



Magic Mustang swallows the Atlantic

John George goes to fetch his new Cessna Citation Mustang, with a little help from his friends. By Terry Earl

I don't know who coined the phrase 'It's not what you know, it's who you know' but we all appreciate its relevance in our own lives from time to time. In my flying career, since becoming an instructor after some 30 years of military and airline flying, the 'who' has been a successful entrepreneur and speed freak called John George. I was instructing at Cornwall Flying Club at Bodmin, near to where John was running his mobile phone business JAG Communications. He had decided to learn to fly in order to save time on his travels, particularly those trips necessary for his participation in the British Touring Car Championship, in which he was a keen private entrant. Once he had gained his PPL he asked me to take him through a basic instrument



flying course, and as soon as he had completed this announced he was buying a brand-new Cessna 172, a comfortable and capable four-seater. Before long we were giving him more route flying experience with flights to France and Spain. It soon became apparent that the 172 was too slow for John's needs so within months he upgraded to the similar but faster 182, which arrived as the first in UK with the advanced glass-screen Garmin G1000 navigation system. John was aware that he also needed to upgrade his own all-weather flying capability, so we began training for an American Instrument Rating, the time required to study for the airline-style theory exams of the European version making that a non-starter. After John had completed some 25 hours of instrument training with me, we went to a flight school in Oklahoma where he completed the rest of his training and passed his test. Having obtained his American



Above: John George (left) and Cyrus Sigari at the business end of the Cessna Mustang
Above left: John's Honda Integra, his 2010 British Touring Car Championship entry

qualifications John still needed one thing – a US-registered aircraft in which to exercise these privileges. This came in the shape of a Columbia 400, purchased because it was the fastest single-engine four-seater available at the time, and again it was the first example of its type to arrive in UK with the Garmin G1000 system. John was content for a while, but I was not surprised when he told me he'd heard about a single-engine turboprop aircraft which he felt would suit his needs even better. The TBM700 is a six-seat machine capable of flying at up to 30,000 feet and of cruising at 300 knots in airline style comfort. Before long

we were in France with a pre-owned TBM 700 doing the type training course at the Socata factory in Tarbes. Need I say that after a few months he had realised he would gain another 25 knots if he upgraded to the 850, so before too long we were back at Tarbes to pick up a brand-new TBM 850. By this time John had moved to Guernsey but his company was still based in Cornwall. This meant he was flying between the two several times a week, so a fast and well-equipped aircraft was essential, as was a tarmac runway of acceptable length at an airport where he was not constantly paying out large sums for landing and handling. Fortunately it happened that the airfield of Perranporth was on the market, with its 1,000 metre tarmac runway, and although it had very limited facilities, the neighbouring Newquay airport provided a radar service as well as approach aids and a diversion option. In true entrepreneur fashion John went ahead



**Top: the delivery crew at Goose – from left, Cyrus Sigari, John George and Terry Earl
Above: the Mustang at Goose Bay, where de-icing was completed after engine start
Lower right: former Nimrod captain Terry Earl samples the comforts of the owner's throne**

and bought the airfield and moved his company head office to an adjoining site. For a couple of years he commuted happily between Guernsey and Cornwall at a speed acceptable to his needs and in style and comfort to boot. He became a most proficient all-weather pilot, with weekly trips around the UK and frequent forays into Europe. However, by this time the idea of flying a jet had begun to fix itself in his mind, and once John is minded to do something, it usually happens – and somehow I have the good fortune to become involved.

After over a year of thorough research John decided that the aircraft most suited to his requirements was the Cessna Citation Mustang, a six-seat twin-jet that is the smallest in the Citation range of executive jets. During this research John had been put in touch with a company called Jet Aviva and a most helpful fellow called Ben Marcus. Ben and his long-time friend Cyrus Sigari had set up a company named Jet Aviva to market executive jets, particularly Cessna Citations. They also provided a delivery service, and once John had negotiated his deal for the Mustang, which would require collection from the Cessna facility in Kansas, it was agreed that Cyrus would accompany us on our flight from Wichita to the UK. Knowing the vagaries of the North Atlantic weather in winter I was relieved that we would have with us someone experienced in such flights. I had also agreed with John that following our Saturday

