

# Florida to Texas

# *Flying Back Home*

BY SCOTT SEVEREN

I have been flying the Thorp T211 locally for a while and have been excited to take her on a longer mission. The Thorp, you say? Those of you who have been reading *Ultralight Flying!* for several years might suggest the Thorp is a pretty big plane for this magazine, and this scribe.

The T211 is a 2-seat, cool-looking, great handling, fat ultralight, uhh, Light-Sport-Aircraft-to-be. Originally powered by a 75-horse engine, it is the upgraded T11 Scooter, designed by John Thorp. In the mid 1940's an 85-horse was installed (T111), and finally, re-Type-certificated in 1946 with the 100-hp Continental 0-200 engine (T211). The proposed Light-Sport Aircraft version grosses in at about 1,230 pounds with the 120-hp Jabiru 3300 engine.

The plane I fly is a normal category production model, built in 1990. With the 0-200, it burns about 4 to 4.5 gallons per hour (gph) at 75 to 80 mph – it's a happy plane in this speed range – and about 6 gph at around 115 mph – it's happy at this speed too. It stalls about 45 mph. What I love about the plane is, it's small, compact, lands short anywhere (like an ultralight), and you can close the canopy and really go cross-country if you want.

I planned to fly from Dallas, Texas, to Lakeland, Florida, for the Sun 'n Fun fly-in, but circumstances prevented that from occurring. I wound up going by car. Ram Pattisapu, the owner of Indus Aviation – the company that manufactures the certified aircraft and 51% kits for the design – and Jason Stone, a friend from the United Kingdom, would tackle the Dallas-to-Lakeland journey. That was fine with me. The trip from Dallas to Tallahassee in the Thorp was 8 hours of grueling instrument flight rules (IFR) flying in clouds and soup the whole way. Blind, bumpy and wet.

The trip on the ground was much easier, with much better weather, albeit a little longer. Russell Smith (my roadie partner) and I did manage to meet up with the flight crew, Ram Pattisapu and Jason Stone about 11 p.m. Sunday at a hotel in Tallahassee. We were all ready for some rest.

Monday got all of us out of Tallahassee by midmorning. With marginal VFR, Pattisapu and Stone made it to Lakeland Linder Airport by about 2 p.m. Smith and I were about 3 hours behind.

It was generally overcast and the air was thick as peanut butter, but not too thick for Dan Johnson to do a flight review on the T211. The next two days were blown-out and rainy, but we were at the show, and, the show must go on.

Finally, Monday (the end of the show) came and I was ready to head west. A friend, David Cusimano, who is also a certified flight instructor, would fly back with me. This would be a great opportunity to review my flying habits!

We were set to leave about 8 a.m., but had a little business to take care of first – a photo shoot for one of the flying magazines. Cusimano had made it to Sun 'n Fun from a wedding in New Orleans so he had plenty of luggage with him, but we managed to jump up and down on our suitcases enough to get them to fit in the baggage compartment. I remember thinking we needed one of those baggage-sizing devices the commercial air carriers provide.

I contacted ground, got clearance, and the flagman waved us off. I could feel right off we were full of fuel and baggage – we didn't just spring into the air, but we got up and out just fine. After executing Sun 'n

Fun departure procedures, we headed west towards Tampa, to some reef islands at the Anacote Keys just northwest of the Tampa Bay area in the Gulf of Mexico. Well, "in the Gulf" sounds pretty brassy for a single-engine plane. Truth be known, the islands are only perhaps a mile off shore, so even as low as 1,000 feet, with any kind of glide ratio, one could make mainland. Soon, we met up with the photo plane, a Cessna 210.

*Staying close to the Florida coast was easy as visibility could not have been any better. Severen and Cusimano climbed to about 2,500 feet, which still allowed a great appreciation of the coastline, and flew over deserted beaches and forgotten islands.*

*"What a life! We saw the couple who had sailed this tri-hulled boat in a few hundred feet north enjoying the conservation area. Then we realized the beauty of the islands below, and we had to immerse ourselves from the air."*





*All fueled up, packed and ready to spring into the air, the Thorp T211 waits for pilot Scott Severen and passenger David Cusimano to fly her to Dallas, Texas.*



*“One of the most beautiful islands we saw on the trip was in the Anaclothe Keys Conservation Area. Note the fire watchtower in the foreground and the awesome beach off to the right.”*



*Located in Gulf Islands National Seashore, Fort Pickens (arrow) was built in the early 1800s to protect Pensacola Harbor. The fort was fired upon during the Civil War as Confederates tried to capture it. Later, it was used as a military prison, and the Apache Indian chief Geronimo was held there. Informative tours give historic background on the fort’s role during the Civil War.*

I enjoy photo shoots. They are great “precision flying” and “paying attention” practice, except that you aren’t practicing. These photographers wanted early-morning light, which is a favorite time of day. What goes on in the shoot is formation flying – following the lead airplane wherever it goes such that the photographer can get the correct lighting coupled just right with the background he wants. This requires complete faith in the lead (photo plane). This is fine when you are working with top-notch people, and we were.

