

Flight Trip to the Adria & Italy, 2.6-15.6.2015

Several Israeli LSA planes have been planning a flight trip to the Adria & Italy since some time. Couple of weeks ago, I decided to join them, and recruited Ronen to join. A week or so of intensive planning, and I felt we are ready. Just in case, I asked our mechanic to make a quick check of the plane, despite the fact that it just underwent a periodic maintenance few flight hours before. On Thursday, 3 days before the planned departure - the phone call that no pilot likes to receive came in - the plane is grounded because the check revealed that the water pump is leaking, and that repair could only begin on Monday. After all the preparations, suddenly - it was not sure if we could fly. The take off with the other planes on Sunday could not take place. When I drove to the airfield on Monday, my main intention was to oversee the repair, not much more. To my surprise - the pump was already replaced and the repair work was nearly finished. Despite a large scale closure of the airspace, I managed to make two test flights. Suddenly - re-initiating the flight trip became feasible. The next morning, Tuesday 2.6 - we were on our way westwards. The task - to catch up with the other three planes that were, by now in Rhodes. The flight to Rhodes via Paphos, was very quick thanks to strong tail winds. Ground speeds in the leg to Rhodes were between 120-130 knots!



Passing over Limassol



Downwind to Paphos Airport



Technical Stop in Paphos for refueling

By the time we arrived to Rhodes - the guys were already on their way further west to Naxos island, but we were on track to catch up with them. As usual, we took the bus to the city and checked in to Simirios hotel, where our friend - Manolis works in the bar (and also takes flight lessons from time to time). An evening stroll in the old town (very alive and lovely) and dinner (wrong choice of restaurant) rounded up the long 5.5 h / 3 leg day.



Base leg and final to Rhodes airport



Parked in Rhodes airport, while another flight arrives from Israel with a slightly larger plane..



Rhodes Town

The next morning, we were informed by the colleagues of the other planes, that they will not wait for us in Megara, as originally set, but take off early from Naxos and meet us in Corfu (after a quick refuel in Megara). We were not happy to hear that, but on the other hand - the motivation to optimize our catching up flight just grew. We kept our time plan strictly, took off on time and cruised fast in the right altitude. Knowing that in this area -the headwind blows forcefully in low altitudes, I selected to fly at FL075 as long as the controllers enabled. Only the last few tens of miles were at low altitude (due to Athens airspace). This strategy proved right (I utilized it in later legs with great success), and we managed to surprise the guys and meet them in Megara!



On the way from Rhodes to Megara at FL075



Cockpit & Instrument panel views – a combination of conventional and digital age

Well, our happiness was short lived. In a routine check after landing and refueling - I noticed that the front gear shock-absorber was hard and not moving smoothly. This is very bad, and even worse - considering the amount of landings we still have in front of us, some in grass fields, and all far away from our home airfield and home aviation maintenance center.

