



FLYING GOOFY

Life as a record-setting aerial ambassador

SPARKY BARNES SARGENT

Steve Wood, EAA 515839, has evolved into an international aerial ambassador of sorts by promoting flying opportunities for the disabled, EAA and Young Eagles, and homebuilding in general. It's not that he has been flying for decades or has logged a tremendous number of hours. It is, rather, how he's spent those hours aloft with his homebuilt GlaStar *Goofy* (N600FY) that has elevated him to new heights.

In 2007, Steve decided to try for a few aviation records, and soon one record led to another...and another. Today, he has established more Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) world records than any other British pilot, and he received The Air League's prestigious Scott-Farnie Medal in June 2008. The award recognizes "work in the field of air education" and was presented at St. James' Palace in London. Steve divides his time

watch the video



The Goofy GlaStar
www.EAA.org/video/eea.html

between Yorkshire, England, and the Spruce Creek Airport community in Florida. He's been flying since 1993, when he earned his FAA private pilot certificate in little more than two weeks' time in San Diego. After a five-year hiatus during which his professional career as a Fellow with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors demanded a good deal of his time, he resumed flying and earned his instrument rating. He has now logged more than 1,100 hours

in about 45 different airplanes.

Steve was actively associated with aviation even prior to his personal flying. He said that in 1991 he "put pressure on the United Kingdom [U.K.] government to set up a helicopter medical service in the U.K. And then I set up EAA Chapter 1168 in 1996, which was one of only two at the time in the U.K., and I got involved with flying Young Eagles—then I decided to fly disabled kids as opposed to able-bodied kids."

This quietly confident pilot expressed his motivation for flying disabled children in simple terms. "I've been lucky, and I hope I always will be, but these kids don't get the chance to experience what flying is like," he said. "We had limited resources in terms of the number of pilots in the chapter that I formed, so I thought, 'Well, let's put them to good use.' One of the events was at the Royal Air Force [RAF] Museum at Cosford, and we got children from special needs schools and hospices—the Air Force hosted them, and then I got a few pilots together to fly the kids. That's where I met Polly Vacher, and that's really how I started promoting experiences flying for the disabled."

To further his mission, he personally founded GreenHawk Trust as a charitable trust in the United Kingdom in 1998. The sole aim of the trust has been to provide Young Eagles flights for the disabled, disadvantaged, and life-limited children. To date, hundreds of children have been flown. And though he said he hasn't flown a large number of Young Eagles himself, he's made a significant contribution to the program nevertheless. "I usually set the events up and try to inspire other people to come join me," said Steve.

GOOFY THE GLASTAR

Steve, who had no prior experience building airplanes, chose a GlaStar kit for several reasons. "It had very safe flying characteristics, a good flying record, folding wings, and it gave the option of interchangeable gear so I could put regular gear or floats on the airplane. I also put extended range tanks in the wings [50 gallons total], with a provision for removable fuselage tanks, because my original idea was to complete it and fly around the world for the millennium, but it took a little bit longer than that to finish."

All told, Steve spent more than 4,000 hours building the airplane. In 1997, he began building it in the United Kingdom, where he had an arrangement to house it in the aero engineering department at Cambridge Regional College. "I went down there to work on it and let the students see how an airplane was put together," explained Steve. "That's one reason it took so long—I was traveling 150 miles each way, and

... N600FY was available, and I thought, 'Well I could have a bit of fun with that.'

I'd only do that one or two days a week." By November 2001, the airframe was finished and shipped to his vacation home at Spruce Creek Airport (7FL6), in Daytona Beach, Florida, where, with help from fellow EAA members and flying friends, the airplane was completed and took to the sky. It joined the list of EAA centennial celebration airplanes upon its completion in 2003.

As for how the moniker *Goofy* came about, Steve chuckled and said he "was just looking in the FAA database and found that N600FY was available, and I thought, 'Well I could have a bit of fun with that.' So that's where the color scheme came from, after I decided to use the number. I've got Goofy [a stuffed plush toy] riding with me as a copilot, and the kids love it!"

SUCCESSSES AND SETBACKS

In 2005, Steve undertook his first four corners flight around the "corners" of the lower 48 states—Key West, Florida; San Diego, California; Bellingham, Washington; and Bangor, Maine. He flew a Young Eagle at each of the four corners and traversed 10,000 miles in 10 days.

After that successful trip, he began planning a flight around the world in *Goofy* and installed a new, 200-plus-hp Eggenfellner engine, in place of the original 125-hp Continental. With his preparations completed in 2006, Steve climbed into his GlaStar after AirVenture and set out on his course with high hopes.