commercial flight from London to Wichita via Chicago we would take the Sunday as a rest day before setting off on our trans-Atlantic adventure on the Monday. I was therefore mildly unimpressed to be woken, during a fitful post-arrival sleep at Wichita, by an incoming text informing me that we should take breakfast at eight o'clock and would be departing for Goose Bay later that morning! The next surprise occurred at breakfast when, in an otherwise deserted hotel dining-room, we met a smart young man wearing a Jet Aviva jacket bearing the name Cyrus Sigari. To me he looked about 18 years old, and when he announced that he was really looking forward to our trip as it would be his first trans-Atlantic flight I could see that our best-laid plans were falling apart. However, it soon transpired that he was older than my first estimate, had been flying for over 10 years and had more than 500 hours on the Mustang. He was to prove an excellent person to have with us, both as a professional aviator and an enjoyable companion. It also turned out that he had the uncanny knack of attracting good weather in unlikely places.

Wichita to Buffalo

At the Cessna Service Centre John was able to get his first look at his shiny new – well, it only had 120 hours on it – Mustang. After a thorough inspection, and cursory look at some other smart Cessnas in the spotless hangar, we

sat down for a route brief with Andre Grosvenor of Aviation Dynamics, a company specialising in providing route briefing and support for ventures such as ours. Outside it was fine but with the temperature just below freezing and a strong wind from the north-west it seemed sensible to get ourselves all set in the hangar and then have the aircraft pulled into the open. We started engines at 12.30 local time, with John making his way slowly through the check-list and setting up the aircraft and its systems carefully for our planned route to Buffalo. We had both completed a most thorough two-week course on the Mustang with FlightSafety at Farnborough, but that had been two months previously so familiarity with the aircraft was not our strong point. Cyrus was thorough and patient, ensuring that we followed the correct procedures and understood properly the aircraft and its systems.

After a lengthy taxi to the holding-point for the take-off runway – made so much easier by having the airfield map displayed on the Multi-Function Display (MFD) screen in centre the instrument panel, complete with a moving aircraft symbol – we completed the checks and obtained our departure clearance. John moved the throttle levers and thus initiated a most impressive rate of acceleration along the runway – although close to the aircraft's maximum permitted take-off weight, we were airborne at 90 knots and soon climbing at 170 knots at 3,000 fpm. One radio frequency change later we were cleared to climb to 35,000 feet and proceed direct to Buffalo, some 900 miles to the north-east but now only three hours away – this was the way to travel! Later we were cleared to 39,000 feet, which we reached some 25 minutes after take-off, cruising in a clear blue sky and making 300 knots over the ground. We had consumed some 450 lbs of fuel in the climb but the engine instruments now showed us consuming less than 500 lbs/hr. The forecast for Buffalo was overcast with snow on the runway but conditions in the cruise could not



have been better. As we came abeam Lake Michigan away to the east we could just make out Chicago, and closer in we could see Lake Erie and the city of Toledo. To our right we could see snow-covered prairies stretching away to the west. Cleveland Control initiated our descent with 140 miles to go and John was for a moment puzzled to be routed to the Dunkirk VOR, but was happier when the Garmin confirmed that we were indeed still over North America. Buffalo Approach Control took us over as we descended through 11,000 feet and started to vector us for our approach

to land. We needed the aircraft's anti-ice systems as the temperature was minus 12 degrees when we levelled at 3,000 feet at 10 miles from touch-down. Light to medium turbulence held John's attention as he made the appropriate selections to keep the auto-pilot honest and soon we were descending on the instrument approach path with the runway lights in sight. With one mile to go John disconnected the auto-pilot and achieved a nice landing despite a gusting cross-wind – a pleasing result as this was his first landing in the aeroplane, as opposed to in the simulator. Snow patches on the runway and taxi-ways did not cause us any problems and we were soon on the parking apron and requesting fuel for the next leg to Goose Bay.