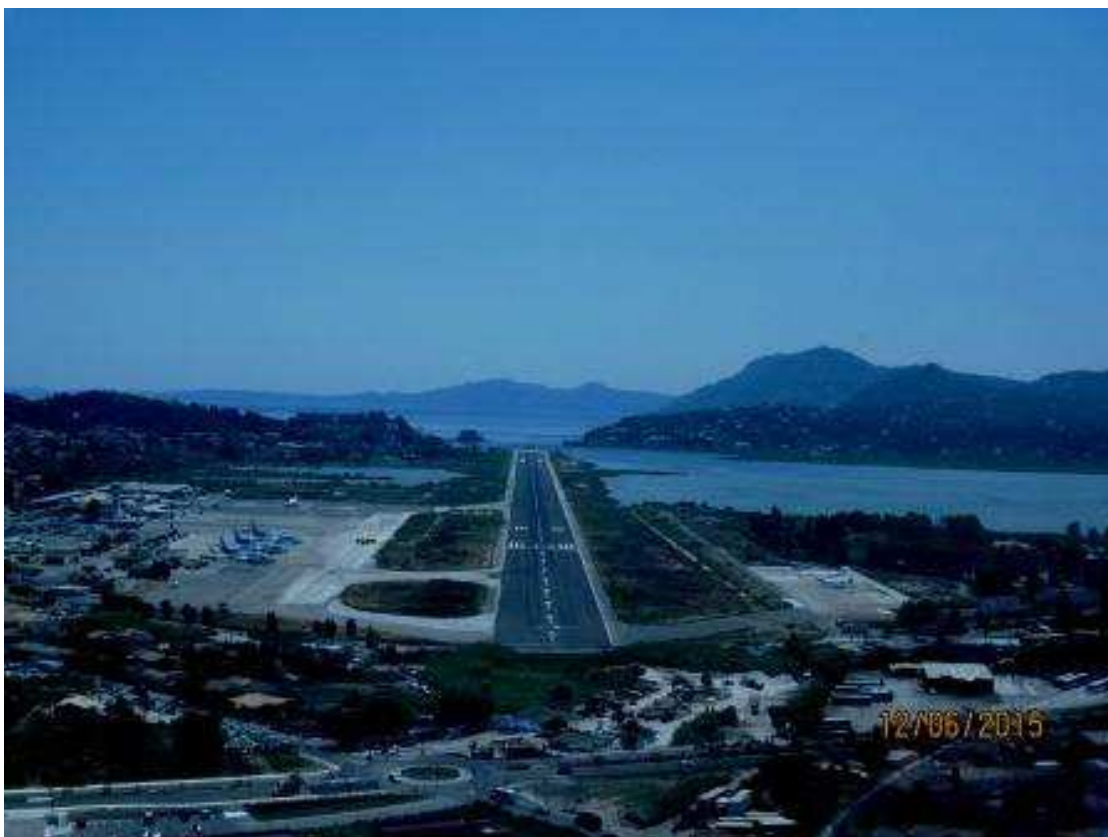
After considering all the options we had, we decided to continue with the other planes for an overnight in Corfu, and split again the next day. They will continue as planned to Croatia, while we will fly from Corfu to the Italian manufacturer of the plane to fix the problem.



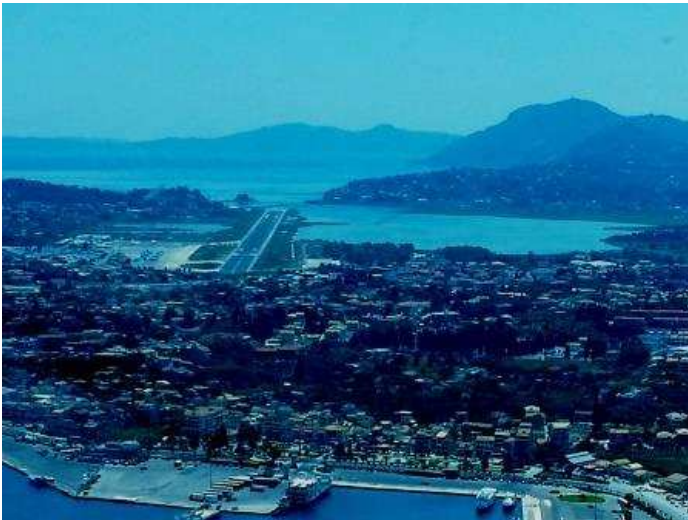
On the way from Megara to Corfu, passing the Korinthos channel and Rion bridge



Final to Corfu airport runway 35 (on the way to Italy)



Final to Corfu airport runway 17 (on the way back)



Landing, taxiing and parking in the busy Corfu Airport. Below - three Israeli planes parked for overnight stop.