The unexpected occurred in short order. "The engine quit seven hours after I started the flight from Oshkosh. It had failed at the end of the AirVenture Cup air race and was repaired, and then suddenly it lost power while I was flying over the forests near Portsmouth in southern Ohio. Two years earlier I lost a very good friend when we were returning from breakfast on a gaggle flight



Goofy's namesake mascot checking instrument readings for accuracy.

and his engine failed and the aircraft hit a tree, so you can imagine what was going through my mind over the forests. I'd just filled up with gas and had been told there was nowhere to land, and there was none. Fortunately, it kept running with minimal power for a few minutes, and I got within 3 miles of Portsmouth airport, and then there was a catastrophic failure. There was a field in between some houses, and so I put it down there, hopping over

a barbed wire fence at the last minute into a soybean field—and there wasn't even a green mark on the airplane. Everything got transported to Hillsboro, and that was quite a good thing because there were some great EAA members there, and they let me use the airport hangar. I arranged for a new 160-hp Aerosport Power Lycoming IO-320, which was ready in just two weeks' time, and I was able to use the MT propeller which had always performed so flawlessly. I



Bonnie Kratz

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was funding the world flight myself, and all the money I had put aside went into those two engines."

Things were looking up for Steve in May 2007, when he set three international FAI world records for speed over a recognized course in only two days. "I flew from Orlando to London, London to Detroit, and London to New York—and I flew that last one in less time than the Concorde has done," he said with a teasing smile. "Just think about it—where might London be? London is in Canada!"

Yet he experienced another temporary setback in July 2007, when electronic ignition problems and weather prevented him from flying the AirVenture Cup air race and visiting AirVenture. Not one to be dismayed for long, the intrepid British pilot rerouted his second four corners flight and used it as an opportunity to raise awareness of Flying Scholarships for the Disabled, which is a U.K.-based charity (founded to honor the memory of Sir Douglas Bader, a disabled World War II fighter ace). He flew 10,019 miles in seven flying days, during which he set a

total of 26 FAI world speed records—now with 29 records to his name, he broke the record for the greatest number of FAI world records made in a U.S.-registered homebuilt aircraft. Averaging 1,431 miles per day during the flight, and based on the timings for his claimed world records, he also set a phenomenal number of city-to-city speed records—157 to be precise. But that's not all—he also set two transcontinental world records. One was from Vancouver, Canada, to Bangor, Maine, and the other was from Seattle, Washington, to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

INSTRUMENTS

One of the most useful instruments when it comes to world speed records, according to Steve, is the TruTrak two-axis autopilot. "You let it do the flying, and it's more accurate than a human in IMC [instrument meteorological conditions]. My panel is a bit antiquated because it was designed before the electronic equipment became readily available, and I originally had 'steam gauges' in there—but I've updated it and have done all the work myself."



The instrument panel features navigational aids useful for cross-country record breaking.

Bonnie Kratz

There's a whole lot more to record setting than just flying a declared course . . .

His panel is equipped for operation under instrument flight rules (IFR), including a King KLN 94 IFR-certified GPS, VAL digital instrument landing system, and Blue Mountain G3 electronic flight instrument system. "The Samsung Q1 has the Seattle Avionics Voyager EFB flight software program running WxWorx XM weather—basically it's a GPS weather system, which is essential for records, because you want to deviate as little as possible due to weather," he said. "Air Chart Systems chart atlases makes deviations a breeze. When I did the two transcontinental records, there was a long line of thunderstorms in North Dakota, and I was able to circumvent them, so that was very useful. I usually cruise



Steve at work in his hangar.

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Young Eagle refugee kids from Sarajevo (Bosnia) during "Young Eagles Day" at Leeds Bradford Airport, Yorkshire, England.



Kids from a children's hospice at nearby Oxford.



Kids from a local special needs school hosted by RAF Cosford and the RAF Museum.



Steve with life limited kids from Leeds Children's hospital.

at 130 knots, but at altitude I can cruise at 120 knots and burn only 6 gallons per hour, so I don't have to stop for fuel."

RECORD SETTING

There's a whole lot more to record setting than just flying a declared course, Steve said. "The flying is challenging enough, but doing the paperwork to get the records is something else," he explained. "It can take up to four months to get

the paperwork to FAI in the way that they'll accept it. You've got to notify them in advance, and the paperwork continues afterwards...quite a number of people fail on that hurdle, and though they've made the flight, they don't have the official papers that they need to qualify for the record. And the paperwork side of setting records is a nightmare; the flying is simple compared to that! And then, when you've set your records, the airplane's in aviation history."

For those pilots who aspire to set their own records, Steve shared that "anybody can set one—there are quite a number of different classes of records, and you can look for cities that haven't been flown between before. Each city has to be approved, and you just have to do your research to make sure that all the elements of the flight are approved. You can have one record, or you can have a hundred—it's just a matter of where you draw the line."

