

PRIVATE

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# PILOT

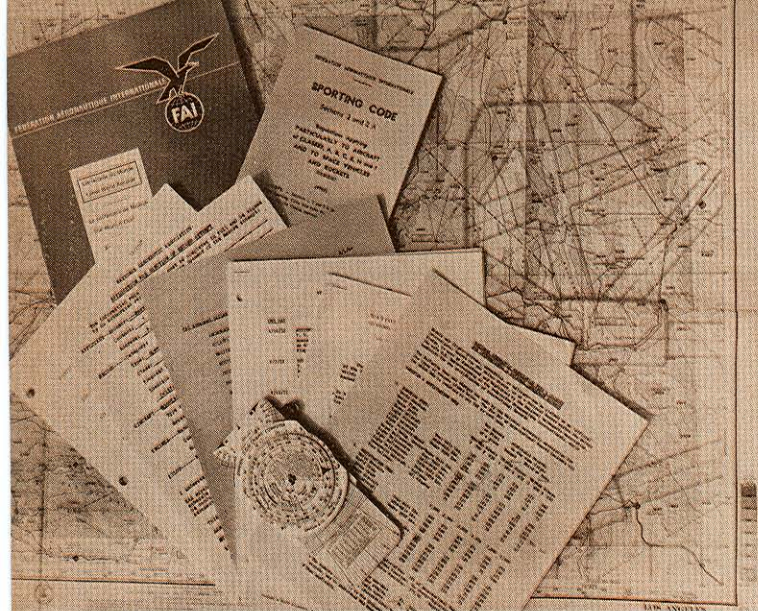
Resort Report:  
COMANCHE  
AT SEA ISLAND

A LONG WAY IN A LUSCOMBE

A blue Luscombe aircraft is shown in flight, banking to the right. The aircraft is a high-wing, single-engine plane with a tailwheel landing gear. The background is a dark, textured green, suggesting a forest or a night sky. The aircraft's registration number 'N121K' is visible on the fuselage.

WE RIDE  
FOR A RECORD  
Tactics For Turbos  
Hood Time Isn't IFR  
Homebuilts in Australia  
UPSIDE-DOWN AND CROSSWISE





*A good deal of paperwork is involved in any recognized world record, but it isn't an insurmountable obstacle.*

Most of us go through life without much more recognition than an occasional bowling trophy or a blue ribbon for our pooch at the local kennel club. And that's about all I ever expected to get. But when PRIVATE PILOT Magazine gave me an assignment to write about lightplane world records (*June, 1967 issue*), I discovered with great delight that I too could establish a new world record or break an existing one.

As a matter of fact, anyone can — including you, dear reader, if you have a valid pilot's license. Even a student pilot signed off by an instructor for solo flight is eligible.

The opportunity to be listed in the same World Record Book as Paul Bikle, who rose to an altitude of 46,255 feet in a Schweizer glider, or Max Conrad, who flew 7668 miles on a non-stop flight in a Piper Comanche, was too good to be missed. I began taking the steps necessary to set my own world record.

The Good Guys at PRIVATE PILOT liked the idea of sponsoring a record attempt and agreed to assist me in the undertaking. We decided to try for the lightplane (Class C1c) speed record from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, a record which had not yet been set. April 30, 1967, was tentatively established as the target date. This would coincide with the International Exposition of Flight to be held on that weekend. Fred Austin, the man responsible for that airman's extravaganza in Vegas, gave us the green light and scheduled the flying finish as part of the already-crowded program.

Next question on the agenda: would the Federation Aeronautique Internationale in Paris approve the LAX to LAS course as one upon which a world record could be established? Since the F.A.I. approves or rejects all record attempts, their approval of the route would have to be obtained in advance. A quick call was made to

TO CUT DOWN TRAVEL TIME,  
WHY NOT SET  
A WORLD RECORD?  
SO WE DID!

