I wasn't hungry anyway, just tired, I went to bed.

Day Two-Friday, May 23

The next day I got out to the airport, used the flight planning room under the tower to call weather and figure out which way I wanted to head, fueled up the plane and departed for Elkhart, Indiana (KEKM). Weather was already playing a role and I figured I'd get there and then re-assess which way to go to avoid the nasty weather that later turned into big storms in the mid-west.

After spending considerable time with the briefer, plus a corporate pilot who had flown in on a Citation and a private pilot who had just scrubbed a flight to a different part of the country, the plan was that I would fly toward Chicago and take the VFR route on the west shore of Lake Michigan to get north of Chicago and avoid the weather that was coming up from the southwest into that area. Then it should get me a clear shot to points westward from there. The pilot who had scrubbed his flight gave me his Chicago terminal so I'd have the route.

I told ground I was headed west and they gave me my squawk code and departure frequency for South Bend Approach. It was a pretty day, just high cirrus and smooth as glass. I followed myself with the chart and matched it up with the GPS. As I came up to Gary, Indiana, I was handed off to Chicago Center who told me to stay out of Class Bravo, Charlie and Delta airspace (yes, there are that many airspaces all together there.) That meant I needed to descend from 4,500 to 3,500 and then right near downtown Chicago I would go finally to 2,500 until about 30 miles north. What a view. I have some great pictures of downtown Chicago, of what used to be Meigs Field and a couple of the harbors around the city. That was pretty darn cool, I must admit.

I had originally intended to land at Kenosha which is north of Chicago but when I got there I figured I would just keep heading west and chose Madison, Wisconsin (KMSN). Actually all I read was Dane Co., that it was a towered field and it looked big so I'd have options if I needed to stop there or just have the facilities to do some flight planning.

As soon as I turned west from the lake, the turbulence started. It had been so smooth up till then. Just enough significant bumps to keep my left hand gripped. It was actually mild compared to what was coming.

I got on with Madison Approach and they vectored me in behind some commercial jet. Nice winds too. Not down the runway and at least 15 or so knots with handy gusts of 20 or more. I bounced my way around to final and landed long but who cares when you have a really long runway. I've remembered Pete's words about landing this Diamond and

so far it has served me well -- get rid of your power just before round out, once in ground effect pitch slightly up just and then let it settle on. Don't force it.

Sure enough it's worked every time.

Besides flight planning, I realized I hadn't eaten since the previous day's lunch so I made my first stop at the airport diner. It was early afternoon, but they served breakfast all day so I ate heartily.

One more leg that day, to Rochester, Minnesota (KRST). I had landed there in 1999 during my first trip to Oshkosh. They had treated me well, had the right connections with hotels that had shuttles and it was good weather there according to flight service.

After the appropriate calls and studying the chart, off I went. And the turbulence followed too. This time definitely moderate in nature. By the time I reached Rochester and dealt with their high, gusty, crossed winds, I was exhausted. The FBO arranged for the shuttle to a hotel. I got a personal size pizza to go from the restaurant at the hotel and called it a night. I did update my logbook and check weather, trying to figure out where next, arranged for a wakeup call and a shuttle the next morning and it was lights out.

I had finished my first full day of flying N408KB.

Day 3-Saturday, May 24

Weather was becoming troublesome. Storms were lining up, low pressure systems weren't moving, IFR conditions...yikes. Again, I relied on the briefers to tell me what was the best direction with the idea of getting back to Oregon.

Brookings, South Dakota (KBKX). Everything else wasn't looking good, but they felt that once there, the bad stuff should pass then clear going, supposedly. Okay. It would be a short trip but once there if it looked like I could go on, I would a bit more into the center of the state. I had called the FBO there and they had a hangar available to protect 8KB against adverse weather that might come through.

I started west. It was bumpy, again, so I spent the trip at maneuvering speed because the jolts were such that I didn't want to take a chance. Thankfully, I still had an east wind so my ground speed stayed well over 100 knots. Soon some clouds entered my altitude and being that I was just about 30 miles from Brookings, I descended. Man, what I descended into!!

The plane was rocking and rolling and yawing every which direction. I was losing altitude then get popped back up a bit, only to lose it again and more. My heading ended up at least 30 degrees off but I was fighting winds and what I think was a crab into the wind. The airplane was weather-vaning into these tremendously high winds. Every time I tried to bank the plane, it was a fight. I finally got it back on course, more or less, and saw the airport.

No one answered my calls to unicom or traffic. Of course, no one was stupid enough to be up in this *#*\$& weather. The clouds were a thousand or so above me and in between bursts of feeling completely out of control, I found the traffic pattern altitude was 2600 feet. Oh boy. I was already at 2500. I added just a bit of power to try to maintain altitude. Since I knew the winds aloft were basically southeast and as best I could tell so were the winds at the surface, I announced I was landing on their southeast runway. By this time, there was no way I was going to try to figure out what the runway was...southeast was close enough. I just wanted on the ground, in one piece, that is.

I knew the winds were going to push me as I turned base and tried to correct for it early, but I misjudged how strong they were. I turned to final (it was an ugly mush of limping around the pattern) and had to add quite a bit of power against the raging winds. I decided not to use flaps either. That was the longest final...I was scared to death. The prayers were going out as fast as I could utter them.

As I came over the numbers, I retarded the power and using lots of rudder and counter-acting ailerons, I let the plane enter ground effect and started my round out, all simultaneously. The left wheel touched and a gust caught me, popping me back up. I remembered Pete's words and Jim's counsel as well, and just held my attitude, working the rudders and ailerons some more to keep the nose pointed straight down the runway.

I touched. I pulled back a tad more on the stick, then the nose settled. I let it decelerate, holding the nose straight. I was down and no pilot or plane was injured in the making of the landing.

I pulled off onto the taxiway and saw a young man at the far end marshalling me his direction. I pulled in, shut down and breathed a sigh of relief that was really a thank you prayer.

I had Dan (the FBO fellow) hold the canopy as I got out. I closed the canopy and he darted off to open the hangar door so we could pull the plane in. I wasn't going anywhere else that day.

Stay tuned for the next part, Part 3

