

Pilot sets world record over North Pole

By Michele Glance
staff writer

John Brown had to fly to the North Pole so he decided to set five world records on the way.

The 49-year-old Birmingham engineering consultant has already set 10 world flying records. The five records he set in early June which are still being certified will bring his total to 15. Brown set five world flight records on a trip to the North Pole last year, he said. He set five more flight records on a flight to South America in March.

"This is the first time a light aircraft has been used to fly from the North American continent over the North Pole to Europe and establish a speed record," Brown said.

Brown received an award at a Paris air show for the polar flight. The total flying time for the record-setting journey was about 26 hours, he said.

Five world flight speed records were set during the flight: from Detroit to Oslo, Norway; from Detroit to Resolute Bay, Canada; from Resolute Bay, Canada, to the North Pole; from the North Pole to Spitzbergen, Norway; and from Spitzbergen, Norway, to Detroit.

THREE PASSENGERS flew on the Piper Aztec plane as it whizzed around the world: Brown, the pilot, George Smith, the co-pilot and a resident of Bloomfield Hills; and Clark Putnam, chief mechanic at Burz Airport in Utica.

"I was going to Europe for business purposes anyway," Brown said. "And we had to test some new navigation equipment over the North Pole. So we attempted to set some records over the pole since it hadn't been done before."

"Setting the records is incidental," Brown said. "If you're making a flight and you can arrange it so you can set a record, it's relatively easy to do." The danger the polar region poses to planes, especially small ones, is the reason the record probably hasn't been set before, Brown said.

"First of all, the polar region is extremely hostile and the aircraft and crew have to be prepared," Brown said. "If you go down up there, the chances for survival aren't very good," he said.

MAGNETIC COMPASSES are useless in the polar region, Brown said. Military and research planes are the only flights that usually enter the treacherous area.

Commercial flights from Japan to Europe take sub-polar routes, Brown said.

"They're about 400-600 miles from the pole," he said. Brown's plane is specially equipped for the long journey, he said.

"I originally got involved in flying as a hobby 25 years ago," Brown said. But most of Brown's flights now revolve around business trips, he said.

BROWN is an engineering consultant in the communications field. He works on installing satellites and radio and TV communication facilities. "We've got clients in Europe and Australia, as well as all over the U.S.," Brown said.

Brown is uncertain if he'll make another world record-setting flight, he said.

"My wife says no," he said with a laugh.

"There's not much left," Brown said. "We've been around the world, unless we hit the South Pole."



John Brown (right) and co-pilot George Smith set five world records during a flight over the North Pole.

JIM VARON

Better idea reaps reward

Diane C. Kangas of Farmington Hills, has been honored in New York City as one of the Center for Creative Studies team members who won first place in the undergraduate category of the 16th Annual Philip Morris Marketing/Communications Competition.

In addition to the trip to New York City, the Center for Creative Studies team received \$2,000 for its project suggesting the introduction of a new line of freeze-dried dinners called "Fresh Harvest."

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