*By Barry Schiff*





# THE FAST WAY TO LAS VEGAS

*Thousands watch as Barry Schiff flies an Aero Commander 200 across McCarran Field to set world record.*





M. J. ("Randy") Randleman at the National Aeronautics Association in Washington, D. C. The N.A.A., being the sole U. S. representative of the F.A.I. of Paris, would also have to sanction our flight if it was to become official. Randy sent off a cable to Paris addressed to the supreme judges of man's achievement in the air, and the answer came quickly: the route and attempt would be approved and sanctioned.

Only one ingredient now was missing — an airplane. We selected an Aero Commander 200, already the holder of several world speed records, including sprints over the three-kilometer short course and the 500-kilometer closed circuit course.

The aircraft we were to use, N2914T, was owned by Avco of Chico in Northern California and PRIVATE PILOT made arrangements for me to obtain a formal checkout, then fly the ship back to L.A. So on the morning of April 28th I arrived at nearby Sacramento via a not-so-exciting jet airliner and was greeted by the genial general manager of Avco, Charlie Krause. After a quick gulp of java, I was introduced to "14 Tango," a sparkling ship sporting a green and white dress of paint.

**The flight to Chico**, where Charlie was to be returned to his active duties as a fixed-base operator and Aero Commander dealer, proved to be a fast one. We never indicated less than 200 mph during cruise flight. This was at 2500 rpm and 25 inches of manifold pressure. Charlie was quick to point out that the Continental 285-hp engine was rated to be flown continuously at maximum power. Having always "babied" aircraft power plants, this came as somewhat of a surprise to me. Charlie demonstrated the spunk of the "200" by fire-walling the throttle and pegging the tach at the red line, 2700 rpm. The airplane accelerated noticeably to an indicated 225 mph at 1500 feet msl over the flat San Joaquin Valley. I was favorably impressed. If one needed a get-up-and-go airplane to achieve maximum performance, he would find it in this hot rod.

**The Aero Commander 200** has four 20-gallon tanks. I made a mental note to leave the two outboard tanks empty during the speed run, which would prevent carrying 240 pounds of unnecessary weight. Even at 100 percent power the "six-banger" up front would burn only 24-1/2 gallons per hour. This would provide a full throttle range of 1:38 minutes, more than enough to make the 235-1/2-mile run from L. A. to "Lost Wages." Well . . . perhaps I might carry a few extra gallons in the aux tanks, just to keep the fuel cells moist and my wife happy. Fuel consumption at 65 percent cruise power is only 13-1/4 gallons per hour.

The Commander 200 is fairly straightforward to fly. Once adjusted to its surprising performance, it's a simple matter to adapt to the docile airplane. It is difficult, however, to become blasé about cruise-climbing at an indicated 160 mph and an ascent of 1000 feet per minute while lightly loaded. The 285 horses up front are a little noisy, but the sound of raw power soon becomes easy to take.

The only difficulty I had in flying "14T" was due to the unusual elevator trim tab control mounted on the lower center of the main instrument panel. It is moved more like an aileron trim control, which the "200" also has. Nose-down trim is accomplished by a clockwise twist, while nose-up requires a counter-clockwise rotation. But after a few hours in the ship, the use of the control seems natural.

*Trim Commander 200 taxis in triumph to grandstand area after the author set new speed mark from Los Angeles.*

**The cockpit** of the "200" has marvelous headroom. Pilot quarters are best described as cavernous. I don't believe any other single-engine aircraft allows such a luxurious margin between roof and cranium. This is an especially comforting feature during periods of heavy turbulence.

On the solo flight back to Los Angeles, I became dismayed by the continuously lowering cloud deck which had begun to lay a blanket over Southern California. Complex arrangements had been made. Official N.A.A. Timers and observers for the proposed flight had altered their family plans to be available for the speed run on Sunday, two days hence. The win, place and show tickets had been bought without provision for refund in the event of inclement weather. The low-pressure trough had to pick this inconvenient time to pay a visit to normally sunny Southern California!