Evening in Corfu town



Enjoying a quiet day in a small bay in the north east coast of Corfu (on the way back to IL)

Anyway - Italy was in the original plan, after Croatia. The task definition was clear: minimum landings till the destination, only on concrete and long airfields and within the range of the plane. After reviewing the options (flight north through Croatia & Slovenia or crossing the Adriatic Sea and flying along the Italian eastern coast) and the various airfields on the way, the decision was to cross the sea to Italy, make one refueling stop in Pescara international airport and continue along the coast to the factory small air strip in the area of Udine (near the Austrian & Slovenian border). The 320 NM length of the leg from Corfu to Pescara was an issue. We never flew such a long leg with this plane. Assuming the typical average GS of 90 KTS (according to our experience with long range flights) - this leads to slightly more than 3.5 hours flight, well within the 4.5 - 5 hour endurance that we have (including reserve however). The next challenge was to reach someone in Pescara airport 11 O'clock at night to arrange landing permit & handling. Most telephone numbers that I found led nowhere. A conference call with an Italian pilot also did not help. Apparently - all offices close at seven. I then searched in Avioportolano - an application that contains data on all airfields in Italy. There I found the tel number of the control tower of Pescara. Knowing that control towers are always manned - I called and to my surprise - I was immediately answered. The controller on the other side was very friendly. He already said that he has no problem to welcome me in the airport the next day, and then gave me several tel numbers where he thought I could find someone from the handling company. One of these numbers really worked! The woman on the other side told me that she received my e-mail (that I sent before and did not expect to be answered till next morning) - and that my arrival is approved! Wow, what a good start. The next task was to prepare the route and enter it to my navigation systems (AirNavPro), flight plans and some briefing material on these two new airfields. At one O'clock at night, I finally fell asleep excited (and also with some concern) regarding the challenging day that lies ahead. By nine O'clock the next morning, we were cruising at 4500 feet above the Adriatic Sea direction Italy. Some half hour into the flight, we could hear our colleagues on the radio, as they were taking off direction Croatia. Flying early morning westwards is always enjoyable. The crisp morning air is smooth, the sun is behind and the visibility is endless. Soon enough, the Italian coast was visible and we began our descend to the planned 1000 feet run along the Italian coast north to Pescara. At this point, I noticed that our cruise speed drops rapidly instead of the expected increase due to the sink flight. Clearly at lower levels - a strong north headwind was present. When our GS fell to 70 knots or below, with power at a higher setting than I originally planned for the long flight to Pescara - I realized that if it continues like that - our fuel may not be sufficient for a non-stop flight to Pescara. We do not have wind reading in our instruments, but from the radio communication with other planes - the reported ground wind of nearly 20 knots north - confirmed my fear. I decided to request a climb back to the altitude I was before and even more, hoping that the previous GS of 90 knots at moderate engine setting could be resumed (the behavior of the GS before I started the descend pointed to a much weaker headwind in higher levels). I requested 5000 feet, and once approved - I kept requesting this level also when crossing the many control zones of airports on the way (Bari, Amendola..), pointing to the strong headwind in low levels and fuel limitation to my destination. At 5000 feet my GS grew back to around 90 knots at moderate engine setting - perfect!



Takeoff from Corfu to Italy



Flying from Corfu to Pescara Italy



In Pescara airport

I reached Pescara with ease and with enough fuel reserve. After refueling in Pescara, the slightly less than 3 hour flight to FlySynthesis factory in the north-east corner of Italy was easy. On the way we passed all the places I know from previous flights here, including Venice. The view from 5000 feet was beautiful. At 16:45 we landed in the small airstrip of the factory, and taxied directly to the production hall. The doors to the large hangar were open, and to our surprise - FlySynthesis technicians immediately began to work on our plane! At 17:00! A day before, we requested the Israeli agent of FlySynthesis - Shimon shay to help us with contacting the factory and arranging the repair. Apparently - he was very effective!