The exciting part came, when following in 360’s, the early-morning sun became absolutely and completely blinding. Even the photo plane would disappear for all the light. Granted for a very brief time, but long enough for me to be real glad to see the lead plane again! I would have taken pictures of all of this but well, you get the picture. It was a very busy time!

After about half an hour of this, we were ready to head north, up the coast of Florida. Then we realized the beauty of the islands below, and we had to immerse ourselves for about 15 minutes or so.

We were surprised to see a beautiful tri-hull sailing vessel beached in the barren and natural sand on one reef island. The surrounding water was clear blue on the Gulf side, and clear green on the east side. There were large fish meandering about, or perhaps porpoises or dolphins. We could see a couple dragging their bare feet through the sand about 100 yards up the beach from their boat. What a setting!

The amount of sea life and fowl was impressive. Boy, events like this really augment how sweet life is.

We were likely to get further behind schedule if we were to tarry much more, so we headed north. Staying close to the coast was easy as visibility could not have been any better. We climbed to about 2,500 feet, which still allowed a great appreciation of the coastline. We passed well over and beside the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Preserve, St. Martin’s Key, Sea Horse Key (where we made out an interesting lighthouse) and Cedar Key, to prevent noise polluting the natural wilderness.

As we came inland, I asked Cusimano how high he thought one would need to be in central Florida, in between the Gulf and the Atlantic, to be able to see both coasts. Had we not enjoyed the previous half hour so much, I would have had an answer for you.

First fuel stop was Cross City. We were ready to stretch our legs and relax from the awesomeness of the last hour and a half. We ran into a pilot in an RV 9 headed to the state of Washington. After chatting a few minutes, they headed on and I offered that we would catch up with them en route. Glancing over at my trusty 100-hp Continental 0-200 and at his bazillion-hp whatever he had fit inside the beautiful long sleek RV nose, I retracted the statement.

At the top of the Florida panhandle, it was time to turn left to head towards Texas. We had the option of getting some altitude and making up a little time, or “smelling some more roses.” If we elected to further delight our visual senses, we would need to stop early for fuel, so we would not wind up on the short end of the fuel gauge. We let down at Panama Bay County International. This was too cool. Aside from approaching over a bay and landing at an international airport – it sounds a *lot* bigger than it is – as we were taxiing off the runway, a beautiful DC-3 passed by, departing on the active. It’s great to see these great historical aircraft at the shows, and surprising as well as a treat to be flying around with them.

After food and trekking all over to get some sunscreen (we were stumped that in Panama Beach it was difficult to find sunscreen), Destin corridor, here we come! Having not flown this route before, I was not aware of “the corridor.” This area is plagued with restricted areas all around Elgin Air Force Base. Actually, the sectional reads: “Special Air Traffic Rule, FAR Part 93 Elgin/Valparaiso Terminal Area, Florida.” Oh yeah, also, there is the Elgin E Military Operating Area (MOA) that overlies all the Elgin/Valparaiso restricted areas.

We called Elgin, and they were pretty busy, but they gave us clearance to transit the airspace. Off we went to get low and check out the brilliant white sands and tan lines. We didn’t really get that low, but at 1,500 to 2,000 feet it was easy to pick out Laguna Beach and Destin/Ft. Walton Beach. Then I spotted the Five Flag motel in Pensacola where my family and I vacationed several times. That was neat. And, guess what? Just inland, it was easy to recognize the Blue Angels parked on the ramp at Pensacola NAS.

Not too far further along the coast, we were routed out over the Gulf. The controller said he would not send us very far out. Do you remember that “one man’s ceiling is another man’s floor” thing? Man, I was not real comfortable with this. It’s amazing how many new



noises a single engine can make the further over water you get. It's like there is a "water below" indicator hooked up to the engine. Cusimano requested an altitude and heading change to be routed back a little closer to shore, which was approved after three A-10's (the military ones, not the Mitchell Wings) zoomed

their Doppler radar to us, and this along with our L.O.W. (Look Out the Window) system was very effective. Visibility was still more than 10 miles, even with the light rain. Finally, the lights of Dallas began appearing. We were handed off to Dallas Executive, which used to be called Redbird Airport, where the



***Certified flight instructor David Cusimano was still smiling at the end of his flight home in the T211 with his good friend, Scott Severen. —Photo courtesy of Scott Severen.***

toward us from inland and did a bee-swarming maneuver all around us. It was okay, we heard them chatting on the radio and knew they were coming and what they were up to. They didn't get real close, but it was pretty exciting! Now we understood why we were routed out.

