



B2Osh Formation Flight Clinic

Stockton, California - April 25-26, 2009

BY ROB ULANER, ROCKLIN, CALIFORNIA

PHOTOS BY ROB ULANER

As the sun rises over Stockton Municipal Airport, 17 pilots, including the Safety Pilots and me riding along as a passenger, assemble in a small conference room. Those of us who are new nervously eat our doughnuts and drink our coffee as we anxiously wait for the morning B2Osh Formation Flying Clinic briefing to begin.

We all look around the room and take stock of each other and begin introductions to better acquaint ourselves with our fellow Bonanza comrades. As the briefing begins, Bruce Poulton covers the basics of what will be practiced on this first of three sorties for the day. The plan for the initial training flight is to designate a lead and a wing, provide a map for our designated training area and assign Safety Pilots.

Upon completion of the briefing, we set out to the flight line. Awaiting us

is a gorgeous group of Beechcraft single and multiengine beauties. As the only non-aircraft owner in the bunch, I felt fortunate to ride along as an observer and photographer in the backseat of Bruce Wold's gorgeous V-tail. For this first hop, we were in the lead aircraft, while Mark Overholtzer piloted his Travel Air as wing.

When Stockton Tower gives the "clear for takeoff," both planes taxi onto the active runway. In the lead Bonanza, Bruce gives the "run-up" hand signal and the party begins! As Bruce lowers his head, both planes simultaneously begin their dance down the runway in unison.

When we lift off and begin a right turn out toward Comanche Reservoir, I begin photographing. It wasn't until we were over our practice area that I realized just how close the planes truly get to each other and how challenging it is to maintain both distance and speed. Comanche Reservoir made an excellent backdrop for photographing this event.

Off our wing, Mark keeps a welded-wing stance while practicing both inside and outside turns. After 45 minutes of repeating these exercises, including passing under the lead aircraft to change sides, we head back toward Stockton Municipal to make our first formation landing of the day.

Watching both planes land simultaneously was an awesome sight and I know both Bruce and Mark were happy the first sortie came to end. Both guys did an outstanding job! All of this is in preparation for our mass formation flight from Rockford, Illinois, to Oshkosh on July 25 for AirVenture 2009.

After both planes were secured we headed in for a debrief, allowing both pilots and Safety Pilots (flying right seat) to discuss improvement opportunities.

That day and the entire weekend passed quickly as we completed two more sorties on Saturday. On one of these, I was fortunate to fly right seat in a 4-man formation. That was an incredible experience, and I have found new respect for our Military Flight Demonstration Teams! It is definitely hard work and requires both the trust of the lead pilot and everyone's undivided attention.

Larry Gaines deserves special recognition for heading the B2Osh group and getting these formation clinics put together. As a pilot, safety comes first and Larry emphasizes this with these clinics as a mandatory prerequisite for being part of the formation flight into Oshkosh.

Everyone was extremely welcoming to me and I feel like I have a whole new group of friends to spend time with at Oshkosh! I currently fly both Cessnas and Pipers and have yet to own my first plane. But I will tell you this, when that day comes, it's going to be a Beechcraft Bonanza. Hope to see you at AirVenture.

Rob Ulaner holds a single-engine rating with about 350 hours. He is a senior IT manager for a local mutual fund company managing their global help desk and account administration.



Mark Overholtzer's Travel Air off our wing.