**Weather is a major problem** for the prospective world-record setter. Planning takes time and must be done in advance. The pilot would be wise to choose a time of day and season of the year when weather odds will be in his favor. In my case, there was little room for flexibility in the planning. The flight was to be a small part of a large and complex flying exposition. Officials of the show in Vegas had said I was to cross the finish line at noon on Sunday or not at all.





"After all," I was told, "you don't expect the Air Force Thunderbirds, scheduled to perform Sunday afternoon, to wait around for you to come across the finish line while their hungry engines are burning precious kerosene . . . do you?"

Yes, the pressure was on. If this weather didn't blow out fast, I was in trouble.

By the next day, Saturday, the low-pressure trough began to show signs of moving on. But in its wake it was leaving heavy turbulence and unstable conditions across the entire Mojave Desert, a patch of sand lying directly between LAX and LAS!

At last the big day arrives! The alarm goes off at 6:00 a.m. and instead of groping in the dark for my first cigarette, I toss off the covers and leap for the nearest window, where in my haste to view the early morning skies, I almost tear the window curtains from their overhead rails. The sun is shining and not a cloud can be seen! I make a mad dash for the telephone. A quick call to the Weather Bureau confirms VFR conditions along the entire route, but dampens my spirits with news of prevailing northerly headwinds along the north-easterly course and turbulence at the lower altitudes. Actually, I should have been able to predict this on my own. As a low-pressure area moves eastward, north to northwesterly winds can be expected in its wake.

**Low-level winds** were reported from 340° at 25 knots and strengthened with a gain in altitude. To make the trip in minimal time would require flight at tree-top level.

Previous study of the route to Las Vegas had revealed an 8000-foot mountain pass on the straight-line course at a distance of only 43 miles from L. A. Airport. To fly direct would necessitate climbing into strong headwinds for a short period. This would obviously increase the point-to-point time of the trip. A 10 to 20-mile detour to the east or west of the San Gabriel Mountain Range would lessen the climb requirement but the additional mileage would have a detrimental effect on the speed performance.

It is interesting to note that the F.A.I. computes groundspeed on the basis of the straight-line distance between the cities involved. If a pilot flies a dog-leg course and takes longer to complete the speed run, that's his tough luck.

For this trip I chose a compromise course which required a climb to only 5500 feet but would cause a 12-mile offset from the direct route.

During breakfast at a local 24-hour coffee shop, my mind swam with details of the impending flight. My coffee-stained sectional was almost worn out with the use it had been getting. I tried to muster in my mind



every trick I'd ever learned to get maximum performance out of an airplane. The climb would be as shallow as possible. Headings and altitudes would be strictly adhered to. Engine temperature gauges would have to be monitored closely since the mixture control would be utilized to the fullest extent possible. And flying at less than 1000 feet above the rocky, craggy desert, I would have to keep an eye open for a suitable landing spot, just in case.

**Arriving at the AiResearch facilities** at Los Angeles International Airport, I was greeted by Fred Stiefler, the N.A.A. official who would observe and time my departure. Also present was Scott Miller, cordial AiResearch manager of customer service, who had arranged for the weighing-in of N2914T.

The F.A.I. is very touchy about aircraft weight. Since aircraft world class records are based on established weight categories, the aircraft, pilot, fuel and supplies must all be weighed accurately, to within one tenth of one per cent. The scales used must have been calibrated within the previous 90 days. Frank Almeida, lead inspector for AiResearch, determined the gross takeoff weight of "14T" and pilot to be 2,648 pounds through the use of an elaborate electronic weighing device. The fuel tanks then were sealed to prevent a change in fuel weight.

I was informed that I would have to make a flying start over the geographic center of the airport at an altitude of less than 500 feet. Clearance had been arranged with LAX tower for this downwind pass over their runway 24.