Then, there was the C-130 cargo plane that passed below and slightly behind us. We were on flight following and everyone knew where everyone was at all times. All the interaction was very interesting, indeed.

Time to make a course change to the northwest, through Louisiana. We were generally keeping about a 10-knot tailwind, which kept our ground speed around 110+. Still, though, it would be dark when we got back to Dallas.

Crossing the Mississippi River, there were forest fires that Flight Service in Lakeland had advised us about. I was not too concerned with them, but at 4,500 feet and 6,500 feet smoke from the fires sure reduced visibility.

We finally made it to Columbia-Marion in Mississippi. This was nearly a 3-hour leg, and I usually prefer 2-hour legs, or about 200 miles. On approach, it looked pretty lonesome on the ground, but a very nice retired guy wandered over and tanked us up. Interesting about this airport were two Korean War-era fighter aircraft mounted on posts in the ground – an F86 and a T33. My dad would have gotten a kick out of these as he was a career Air Force fighter pilot. Having served in WWII, Korea and Vietnam, there were not many planes in the Air Force's inventory he hadn't flown when he retired.

After a soda, we crawled back in the Thorp and prepared to cross the Mississippi River, between Vicksburg and Baton Rouge. We took it as far as Natchitoches, Louisiana. Another nice, quiet, deserted-looking airport. We couldn't bring up anyone on Unicom, and didn't want to waste time and precious fuel on a chance, but it was a pretty good-sized facility. Sure enough, the very accommodating lineman said they were receiving but not sending on the radio. Glad we stopped! Then it was off to Dallas just 200 miles more.

Sure enough, it got dark later in the afternoon. Not only that, but the darkness was complemented with rain. The rain wasn't so threatening, but the towering clouds that were spitting it out were. So we executed a few jiggery-pokery paths and wound around the big stuff. It looked as though we were going to have to stop at Longview and wait the weather out till morning, but luck was with us. While there was no weather radar, Flight Service was very helpful in reading

Thorp T211 lives at Indus Aviation. Redbird has a nice sound to it, however, the Dallas city planners are renovating the area and Dallas Executive sounds much more business-like, doesn't it?

Transitioning down to a pattern altitude of 1,500 feet, it started getting a little bumpy. It was raining, and plenty dark. Going through the landing checklist, I noticed no reflection off the rain in front of the nose and no electrical load when I flipped the landing light switch to the "on" position.

It was time to invoke a procedure my flight instructor Tom Tweedale suggested (way back when Dallas Executive was called Redbird). Tweedale said, "When you're on approach at night, and you don't like what you see when you turn on the landing light, turn it off!"

Roger that, we had no landing light. There was a comment from somewhere in the cockpit that it was now time to finish paying for the spectacular flight we had almost completed. Turning on final, it took effort to stay somewhat aligned with the runway, let alone the centerline. I could tell Cusimano was almost relaxed. Fortunately, winds were from 130°, right up (and down) the runway, and at KRBD (at least they still use the old airport identifier) the long runway is 13/31 (6,451 feet of opportunity).

As we rocked and rolled into ground effect, things smoothed out a bit, and we made it comfortably on the ground – an exciting end to a spectacular trip. ✈

SCOTT SEVEREN (USUA 22) began flying hang gliders in 1973, is an FAA-rated SEL pilot and has since logged nearly 2,000 hours in powered and nonpowered air vehicles and craft of many types. Scott has served the ultralighting community as an original Part 103 ARAC committee member, USUA Advanced Flight Instructor and AFI/BFI Seminar Presenter. His aviation career includes founding Lone Star Airpark, serving as president of Light Aircraft Manufacturers Association, Airpark Owners and Operators Association, TEAM Aircraft and USUA. He lives with his wife and two children near Dallas, Texas.

Reprinted courtesy of  
*Ultralight Flying!* magazine,  
 PO Box 6009, Chattanooga, TN 37401.  
 Phone: (423) 629-5375 • Fax: (423) 629-5379  
 Website: [www.ultralightflying.com](http://www.ultralightflying.com)  
 e-mail: [contact@ultralightflying.com](mailto:contact@ultralightflying.com)