Takeoff from Pescara to FlySynthesis in north Italy



Passing Venice Lido airfield on the way to FlySynthesis



Arrival to FlySynthesis, the manufacturer of the Texan located near Udine in the north east of Italy

I have no words to describe how happy and lightened I was. Not only the defect landing gear held through the flight to the factory, but also the repair was immediately and professionally initiated. When we arrived, we also met Massimo, the commercial head of FlySynthesis and Claudio - the technical head. The welcome was warm and we felt we are in good hands. Later on, Massimo brought us to the hotel. The hotel was a beautiful and romantic farm house, not what I expected in this remote non touristic region. Albergo Casa Orter lies in the middle of a large green walled garden with impressive old trees. The sitting areas outside were a perfect place to relax after such a long and demanding day of flying. Annalisa, the energetic hotel owner showed us our room, and after a well needed shower, we went down and took a drink at one of the tables outside, while waiting for dinner. Roberto, Annalisa's husband is a true chef, and the dinner in the cozy dining room was absolutely top! I started to wonder if our unplanned repair was actually a lucky change of plan. Not only that! By chance, the next morning - we met Shimon Shay and his wife in the hotel. Shimon came for a routine visit and meetings in the factory, and so he could actually help us on-site. By the time we arrived to the factory, FlySynthesis technicians were intensively working on our plane. Ivan, the production manager, Stefano - the quiet yet professional technician and Alessandro - the instrument technician - all did an amazing job on our plane, fixing not only the faulty landing gear, but also replacing some other components with new ones. By the evening of Friday, our plane was ready. The dinner at our hotel with Shimon and his wife was again very tasty. Annalisa crowned it by playing the harp, WOW!



4X-HLR is receiving a warm welcome and treatment in FlySynthesis factory



Our hotel near the FlySynthesis factory – “Albergo Casa Orter” in Risano

The next morning, we took off and flew to Venice Lido airfield. I landed in this beautiful historic grass airfield two years before and loved it. The 30 minutes flight from FlySynthesis to Venice Lido was uneventful, and after landing we took the bus and the Vaporreto to Venice. Venice is always beautiful and romantic, but with the current heat wave and the crowds - the few hours there were quite tiring.



Leaving FlySynthesis and flying to Venice



In Venice Lido grass airfield. As it was a weekend summer day, there were lots of planes visiting



In front of the historical terminal of Venice Lido airfield, and after a short taxi-bus trip – in Venice

By 15:00 we were back in the airfield and sometime later we took off with the intention to fly west to the area of Milano where we set to meet with Gyuri, an Italian pilot friend. During takeoff I noticed an unusual low airspeed reading. Although speed picked up as expected, the Airspeed indicator seemed to freeze at the value of 60 mph, while GS climbed well above 80 mph. I immediately suspected the Pitot tube being clogged, and requested from Lido tower to return back and land in Lido for checks. Landing with the help of the GS indication was uneventful and we taxied to the apron for checks. While trying to clean the Pitot tube, we apparently damaged the speed indicator which was now stuck at 75 mph. By now, our morning happiness flipped to an evening frustration and sadness. Although we finally managed to clean the Pitot tube, it became clear that the Analog Speed Indicator was defect. Despite the fact that we have several other speed indicators, including a full EFIS, it was already late and we were too tired to fly another two hours. We decided to stay the night in Venice Lido and fly there the next morning. Our hope was to try to repair the indicator with the help of our friends in Rosangeles, the Ultralight airfield near Milano. At around 11:00 we landed in the small grass field and were welcomed by Emilio, the owner of the rice farm and it's airfield. Gyuri came and soon after - Doron & Yoram - two Israeli pilot colleagues arrived from Milano (they came to replace two pilots of the other three planes). The repair of the faulty speed indicator did not succeed. As one of the other three Israeli planned to fly through FlySynthesis factory on the way back - we decided to do the same, and install there a new speed indicator. The three planes arrived in the evening. One of them of the same type like ours, had also a Pitot malfunction after takeoff from Venice Lido (which pointed to the grass / insects there as the route cause for the Pitot tube blockage). We quickly pushed all four planes into the two hangars, and all of us, eleven pilots went to have dinner together.