Steve himself hasn't yet drawn the line—he claimed half a dozen more international FAI world records in November 2007, when he made flights between the United States and the Bahamas. The following month, he claimed an additional 32 international FAI world records—again, between the United States and the Bahamas. In April 2008, he laid claim to 14 more FAI world records for flights between the United States and the Bahamas. From May 2007 through April 2008,

Steve set a phenomenal total of 197 city-to-city records, claiming 77 as official FAI world records.

And he's still going—in July 2008, he flew his third four corners flight, during which he set 27 more records, claiming 13 as world records, which will bring his total of FAI world records to 90 (exceeding the 87 FAI-listed records that Steve Fossett set). That's Steve's way of celebrating the RAF's 90th anniversary this year.

Reflecting on his numerous records,

Steve said, "I never intended to set as many records as I have done. I just started with a few, and then a few more, and then I found that if I set a few more, I could set the most records of any British pilot. So it's just gone on and on! I'm very proud; I've set potentially 90 world records, and I'm pleased that I've done it in a U.S.-registered homebuilt airplane. The point is to enjoy yourself when you're flying, and hopefully the publicity will now begin focusing attention on Able Flight in the U.S."

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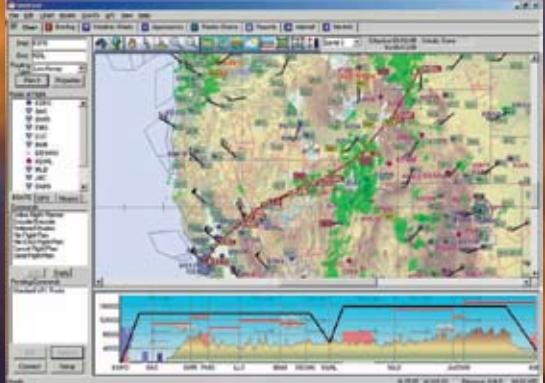
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Steve with another happy Young Eagle in Bangor, Maine.

FLYING FOR THE DISABLED

His overall goal is not just about claiming his own records, or records for Britain—it's about raising awareness for aviation experiences for the disabled. "I haven't been raising funds as such; instead I make plans to do something which can then get publicity. And all of a sudden, the airplane is becoming more important, in that nobody has flown a homebuilt to set as many records," said Steve, adding, "and equally, no other British pilot has set as many world records as I have. So what I'm hoping to do is get publicity for both the aircraft and myself, and then I can talk about flying for the disabled."

Steve's message is twofold; it's about giving the disabled a new challenge in life through aviation, and offering flights to disadvantaged and life-limited children. "Aviation is challenging intellectually, and flying is an achievement of something they probably never thought they would do, even when they were able-bodied. That's a separate idea from flying rides for disabled kids," explained Steve. "I would particularly like to work around children's hospitals, for example with kids who have cancer, in order to give them the determination to try and fight their problems by experiencing flights with EAA members."

SPIRIT OF ENDEAVOUR

Steve is immensely pleased to have his endeavors serve as a catalyst for awareness for the disabled, and while he's certainly proud of the number of records that he's set, there's another facet to his flying that is also significantly rewarding for him. That, he said, is "seeing the smile on the faces of the kids who have been up for a flight. There was one particular little girl who came to Spruce Creek on a Saturday, and we had to cancel our flights due to weather—she couldn't walk or speak, and you could see the disappointment on her face. I said, 'Well, come back tomorrow—I think it'll be all right to fly. So she came back and went flying, and the look on her face was amazing; she got out of the plane and walked, then said 'I fly, I fly!' She was so determined. That was quite unusual, but these are the things that make it worthwhile, really. They experience the sensation of flight in a different way than an able-bodied person—we've flown blind children as well, and they have a more heightened awareness, too."

While his GlaStar is affectionately known as *Goofy*, Steve has, a bit more formally, christened it the *Spirit of Endeavour*, as a tribute to Capt. James Cook and the astronauts who have flown in the space shuttle *Endeavour*. "The reason why," Steve shared with a

smile, "is that Capt. Cook came from Whitby, which is in Yorkshire, England, and I'm from Yorkshire. One day in 1996, when I was standing next to his statue watching the replica *Endeavour* sailing in to Whitby Harbour, I decided to build an airplane and fly to New Zealand, which is one of the places Cook landed during his voyage of discovery in the 1700s. So that's the reason why I've named my airplane the *Spirit of Endeavour*."

It's a fitting name for not only the airplane, but also for Steve, who embodies a determined and stalwart spirit in his aerial endeavors. And, under the newly revised 2008 FAI Sporting Code rules, Steve Wood has now achieved a rank of number one for the number of world records set by a pilot flying a homebuilt aircraft. 

Sparky Barnes Sargent holds private pilot and commercial certificates and a glider rating, and she personally restored her 1948 Piper Vagabond.

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