

THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

MENTOR

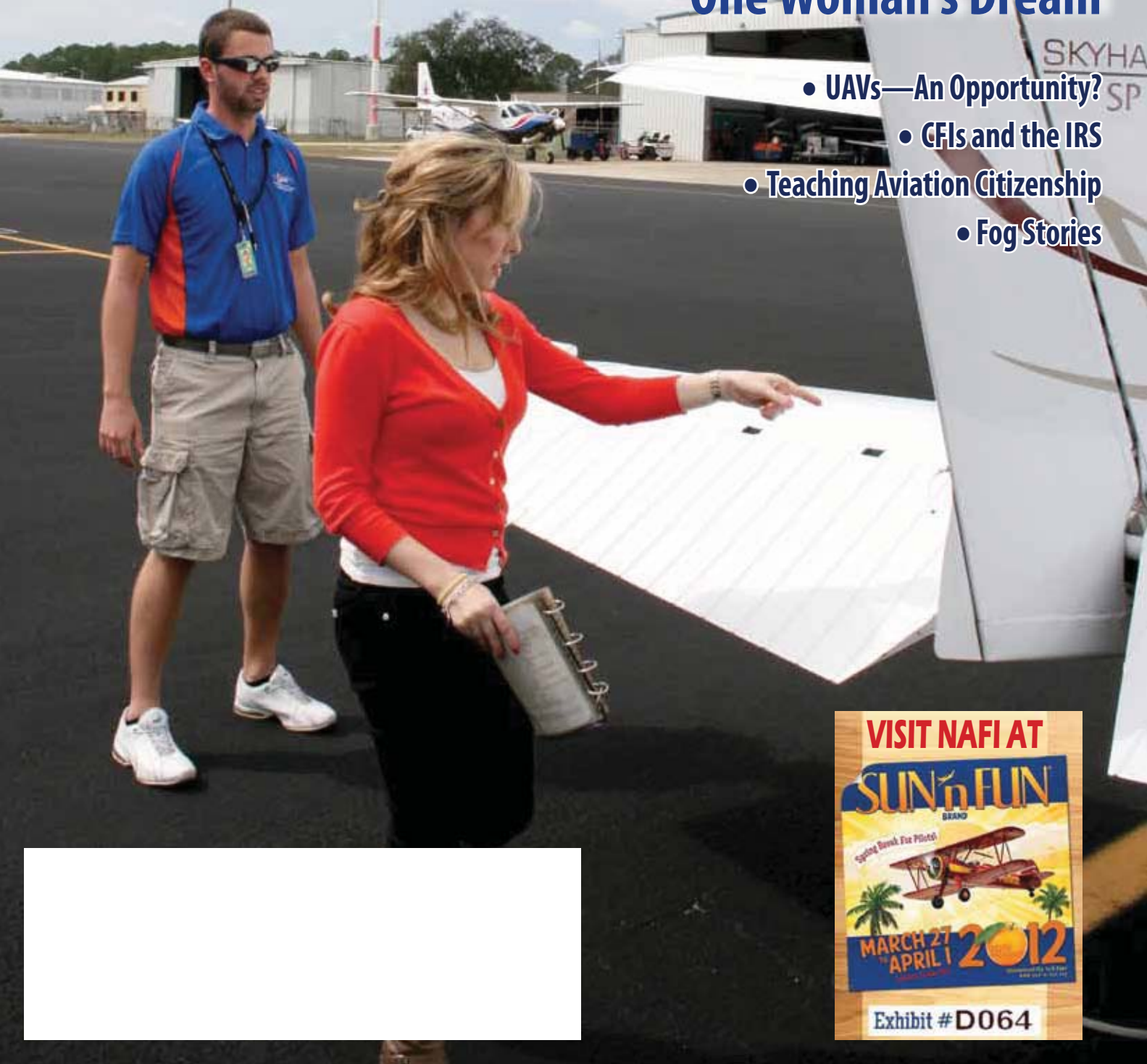


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Becoming a CFI: One Woman's Dream

