



# West to Lago di Maggiore

Floatplane enthusiast *Derrick Fawcett* sorts his FCARS from his nightowls

There is something compelling, captivating and impressive about aeroplanes that operate on water. Perhaps there is an enigma about them, arriving and departing in places which other aircraft cannot use. Possibly it is the drama of water spraying from the floats during landing and take-off. Or is it the elegance and style which is portrayed when floatplanes enter a scene?

Four years ago my fascination with floatplanes came alive when I responded to an advertisement offering seaplane ratings in Como, Italy. This is a picturesque city at the southern end of Lake Como. Selling the idea of a vacation in Italy to my wife was fairly easy, since which lady can resist an opportunity of shopping in Como and Milan, and sailing to the lakeside towns in such spectacular surroundings.

Weather was perfect for our holiday and flying in such magnificent scenery was the best possible environment in which to fly seaplanes. Throughout my six days at Como there was a welcoming atmosphere at the aero club from committed, enthusiastic and professional staff. This is meticulously supported by a competent, efficient and extremely helpful administration and management. Every day was flyable which enabled completion of the flying and ground school syllabus, and the necessary proficiency

flight test with a JAA-FCL Authorised Examiner.

Floatplane flying has become an impulsive privilege and allowed me to discover where aviation's real enjoyment lies. No other form of flying matches the pure excitement and adventure of seaplanes. Visits to Como are made at regular intervals and this year was my bi-annual proficiency seaplane check. This was successfully completed on my first day with Francesco Cereda, an authorised JAA-FCL seaplane rating examiner. Franco is a pilot of immense professionalism, experience and skill, and an enthusiasm and commitment with that rare ability to inspire pilots to enjoy floatplanes.

For my adventure flight in the early evening next day, the plan was to fly north then west to Lake Maggiore with my wife. Wind was from the north at 10 knots and the initial water taxi was on the western side of the runway. At Como the water runway is a dedicated section of the lake, 900 metres long by 150 metres wide with the direction 01/19. It is marked by buoys with yellow flashing lights on each

corner and at the half way points, and intermediate unlighted buoys.

Whilst taxi-ing to allow the engine to reach operating temperature the take-off briefing is recited.

- If there is a problem during take-off whilst still on the runway power is reduced to idle and the control column brought all the way back and the aircraft brought to a stop
- If there is a problem after take-off but below 10 feet power is reduced to idle and the control column brought all the way back with a landing on the runway
- If there is a problem above 10 feet the control column is pushed forward, power is reduced and a normal landing carried out
- If the aircraft is not airborne by the half way runway marker the take-off is abandoned

With all take-off checks complete a return is made to the start of runway 01, final checks on runway line up are remembered with the initial letters FCARS

- Flaps set at 10 degrees.
- Carburettor heat cold
- Area for take-off clear
- Rudders – water rudders up
- Stick – control column all the way back

Then it's increase to full power and enjoy the take-off. This is quite dramatic as the nose

**Above: I-BISB landing on runway 01 at Como**  
**Below: launching a refuelled I-SIPI ready for my bi-annual proficiency check**  
**Below right: author with Francesco Cereda, the authorised JAA-FCL Authorised Examiner at Como**





enclave, with a large casino is underneath our port wing. Continuing our most enjoyable trip in perfect conditions, we track the right hand fork of the lake, otherwise it would be a quicker than expected return to Como.

After weaving through valleys the view opens up with Lake Maggiore in the distance and a descent effected to 2000 feet. Crossing the lake towards Verbania landing checks are completed using the acronym NTOWLS (night owls!).

- **Noise:** Don't disturb the locals
- **Traffic:** Be aware of seaplanes, boats, jet skis and all lake operations
- **Obstructions:** Check for possible obstructions in the circuit pattern, especially on the approach and landing area
- **Wind:** Assess wind direction and strength
- **Length:** Ensure there is sufficient length for landing and take-off
- **Surface:** Conclude the surface conditions (glassy, slight, moderate or rough) which will determine the landing configuration

Selected area for landing is at Stresa, adjacent to the Borromeno Islands. Just one small static fishing boat to monitor on the approach, with the occupant probably concentrating on the possible menu options for dinner. Conditions on the lake surface are slight with wind blowing from the south. After

**Top left: the picturesque town of Stresa on Lake Maggiore**

**Left: villa retreats for the very wealthy**  
**Bottom left: downwind for runway 01 at Como with the green dome roof of the cathedral in the centre**

**Below: Aero Club Como seaplane base**



a full stop landing followed by water taxi, take-off is to the same direction as landing and the climb established with a clear view of Stresa and the islands. Heading to the south east passing Gavirate and Lake Varese, visibility is amazing with the parallel runways 35/17 at Milan-Malpensa clearly visible some 25 kilometres to the south.

Return to Como is with a standard 2000 feet overhead NTOWLS assessment, followed by a crosswind rejoin at 1400 feet QNH for downwind runway 01. Base leg is parallel to the lake edge, just north of the cathedral, with 1200 feet over San Giovanni railway station and 1000 feet over the aero club hangar on finals. Lago di Como is 660 feet above sea level.

Occasionally the question is asked, "Which aeroplanes do you most enjoy flying?" Without hesitation my response is always the same: "Seaplanes." ■

of the aircraft rises and water sprays from the floats. After the second rise of the bow and the aircraft stabilises, the control column is eased forward and the floats start to plane at a neutral position on the step. This position is maintained until take-off position is reached when the floatplane takes to the air.

After the climb is established at 65 knots, power is reduced to 2500 rpm to moderate noise from the engine, with a track on the east side of the lake. At Torno a radio call is made reporting position and height. The picturesque villa owned by George Clooney passes by on the starboard side as the journey continues

north. In expectation of the high ground ahead the climb is maintained to 4000 feet. Although it is early evening there is a considerable amount of small and large boat traffic on the lake as locals and tourists return home or to hotels. In the winter months the lake is much quieter and more peaceful.

Approaching Argegno, established at 4000 feet, we make a left turn, over-fly the village and follow the high valley towards the Italian section of Lake Lugano. Another left turn to follow the lake into Switzerland. Lugano city passes by on the right side as we follow the lake initially to the south. Campione, an Italian