**After filling out a few forms**, Fred called the tower and synchronized his stop-watch with the exact time as reported by WWV, the international time standard. Then the engine and airframe serial numbers of the Commander were noted. These would later be phoned to Earl Hansen, the N.A.A. timer who would be awaiting my arrival over the geographic center of McCarran Field in Las Vegas. He would verify that neither the engine nor the airplane had been changed enroute. While such a stunt couldn't prove beneficial on a short hop like this, a similar change could be made on a longer trip to give the pilot an illegal edge. The F.A.I. looks upon this world record business as a serious affair. Elaborate precautions are taken to deter the pilot who might be tempted to dishonesty by a chance to deceive.

Other formalities dispensed with, I climbed into the Aero Commander 200 and spent several minutes making sure everything was as it should be: charts in place, doors locked, cowl flaps open. My wits were somewhere nearby but I was having difficulty locating them. Tension was running high in the confines of the cockpit. Even though I had no previous record to beat, I wanted desperately to do my very best. I was about to engage in a flight which would go down in the World Record Book. It would be listed along with the great accomplishments of those much more expert in the science of flight than I. This trip would be listed as a world record until somebody else would choose to unseat me from my personal throne of distinction. I wanted to make it as hard as possible for the next aspiring pilot who would choose the LAX to LAS route upon which to make his mark. Headwinds and turbulence lay ahead, but I was committed to go. Too many people were involved; I couldn't wait for more desirable conditions.

**The 285-hp Continental** came alive without a hitch. I taxied out to runway 24 and methodically executed the prescribed preflight runup. In the distance I could see Fred Stiefler in an airport car awaiting my takeoff and the return high-speed pass, at which time the clock would start to run. Considering existing wind conditions

and enroute climb requirements, I tried to time my initial low pass so as to arrive in Vegas as close as possible to twelve noon.

The time drew near, and the moment of departure arrived. Cleared for takeoff, I flew straight out for about two miles. Then without retarding the throttle a notch, I made a shallow 180° diving turn and headed for the starting line. At an altitude of about 100 feet, heading directly along my projected course, I passed Fred at an indicated 236 mph, which happened to coincide with the airspeed indicator red line. Don't ask me how, but I heard the click of Fred's stop-watch. It was faint. Sounded sorta like a 50mm cannon shot off at point-blank range. The sound screamed loudly: "Go . . . Go . . . Go!" And go I did. Gingerly raising "14T"'s nose, I began climbing at 190 indicated and just a few hundred feet per minute. The San Gabriel Mountains were less than 14 minutes away.

**The next radio transmission** caught me slightly off guard. The control tower told me to switch to the departure control frequency of 125.2 "mHz"! Doing so, I was informed that I would be tracked on radar all the way to Vegas. I was to be given radar groundspeed checks and vectors if necessary to help me get there in minimum time. All air traffic would be pointed out to me. And this was arranged without my knowledge. Those F.A.A. controllers won my heart this day. I needed all the help I could get. But alas, all good intentions aside, my low-level flight wasn't high enough to maintain either radio communications or radar contact. Thanks anyway, fellas!

Before losing radio contact with Los Angeles Center, I was informed of my official starting time, which Fred Stiefler must have provided. It was 17:45:00 G.M.T. or 10:45:00 local time. This information also was forwarded to Earl Hansen in Las Vegas.

Passing over my first checkpoint, I made my first groundspeed check. It worked out to be 221 mph and included a climb to 4000 feet. But I was never to achieve such speed again this trip. Prevailing headwinds over the Mojave Desert took their toll of my progress. Subsequent checks showed continuous reduction in my average groundspeed from 226 to 220 to 210 to 200 mph. And the turbulence didn't help either. Navigation over the barren route required my constantly consulting the sectional chart, which found delight in sailing about the cockpit.