Buffalo to Goose Bay

Snow had begun to fall as we walked out to the aircraft just over an hour later. We had re-checked the route planning and studied the weather forecast, which revealed that Goose Bay was looking a little uncertain as far as cloudbase was concerned. As alternates were not too plentiful Cyrus had a chat on the satphone, with Andre after which it was decided we should continue in the likelihood that weather conditions at Goose would improve. It was getting dark as we taxied towards the runway, where snow-clearing operations were still in progress. Once the snowploughs had cleared the runway we were cleared for take-off. Our departure clearance was to climb on course to 10,000 feet and to expect further clearance after 10 minutes to 41,000 feet. John and I were still having to pinch ourselves to believe both the performance of the aircraft and the simplicity of such straightforward en-route clearances. Turning right after take-off we quickly penetrated the thin layer of cloud at around 5,000 feet and burst into a beautiful and perfectly clear evening sky, and for the first time we had time to appreciate the cockpit display in its night mode – a stunning combination of the three screens on the instrument panel, the two Primary Flying Displays (PFD) and the central and larger MFD surrounded by the white back-lighting of the various cockpit switches and controls. It had all looked impressive enough by day, but at night it looked very special, and as far as I was concerned sufficient to compete with occasional glimpses of the Northern Lights out to our left as we made our way north-eastwards along the Canadian border. About 15 minutes after departing Buffalo we were climbing through 32,000 feet and flying over Lake Ontario, from where our route would take us along the course of the St. Lawrence and on towards Canada's north-east coast. Montreal Centre confirmed our clearance to 41,000 feet but on reaching that height we found that at a temperature slightly above that planned for, and having taken off close to the maximum weight, the little jet just didn't seem happy. After negotiating a descent to 39,000 feet we found the aircraft to be much steadier with an indicated airspeed of just over 150 knots giving a true airspeed of 320 knots.

At this point Cyrus brought our attention to a new source of magic – the current weather forecasts for Goose Bay displayed on the MFD. This was achieved through the XM weather broadcast system which provides a whole range of weather information via satellite to those aircraft equipped to receive the signal, assuming of course an appropriate (but not unreasonable) subscription has been paid. As we approached our half-way point the forecast



weather at Goose Bay remained less than ideal and Cyrus was considering our options, making use of the satphone to obtain further advice from Andre. The most convenient alternate would soon be behind us, and given that fact, Cyrus was keen that we should not descend from our cruise level until we were sure that Goose was looking good for landing. He rightly stressed the importance of being aware of the increased fuel consumption of a jet at low-level and in the climb, and therefore that this is something that needs to be thought about very carefully when destination weather is in doubt. However, about 40 minutes out from Goose we received an improved forecast giving broken cloud at 700 feet but a main base at 2,400 feet. Even so we stayed high until we had less than 60 miles to run, then commenced a descent at 3,500 feet/min, in

Above: approach to Narsarsuaq; try to find the right fjord using only the chart
Right: John and Cyrus at Narsarsuaq – at six degrees it was balmy for February

the latter stages of which we used the very effective speed-brakes to keep the speed below 200 knots as John followed radar guidance onto the final approach. John's first night landing in the aircraft was another good one and although there was plenty of snow on the ground the runway was clear. And so to bed, once some confusion over our hotel booking had been resolved – it all seemed rather strange that there should be a problem as it appeared to us that we were the only people visiting Goose Bay that evening. It had proved something of a hectic start to our trans-Atlantic adventure. We had left Cornwall on Saturday morning, travelled via London and Chicago to Wichita and on Sunday evening we were a third of the way back home having done over six hours flying in the Mustang! Now, at just after 11 o'clock local time, our morning calls were set for 5.30am so the pace showed no sign of slackening – and the following day would bring us the uncertain pleasures of Greenland and Iceland.

