

# The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



## Vacation Flights

In the past couple of weeks I've taken two different trips. One was a fast camping trip to Yosemite by car. The other was a ride in a small plane, courtesy of State Farm Insuranceman Skip Tenney. In his "spare" time when he's not selling insurance, drumming with the Ragtimers band, or keeping up with his many responsibilities to his church, Skip likes to fly.

Being in Yosemite was, as always, a delight. I never tire of that magnificent valley and the "range of light," to use John Muir's words. A car is a necessity to get around Yosemite in a limited time. Leisurely weeks or months hiking across the hills are just not practical. But the automobile has its drawbacks. In some parts of Yosemite Valley you would think you were in downtown San Francisco except for the lack of parking meters. Between hairpin turns, crazy drivers, overcrowded roads, and road construction everywhere, driving is not completely relaxing.

After a couple of days of driving, the memories of that airplane trip made quite a contrast. You should understand that I am a great one for keeping my feet firmly on solid ground. I don't ride rollercoasters as a matter of policy, and I don't qualify as a daredevil by any stretch. It may have been 30 years since I'd been up in a small private plane. When Skip invited me I had to give it some thought. Should I extend my rollercoaster policy to cover...? I could find no logical reason to turn him down. The opportunity to take aerial photos of Pacifica over-

whelmed my reservations, and I found myself one recent Saturday on my way to Hayward Airport with Skip, his wife Marj, and my daughter Joan.

Skip Tenney has a way of putting ground-hugging cowards at ease. His meticulous checklist (gasoline — oil — instruments — radio, etc.) was immensely reassuring. If every general aviation pilot is as careful as Skip Tenney, it's no wonder general aviation is as safe as it is. For that matter, if all drivers were as careful each time they started on a trip as Skip and his fellow pilots, the roads would be appreciably safer.

After all the anticipation, we did have a disappointment. Pacifica was overcast, and cautious man that he is, Skip skipped that part of the trip. We flew west across the Bay, observed the crowded freeways and streets. The salt flats seem much larger from a plane. We went south, past the San Francisco watershed, past Stanford and the Linear Accelerator, past dry reservoirs that screamed "drought" more forcefully than any radio commercial, past the hill that the town of Morgan Hill is named for, then dropped in at the small airport at San Martin. Skip looked around for other planes, then put the little Cessna down on the runway with a casual smoothness.

My daughter and I were then introduced to a unique experience, a restaurant called the Flying Lady that features hundreds of model planes, including some full-size replicas of very old planes. Many of the models hang from a moving chain and move past diners, who can enjoy the food and the changing display of old airplanes at the same time.

The flight back to Hayward graphically reminded me how little space we actually use to live in, and how much area is occupied by hilly open space, like the hills east of the bayside plain. There is a kind of solitude up there, even though the plane is unavoidably snuggler than the smallest automobile. There are thousands of cars to every small plane, and while my gut fear may never quite go away, my logical brain tells me that with pilots like Skip Tenney, I want to do it again. Maybe next time I'll have the chance to fly over Pacifica.