

## Airmanship Skills Tested at the 50th Hayward Air Rally to AirVenture 2014

© 2014 by Gil Takemori

Take-off checklist complete, check. The radio crackles as we hear our race number called to line up and wait for our start. The tension builds and then finally, the radio breaks its unbearable silence and we hear the air boss finally count down “3-2-1, Go!” The throttle gets pushed to redline and we’re off, just as the flagman briskly swings the bright orange and white checkered start flag earthward. I look over at my navigator who has already started our race timer and our Hayward Air Rally competition has officially begun. For the next 3.9 hours, precisely, we’ll be tracking our course, fuel consumption and elapsed time while trying to identify the six checkpoints and finish line specified in our Air Rally crew handbook. We will also have to answer the multiple choice questions contained in our handbook that will help verify that we actually *did* see each checkpoint after all, not just fly somewhere near it. And if that weren’t enough already, we’re trying not to get too lost along the way so that if all goes well, we may come close to the six second time variance and within 0.4% of the estimated fuel consumption score established by last year’s winner so that we may have some slight hope to win this year’s event. But then again, we’d probably be happy just not getting too hopelessly lost period, since we will be making this journey (gulp) without using our trusted GPS navigation system...



Pilots and crews are briefed before engine start

What began as a friendly bet between two fellow aviators in 1963 has now become one of the longest continuously-held aviation competitions in North America. The Hayward Air Rally is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and will be commemorating this historic event with an unprecedented, three day competition route to AirVenture 2014 in Oshkosh. Past Air Rally events have been conducted to Las Vegas, Laughlin NV, Palm Springs CA and Bend OR but none have ever spanned over more than a one day flight. With mandatory fuel and lunch stops during each leg, as well as overnight accommodations for each team of competitors, and with the route spanning over CA, NV, WY, SD, MN and WI, the logistical challenges for planning this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event have been monumental. But as current event chair and committee member for over 18 years, Chris Verbil is undaunted and exudes the excitement that this year’s extra special event brings. After all, Chris has not only run this event for the past six years, he’s actually won it himself participating as a solo competitor.



Crews painstakingly plan their routes with precise fuel use and elapsed times

Chris' responsibility as Rally Committee chair encompasses a variety of roles, as you would expect with the leader of any volunteer non-profit organization. Not only is his job to make sure dozens of competitors all arrive safely at their destination at each leg of the competition, that all fuel pumps are carefully calibrated at each fuel stop and that each EAA chapter and other civic groups are ready at each of the rally stops for local support, Chris is also fundamentally responsible for the tremendous philanthropy that results from this event, namely the (15) full EAA Air Academy youth scholarships that the Air Rally has sponsored which have totaled more than \$25,000



Competitors nervously await the start of their runs

over the years. Lucky young aviation enthusiasts from each of the locations where the Air Rally legs have been held are sent to Oshkosh each year, airfare included, to enjoy a week-long camp learning about aviation in a top-rated youth education summer program run by EAA. Some of these attendees have gone on to career paths in the Air Force or have become private pilots themselves on their way to various aviation-related careers. "It is a tremendously satisfying and rewarding experience to provide both a challenging competition for flight teams, as well as to provide such a great benefit for the youth in our participating areas" explains Chris who would one day like to return to the Air Rally as a competitor himself.

So what does it take to win the Hayward Air Rally? It requires a keen understanding of your plane's performance first, combined with your team's ability to then plan, predict and fly a precise enough course over specified checkpoints within seconds of your estimated time. Not hard enough? Then let's make predicting your fuel consumption twice as important as time in scoring and factor in the unpredicted winds aloft, getting lost, not locating the checkpoints at first pass and your ability to precisely refuel your own plane at each stop as some added noteworthy challenges. To add to the excitement of the competition, an arrival timing line is used just before landing at the final destination where planes get the rare opportunity to zoom along at 100' AGL so Air Rally ground officials can log their official race time as they zip by, some teams likely pushing into the yellow arc in a steep dive for the line while others may be hanging the gear and flaps out to try and cross at the slowest speed possible while still managing to maintain some degree of controlled flight. In the end, the winner will be recognized at the event's infamous awards dinner, along with a collection of many other dubious honors designed to recognize most all the participants including "Tail End Charlie" or the equally distinguished "Red Baron Award" presented to the team heralding the least direct path from start to finish. To add to the fun, a graphic is displayed at the end of the ceremony which is an overlay of each team's flight path as recorded in the compulsory GPS logging unit that is installed within each plane, and this is when especially beleaguered teams must then claim responsibility for and expand upon their various navigational misadventures. It's all in good fun and most all participants go home with some type of award or door prize at the conclusion of the ceremony, along with some great stories to tell their fellow aviators and friends.



Pilots refuel under the watchful eye of rally officials



Timing runs flown at 100' AGL are thrilling for both pilots and cameramen!

competition. The Hayward Air Rally is designed to be a test of your basic airmanship skills using compass, charts and timer along with careful flight and fuel planning and will either surprise you with the results or help dust off those seldom-used pilotage skills that have since been abandoned from your primary training days. The Hayward Air Rally 2014 will conclude with a group fly-in to AirVenture following the final day of competition on Saturday, with an awards ceremony to take place on Tuesday, July 29 in Oshkosh.

For those still looking for the potential once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience flying their own or rented plane to Oshkosh but who may lack the confidence or experience in planning such a long cross-country flight, the Hayward Air Rally may be a great opportunity to give this a try. With full ground support, established logistics and confidence of knowing that all flights will be made in VFR conditions, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Hayward Air Rally could be a fun and exciting way to experience flying to Oshkosh. The Air Rally is guaranteed to test the most seasoned veterans as well as those freshly-minted pilots who are ready for their first long cross-country adventure and who may want to just follow the magenta line to Oshkosh. For more information, visit the event website at [www.hwdairrally.org](http://www.hwdairrally.org) or you can email them at [info@hwdairrally.org](mailto:info@hwdairrally.org).

This year's Hayward Air Rally 2014 to AirVenture will start July 23 as competitors' planes are impounded and inspected for rally rules compliance during their overnight stay at KHWD. Here, race committee members check that GPS, fuel flow and other disallowed flight instruments are either covered up or temporarily disabled for the following days' competition. Early the next morning, a final crew briefing covers the relevant details and last minute instructions before the competitors all head out to the ramp. If you are the owner of a Technically Advanced Airplane with a glass primary display, fuel flow measurement and GPS, you can still compete in the Hayward Air Rally but with increased penalties for estimated time and fuel use as a compensatory handicap in their Digital Class category. The object of this event is safety and fun however, so any panel vintage or airplane type will be welcomed to the