**About 25 miles from Vegas**, I zipped across the last ridge of mountains along the route. Ahead I could see the airport at the southern end of the famous Vegas "Strip." This was the first time since departure that I was within VHF range of an F.A.A. facility, namely McCarran tower. But I couldn't believe what I heard. From the cabin speaker came a continuous chatter. One aircraft was cleared number 24 to land. The traffic pattern was loaded and here I was planning to streak across the center of the airport at almost 230 miles per hour! Frantically I tried to break into the communications, but it was impossible. Only 10 miles and slightly less than three minutes from the finish line, I was unable to get a clearance. To circle or slow down to await a clearance would be catastrophic to my speed run. Ground Control was deluged! Likewise Approach Control. Finally, at the brink of the edge of the control zone, a departure controller heard my frantic plea and recognized the call sign of Commander 14 Tango. I was cleared for a low pass over the intersection of runways 7 and 1.

Hansen clocked the Commander over the finish line at 11:59:40, twenty seconds ahead of schedule. While Lady Luck dispensed adverse weather with her left hand, she did bestow an on-time arrival with her right.



*Visiting aircraft swarmed into Las Vegas from all over the continent, jamming McCarran Field tiedown area.*



*Tired but happy, author emerges from plush interior of Commander 200 to a warm welcome at Las Vegas air show.*



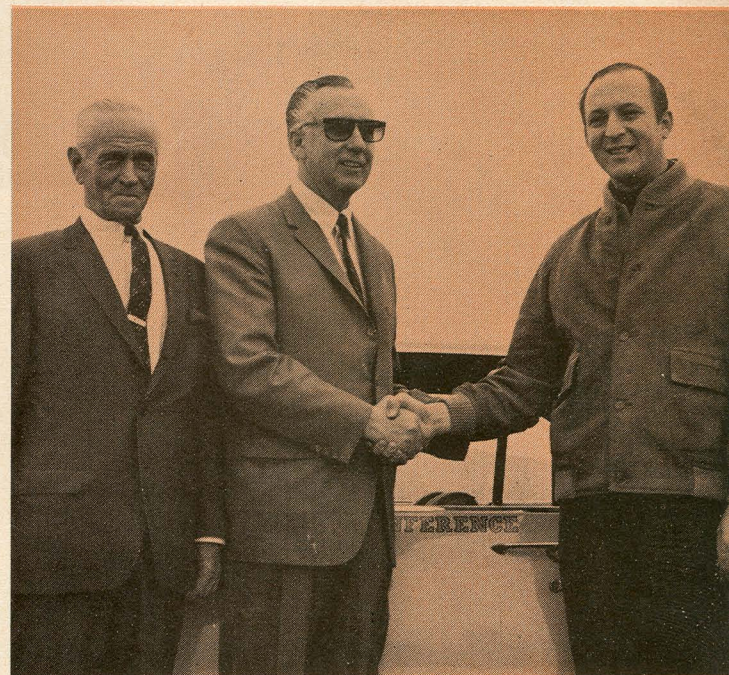
After being cleared number 17 to land, I taxied up to the Aero Commander display area. I was mentally exhausted. Shutting down the engine, I pulled out my first cigarette since leaving L. A. and that, my good friends, is some other kind of a record!

But before I could take more than one drag, "14 Tango" was surrounded by Aero Commander people, press photographers, TV cameras and officials of the Exposition. Somewhat bewildered and definitely surprised by the attention, I found myself in the company of two lovely Aero Commander hostesses. My attention was distracted temporarily from the actual flight while photographers recorded my confused reaction to all the commotion. My dear wife, Sandy, observed carefully from the sidelines.

When the dust had cleared, Sandy and I left the crowds bending their necks to observe an array of parachutists performing beneath their billowing silks. Earl Hansen told us that the flight was now official and a provisional claim had been wired to the N.A.A. in Washington.

The flight proved two important points to me. First, the Aero Commander 200 is one helluva sturdy ship with plenty of spunk and snap. Second, any pilot with the desire and the will to make the necessary effort also can set his own world record. Dozens remain which have yet to be set. Your name too can be etched in the same record book which contains the names of Alan Shepard, Jr., Gordon Cooper, and V. Terechkova, the first and only woman to have assaulted the reaches of outer space.

Give it some thought! 🚀



*Veteran airline pilot Dick Merrill and Fred Austin, director of Exposition of Flight, from left, welcome author.*