

# CESSNA

# FLYER

VOL 09 ★ ISSUE 11  
NOV 2012 | [cessnaflyer.org](http://cessnaflyer.org)

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LADIES, START YOUR ENGINES  
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# Ladies, Start Your Engines

*Air racing for your "Sunday Sedan"*

**By Terry Carbonell**

*Every June over 100 female pilots come together to participate in the four-day, 2,500-mile, cross-country, VFR, all-women's Air Race Classic, the modern-day continuation of the Powder Puff Derby.*

These pilots do not arrive in highly modified experimental aircraft. Quite the contrary: they race their every day, average, stock airplane—their “Sunday Sedan.” The Air Race Classic rules even prohibit entry of experimental aircraft for competition.

Basically, if your airplane is a commercially manufactured single or twin, is normally aspirated, has no restrictions on running continuous full power and can make each race leg in its entirety without fueling, your plane is probably qualified to race.

Many, if not most, of the race airplanes from the 2012 race were Cessnas. Fifteen of the top 16 finishing planes were Cessnas.

So what does it take to race your stock Cessna in a four-day cross-country race?

First and foremost, know your airplane. Even if you rent a plane for the race, know your airplane. Make sure you have a good feel for the aircraft at normal cruise speed.

You want to spend time flying the plane at full power, leaned for best power. How much fuel will you burn? What is your range? What are the readings for oil temperature, oil pressure, the cylinder head temperatures, and the EGT readings? How long does it take to make a turn at this faster race speed?

Compare all of these readings and measurements to your normal cruise speed and power settings. Does the airplane feel different and sound different?

Second, talk to the mechanic who regularly services the aircraft. Be sure all of the squawks are repaired. Ask the A&P/IA if the engine compression readings indicate a sound engine. While there are many things that an IA looks at during an annual inspection, not all of the “it will be wearing out soon” items are repaired.

The good news is that there is nothing special in the way of maintenance that needs to be accomplished to fly the race. However, it is a good idea to double-check some basic things, such as:

a) **Is the engine putting out full power?** Is it running over or under speed, or rough running? Does it feel like it is not putting out enough power? If you have access to a digital tachometer checker, use it.

b) **Does the airplane fly straight and is it properly rigged?** A properly rigged airplane flies faster and is easier to fly. Surprisingly, many pilots routinely fly with their aircraft out of rig. Flying the race can mean flying many hours in a





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\*Note: Based on GAMA data for new GA piston aircraft manufactured from 2003 to current, 1 of 3 aircraft Manufactured uses GLAP Windows & Windshields.

single day. You will tire more rapidly flying an out-of-rig airplane.

c) Check required inspections and databases. Is your VFR or IFR certification up-to-date? When does your annual expire? When do your GPS and other databases expire?

d) Check your logbooks. Have there been any modifications to the aircraft, and is the paperwork in order? Many modifications can be completed with a logbook entry; others require a 337 form or other forms. Make sure these entries are documented in the logbooks. Look at your original equipment list then go through the airplane and check what equipment is currently in the airplane and what has been replaced. Find each item in the logbooks. Make sure that each AD is individually signed off as having been completed or that the AD is not applicable to your aircraft.

e) Just before the race, service the airplane. Change the oil; check and clean the oil and fuel screens and filters; check the lights; add air to the tires; change the air filter; check the brakes; clean the fuel injectors; clean and gap the spark plugs; and check the magneto timing. Top off all fluids.

Third, clean out the junk in the trunk.

It is amazing how much extra stuff we carry around in our airplanes. This additional weight robs us of both speed and fuel economy. Remove the carpets and shake out the dirt; remove excess items from the glove box, console and cargo compartments. Thoroughly detail the airplane—inside and outside.

Finally, know your avionics. This is actually different from knowing your airplane. Those little magic GPS and MFD boxes do much more than “Direct to.” They have a wealth of information and numerous functions that can help you more than you can possibly imagine... if you know how to access that information. Read the operators manual; use a simulator (Garmin has a free computer simulator for the GNS 430/530); get a safety pilot and fly around an uncongested area pushing the buttons and testing the little-used functions.

There is a lot that can be learned from racing your everyday airplane. As a race pilot, you will develop a better understanding of your aircraft logbooks, basic aircraft maintenance, aircraft flight characteristics, and you will learn more about your avionics than you thought possible.

Racing the Air Race Classic, you will also experience real cross-country flying and probably meet 100 of your new best friends who share your passion for racing the “Sunday Sedan.” ■

*Terry L. Carbonell is a pilot (ASEL, ASES), CFI, CFI-I and has accumulated more than 2,000 flight hours in just over seven years. She is secretary and a member of the Air Race Classic, Inc. Board of Directors as well as a member of the 99s, AOPA, Women in Aviation, the Lawyer Pilots Bar Association and The Florida Bar. Terry started flying later in life at the request of her late husband, Mario Carbonell, who had Alzheimer's disease and was no longer able to pilot a plane. Terry is the author of "Youth and Aviation Adventure Guide" and has dedicated her life to teaching youth about aviation and all it has to offer. She is an avid air racer, winning the Air Race Classic in 2010, placing third in 2012 and receiving many top 10 finishes in other proficiency air races. Send questions or comments to [editor@cessnaflyer.org](mailto:editor@cessnaflyer.org).*

## RESOURCES

Air Race Classic, Inc.  
[airraceclassic.org](http://airraceclassic.org)



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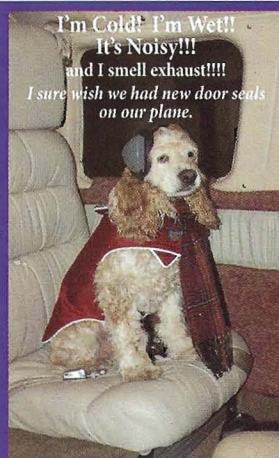
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