On route from Venice to Rosangeles ULM airfield



The three Israeli planes in Rosangeles, a ULM airfield near Milano



A group photo in Rosangeles hangar, with Gyuri our Italian pilot friend (Gyui's plane is behind our Texan)



The experimental wood plane that the rice farm owner is building (Rosangeles airfield is part of the farm)



The farm where Rosangeles ULM airfield is located

The plan was to fly to the next morning to tour the north Italian lakes (Como, Garda). However, towards the evening, storm clouds could be seen over the mountains. The forecast also pointed to a possible bad weather coming in. The next morning, as we realized that bad weather & rain are expected in the area from noon on and also the next day - we decided to change our plan, skip the lake flight and fly straight to FlySynthesis factory. Again, Shimon Shay helped in arranging the visit, and the two Israeli Texans rolled into the factory final assembly hangar couple of hours later. Both our Texans received a warm welcome and a quick treatment. We received a new Speed Indicator, Eitan's Texan landing gear & brakes was maintained, and in the meantime - Massimo and Claudio gave us a thorough presentation of the Latest Texan version and showed us the respective plane of the Taiwanese agent - a dream machine with two 10 inch Dynon, new analog/digital round backup instruments, beautiful and new setup of panel, switches and more.



Two Israeli Texans fly in formation above the green north Italian countryside



Arrival of the two Texans from Israel to the plant where they were manufactured four years earlier

The evening flight to Portoroz in Slovenia was short but the last part and landing there are very scenic. It was the first time for me to visit Slovenia, but It was love at first sight. Portoroz is a beautiful airport. Not only that many nice girls are working there on the Tarmac and in the Terminal, but it is exactly the size I like (not too big, not too small), it is very green, well organized and maintained. I was really sorry to leave and continue to our final overnight stop in Croatia, but I decided that I must return there in the first opportunity I'll have.



In Portoroz airport Slovenia



Refueling in Portoroz

After refueling and passport control, we took off into the late evening quiet sky, and 20 minutes later landed in the small airfield of Vrsar. The flight in low altitude along the coast of Croatia is beautiful. One bay after another, lush green countryside kissing turquoise water and dotted with sailboats. Our flight passed along beautiful marinas and small villages, and the entry to base leg and final through the Fjord where Vrsar airfield is located was impressive. The small airfield was full with all sorts of planes including old Russian ones, Amphibians, Ultralights and Aerobatics planes. Signs from a recent Red Bull event that took place here are still hanging around. We stayed two nights in the small town nearby and finally relaxed a bit, swam in the clear (and cold) water and ate grilled fish. The people here are very friendly and most tourists that come here are Germans and Austrian.



Flying from Portoroz Slovenia to Vrsar Croatia



Flying in Croatia



Arrival in Vrsar airfield in Croatia (middle photo shows our plane parked in front of the tower)



A day off in Vrsar composed of beach, swim and a grilled fish on the water-front (3 planes, 6 pilots)

This morning, we plan to fly to Brac. The plan for the next days is Brac - two nights, Corfu - two nights, one night in Rhodes and on Monday - the long flight from Rhodes via Paphos and Haifa back home to Rishon.

BRAC CROATIA



Flying from Vrsar to Brac, and final approach to Brac airport



Arrival and parking for overnight in Brac airport



Good life in the Croatian island of Brač



Good life in the Croatian island of Brac

FLIGHT FROM CROATIA BACK TO ISRAEL



Takeoff from Brac Croatia to Corfu Greece



Passing Tirana in Albania on route from Croatia to Corfu



Flying along Albania's coastline



Flying at FL075 the direct route from Corfu to Megara (over the 6000 feet mountains)



Downwind to Megara airfield, the refueling stop on route from Corfu to Rhodes



The final leg from Paphos to Haifa



Approaching Haifa airport



Home sweet home – in Haifa airport

Photos and Story: Arik Lichtman