- UAVs—An Opportunity?
- CFIs and the IRS
- Teaching Aviation Citizenship
- Fog Stories



position Report

Instructing, On the Road

Most of the Position Reports that I write for *Mentor* are done from the NAFI office, but this one is different. I am somewhere between Chicago and Phoenix as I ride commercially on one of the legs that will take me to the Burbank airport. Part of doing the job here at NAFI is traveling, visiting companies that work with the flight-training industry, and at the end of this trip for me, a bit of flying also. What struck me today is that as my own flight instruction career has continued, the kind of instruction that I give has changed.

Over the past year my instructional activity has leaned more toward special case situations and the conduct of practical tests than the general kind of pilot training that was more common in my earlier career. In fact, my most recent activities (outside of checkrides) have really been instruction over long distance.

In December, I spent 2-1/2 weeks with a customer training him for his initial CFI in his Twin Comanche, then for his instrument instructor rating, followed by his single-engine CFI add-on. The weather in Michigan isn't always reliable enough to complete consistent training in December, so we headed out to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to do the training. We trained all the way down, then finished training while we were there.

Last week I jumped a commercial flight to Fort Lauderdale to ride back with another customer of mine who is working on an instrument rating in his Mooney M20C. I flew down on Sunday, and we flew back on Monday, doing instrument training all the way home.

As I write this, I am on the way to California for some NAFI meetings, but at the end of the week I will be taking another commercial flight up to Eugene, Oregon, where I will be met by the former owner of an Aeronca Champ, which another customer of mine purchased.

I will fly the aircraft back to Michigan, where when the lakes thaw this spring, it will be joined up with the floats that he has for it so it can provide seaplane instruction this summer.

These types of instructional engagements are not the typical meet at the airport, teach some landings to a private pilot and go home after a debrief event. It is interesting how as our experience as instructors changes, so does the types of instruction that we get to do. Sometimes, taking the opportunity to do new and different instruction can re-invigorate our interest in what we do. It is a change from the same old stuff. Sometimes the trips are more than just instruction time in the logbook — they become adventures.

There are some unique challenges that can pop up. On the trip back from Florida in the Mooney, the question arose of whether we would complete the flight in less than eight hours. Why would it matter if we finished in less than eight hours, you ask? Well, for a normal flight with just a couple pilots traveling, it really wouldn't, but if you are providing instruction, you run into the rule limiting instruction given to eight hours in any 24-hour period. In our case, we made it in 7.8, so it didn't become a problem. But if we had experienced a head wind, it is a consideration that we would have needed to deal with.

There are solutions; in a case such as this, the "instruction time" can be terminated, and if the pilot to whom you are giving instruction is qualified in the aircraft and flight conditions, you can relinquish any crew role at that time and become a passenger. If the pilot is not qualified to fly in the conditions or aircraft (in this case we experienced IFR for most of the flight and the customer was not yet instrument rated and could not have been PIC), the instructor could tran-



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sition to pilot and let the customer rest the remainder of the flight as a passenger. Certainly both of these represent gray areas, and the better practice (not only for regulatory considerations but in general for pilot weariness considerations) might be to call it a day at less than eight hours of time in the air, grab a hotel room and finish the flight the next day.

Taking trips like these with customers can provide an opportunity to give them training that they don't get just flying locally. Long-distance weather planning, fuel management for length of legs and experience at new airports are just a few of these opportunities. Beyond training, an instructor can have some great adventures, and with a long-distance flight, become good friends with a customer who has become a travel companion.

Instructional flights don't have to begin and end at the same airport, fly the same patterns or visit a couple local airports. As instructors gain experience and get to know their customers, I highly recommend taking opportunities for long-distance instructional events if they are available. They have helped keep me invigorated as an instructor, built some great friendships and gave me some wonderful adventures.