Goose Bay to Narsarsuaq

Before leaving the UK I had mentioned our planned trip to a friend who had experience of Atlantic crossings and his only comment was that we should keep clear of somewhere in

Greenland with a strange-sounding name. So when Cyrus told us our route I was mildly concerned when this same name, Narsarsuaq, was given as one of our stops. And I was not encouraged when I learned from the current warnings for the airfield that the rescue boat would not be available due to ice and that 'minor icebergs may occur in the fjord close to the runway' – I couldn't help wondering if it was a minor or a major iceberg that sank the Titanic. So the first thing we established at briefing was that the weather forecast was good for Narsarsuaq, as indeed it was for our second stop that day at Keflavik in Iceland. We also picked up the mandatory life-raft for our ocean crossing, but the fact that it was contained in a package about the size of a brief-case didn't offer much comfort against the thought of using it in the North Atlantic in





Above: Terry had last flown into Keflavik in a Nimrod carrying haggis and whisky
Below: route to Prestwick shows on the MFD, with groundspeed at 331 knots

winter. Our confidence would remain firmly in the ability of those two Pratt & Whitney engines to carry us safely over the 2,000 miles of ocean between Canada and Scotland. Some de-icing of the aircraft was needed before our departure and, although the application of de-icing fluid with a mop was adequate for the wings, we were a little more concerned about the high tail. It was agreed we would have this sprayed from a mobile gantry after we had started the engines. This was completed without incident (except to John's wallet) and we were cleared to back-track down the runway while the snow-clearing vehicles moved off. We were asked to confirm that we were equipped and approved for operations in North Atlantic Oceanic Airspace and this we were able to do. Apart from the aircraft having all the appropriate

equipment, John had completed the relevant courses online back in UK; furthermore we were all too conscious of the need to follow the proper procedures to ensure unhindered passage across the Atlantic.

We were airborne at 8.35, and passing 10,000 feet we broke out of cloud into a clear blue sky. Putting the large area map on the MFD we could see the coast of north-east Canada; apparently we were passing over a place with the somewhat unlikely name of Jigger Island as we coasted out towards Greenland. With nothing more troubling than a slight cross-wind in the cruise at 37,000 feet we expected to cover the 670 miles to Narsarsuaq in exactly two hours and to arrive with at least half our fuel remaining. We were cleared by Gander Control into Oceanic airspace, with a second query as to our equipment and approval, and we double-checked that we were prepared for the required reporting procedures en-route. Our alternate was an airfield named Nuuk on the west coast of Greenland some 250 miles north of our track, but happily the forecast for our

destination remained good with a cloudbase of 18,000 feet, unlimited visibility and a wind straight down the runway. With 100 miles to go we started our descent and on cue at 18,000 feet we slipped through a thin layer of cloud and had our first sight of Greenland – a rather strange name for a country covered by snow for most of the year. The south-western part presented a partly rocky and partly snow-covered vista, with the coast-line shredded by long fjords. At the end of one of these lay the airfield of Narsarsuaq with its 1830 metre runway projecting into the fjord at its eastern end while an impressive glacier stared down from just beyond its western extremity. John was fascinated by the synthetic vision system on the Garmin 1000 which clearly showed the fjords on the PFD as a background to the instrument displays. Remarkable as this system is, I managed to convince John that the view outside the cockpit was even more impressive as we flew along the fjords towards Narsarsuaq. However, when it came to identifying precisely which fjord led to the airfield I confess I looked away from the map I had been using and had a peek at the PFD, where the runway outline was just beginning to appear on the synthetic vision display – magic, pure magic! We were cleared to descend to 4,500 feet overhead the airfield for a circling approach to Runway 07. Had the conditions been less favourable the safety height of 6,000 feet might have presented something of a problem, and this became even more evident as we saw that the rocky hills either side of the runway rose sharply to over 3,000 feet. Cyrus had claimed the landing at Narsarsuaq as his privilege and he flew us in a nice curving descent onto the final approach, but as we descended below the level of the hills the easterly wind of some 20 knots gave us a distinctly bumpy ride. This rendered virtually useless my attempts to use a video camera to film the approach. Safely on the ground we parked ready for refuelling and stepped out into the clear air of Greenland and a temperature of 6 degrees – which was warmer than it had been in both Wichita and London when we left!

