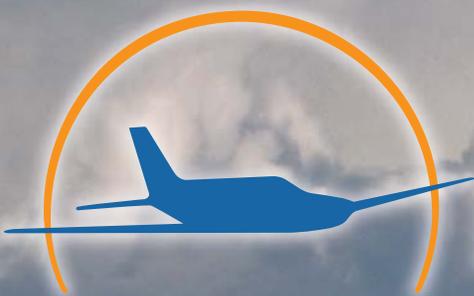


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Malibu Mirage Owners and Pilot Association

FALL 2011

WHAT THE POH DOESN'T TELL YOU

Going beyond the text in the manual



THE GO/NO GO DECISION

Sticking to the judgments you make

NEW DATA ON THE TAIL STALL

Fall weather brings an increased risk of icing

DIY MAINTENANCE

PLUS

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THE VALUE OF ACCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

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Travis on oxygen



Caravan requiring de-ice

Making the Go/No-Go Decision

An important part of the process is sticking to the judgments you make. By Travis Holland

Piaggio accident pictures



Pilots have to manage risk on a daily basis. From the go/no-go decision to in-flight decision-making to the approach, landing and even taxiing, we are faced with critical decision-making at every step of the way. Since we cannot avoid the risk exposure without locking ourselves in the basement, identification and mitigation of risk factors becomes the single most important part of aviation.

In the summer of 2009, I was escorting a pilot from Carlsbad, Calif., to Keflavik, Iceland, on his way to Malaysia in a Cessna 208B Caravan. As is the norm in these cases, I had responsibility for route selection, planning and flight management. The trip began quite normally and, at the end of the first full day, we arrived in Goose Bay with plans to cross the North Atlantic in the morning via Narsarsuaq at the southern tip of Greenland.



Caravan being de-iced

Narsarsuaq is the southernmost of four airports on the west coast of Greenland, each spaced about 150 NM apart, making alternate airports quite some distance away. Narsarsuaq (BGBW) is a special airport, with approach minimums of 1,500 feet and four miles visibility. A 1,100-foot MSL rock formation at the missed approach point serves as a powerful motivation not to cheat on the approach minimums. Although some pilots will attempt to fly low-level up the fjord to the south, unmarked power lines to 1,500 feet, blind box canyons, and a string of fatal accidents in everything from Learjets to Skyhawks have always kept me on the published approach.

As I previewed the weather in the hotel, the southwesterly flow aloft gave me pause. That can often bring moisture and clouds on-shore, obscuring the airport. But the TAF showed a broken 5,500-foot ceiling forecast which was well within my comfort zone. I filed the flight plans through BGBW and on to Iceland and got some sleep before the next day's oceanic flights.

In the morning I took a quick look at the weather before heading out of the hotel and saw the following new forecast and current conditions.

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BGBW 161300Z 1613/1622 24008KT 9999
  -RA SCT030 BKN055

TEMPO 1613/1615 5000 RA BKN018

TEMPO 1615/1622 2800 SNRA SCT009
  BKN012

BGBW 161250Z 23014KT 9999 -RA BKN030
  OVC050 04/02 Q0993 RMK 5SC 8SC
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While TEMPO conditions don't normally throw a red flag in the continental USA, southern Greenland is a different place entirely, and I really didn't like the reduced visibility and below-minimums conditions in the TEMPO forecast. During the van ride to the airport, I told my client that I wanted to delay our departure and re-plan for another airport further north, which would give us more options in the case of a diversion. This delay meant that we would arrive in Iceland quite late, creating some logistical challenges for his onward flight to Malaysia.

But in keeping with my rule never two second guess a diversion or no-go decision, I held firm and left my client to sit in the FBO lounge while I re-planned and filed our day of flying to route via Nuuk (BGGH), 300NM north of Narsarsuaq and 150NM south of our alternate Sondrestrom (BGSF), the northernmost of the four airports on the west coast of Greenland. Takeoff was at 1339 zulu, at FL190 on oxygen to maximize the endurance and range of the unpressurized Caravan.

About 1½ hours into the four-hour planned flight, I called the Greenland met office on the sat-com I always bring for ferry flights in oceanic and remote areas. The accented voice at the other end of the connection informed me that a blizzard was washing up the west coast of Greenland and that Nuuk was down to ¼-mile visibility (1,200 meters) and vertical visibility of 1,000 feet. Narsarsuaq was down to hard minimums already. Sondrestrom was still at 4,500-foot ceiling and forecast to remain clear of the storm. With confidence that our alternate would stay clear for the duration of the flight, we continued on and re-checked the weather an hour later. The updated weather

showed vertical visibility at Nuuk down to 600 feet, and we decided at this time to divert to Sondrestrom which was also lowering but still showing 2,000-foot ceilings in light snow. With a localizer approach and 8,000-foot runway, Sondrestrom is the most weather-accessible airport in Greenland.

Since our diversion clearance took us directly over Nuuk anyway, I radioed the Nuuk AFIS (like a tower) in range and updated the weather. Heavy snow and 400-foot vertical visibility kept me feeling good about the diversion. After 5½ hours in flight, with two hours of fuel remaining, we landed at Sondrestrom just before airport closing in 800-foot ceilings with very light snow. Sondrestrom is normally a very well-organized airport but, on this arrival, we found no follow-me car or marshaller to park us.

After a few moments, a line personnel apologized for the lack of services. He told us an aircraft had crashed on the ice cap to the south a short time before and they had been busy dispatching a search-and-rescue helicopter. Since the aerodrome was closing and we could not depart after hours without paying a \$1,500 USD overtime fee, we secured the airplane and headed for the hotel which overlooked the runway.

The same morning, a pilot in a Piaggio P-180, en-route from Iceland to Canada, filed a flight plan to Narsarsuaq and departed a short time after us headed in the opposite direction. Without the benefit of a sat-com or updated en-route weather, this pilot arrived at Narsarsuaq and shot the published NDB approach to a missed approach. A second approach was attempted without success, and the pilot diverted to Sondrestrom. About 75 nm south of Sondrestrom, all fuel depleted, and the pilot was forced to make a two engine-out ditching onto the ice cap. Had we continued to Narsarsuaq ourselves, the outcome would have been the same, as making the 670 nm flight to destination and a 450 nm flight to the last airport in Greenland still above approach minimums would have been impossible.

The next day we de-iced the Caravan and flew to Iceland without incident, but it was a sober and quiet flight. The no-go and diversion decisions we make are some of the most important elements of flight planning. While we are all pilots capable of flight operations in weather, underestimating the seriousness of flight and the possibility of worse than forecast conditions can easily bite us. In this case, we were fortunate to have made the safe decision before departure and to have the tools for in-flight weather updates that further informed our choices. Unfortunately for the Piaggio, the same cannot be said.

Be careful out there, folks, and never, never, never second-guess a no-go or diversion decision. 




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