Narsarsuaq to Keflavik

We were the only aircraft on the airfield so after a leisurely turn-round we were ready to re-embark for the two-hour flight to Iceland. The weather forecast remained good but all the same Cyrus took the precaution of a further check with Andre on the satphone. Perhaps he recalled Andre telling us that the only likely problem at Keflavik was a cross-wind and that on one recent occasion he had landed a Learjet there with a cross-wind that was gusting well over 50 knots. There appeared to be no such threat facing us – indeed we felt we were now entering the downhill stretch of what was proving to be a much easier crossing than we had anticipated. Cyrus wondered if I had visited Iceland before and I told him that I had landed at Keflavik when the US Navy used it as an operating base for patrolling the Iceland-Faroes Gap in search of Soviet submarines during the Cold War. To be a little more precise, I had flown there in a Nimrod from our base at RAF Kinloss in Scotland to help the Americans celebrate Burns Night. We were invited so that we could bring suitable 'flavouring' for the evening, such as a bagpiper, plenty of haggis and of course whisky. When I told Cyrus that this trip must have been in 1972 we both went rather quiet as it dawned on us that this was about 10 years before he had been born!



The take-off and climb-out from Narsarsuaq was as impressive as the approach, initially toward the glacier face and then climbing steeply with snow-covered hills close in on both sides until we rose above them at just over 3,000 feet. Then as we turned to the right to head out over the southern tip of Greenland we had a bird's eye view of two huge glaciers that slid down to the fjords close to the airfield, beyond which an enormous expanse of snow-covered mountains spread out below us. We were now accustomed to the rapid climb rate of the aircraft and unhindered clearances, and with the temperature being slightly lower at our cruise level than it had been the day before we managed to reach and maintain 41,000 feet without difficulty. The forecast for Keflavik came through clearly some 200 miles out and confirmed what we expected, good weather and a strong but manageable north-easterly wind. We were soon taken under radar control and guided onto the approach for Runway 02. Ahead we could see that the airfield and adjacent low-lying land was quite clear of snow – was this really Iceland in February? John handled the slight cross-wind and turbulence on the approach with the seasoned aplomb of an experienced jet pilot – he now had over ten hours on his lovely Mustang – and we were soon parked and ready for a night on the town. Well maybe not; having landed at sunset it was well after dark when we reached the hotel, there was a cold wind blowing and there was little sign of life. So a meal in the hotel and an early night made a good deal of sense, particularly as we would be up at 6.00 am and had a busy schedule for our final day.

Keflavik to Prestwick

After what is best described as a very Icelandic breakfast we boarded the transport for the airfield, delayed only slightly by John taking a while to settle our account with the hotel and thereby assisting to some considerable extent the ailing local economy. In Goose Bay we had paid a lot for a little, here we had fared better but at a considerable price. At the entrance to the airfield we had to disembark and go through a full airport-style security check, during which Cyrus noted with some surprise that at no point on our journey so far had anyone asked to see our passports. In fact this was to remain the case throughout the trip and as John and I were 'stamped in' to the US I suppose that officially we are still there. We completed a rapid external check of the aircraft, not least due to the cold and penetrating north-east wind, and were soon taxi-ing for take-off. It was still dark but we could see that the sky was clear to the east and that dawn was not far away. As we climbed on course to the south-east the sky on the horizon was soon lightening and once we were above 20,000 feet we experienced that perennial problem for the early morning eastbound flier, the sun shining directly in our eyes. We had again planned to fly at 41,000 feet but conditions proved more suitable for us at 39,000 feet so we negotiated a revised clearance at this height. Prestwick were using their south-easterly runway so we were vectored in for what was virtually a straight-in approach and soon the Mustang's wheels were settled on UK soil for the first time, and each of the three of us had completed his first independent trans-Atlantic flight – by which I mean unaided by airlines and/or military support.

It had all passed off so quickly and everything had gone so smoothly that it almost



seemed an anti-climax after all the preparation and the expectation of seasonal weather problems. In any event we now had three more sectors to fly (we needed to drop in to Blackbushe and Guernsey) before we would be back at Perranporth with our journey finally complete later that day. ■

Top: home and dry, the Mustang crew on the ground at Prestwick

Above: proper job – John George says his farewells to Cyrus Sigari after their first Atlantic crossing

Below: the Mustang at her new home, Perranporth, under typical Cornish skies

