

Fog and a Technically Advanced Aircraft, November

We were booked in to have a demo flight with John Page in TAA UK's brand new fully loaded Cirrus SR20 GTS. We turned up at Denham in sub zero temperatures. Cold autumn days are ripe for fog, but a little wind is actually needed to mix the air and we were lucky being one of the few places in South East England which was clear.

After looking at the weather and phoning around we found that Shoreham on the South coast was fairly clear. It's quite rare that you get a day where both departure and destination airfield are OK but most of the area in between is under a layer of fog. Getting into the matt black cockpit during the pre-flight preparations, Charlie remarked that it was like being in a "James Bond" aircraft - and indeed with the number of gadgets it really was (it even has a parachute).

G-TAAA is one of the first British (G or "Golf") registered Cirrus aircraft in Europe, and has been acquired by TAA UK for flight training and rental. It is "fully loaded" with a Primary Flight Display, a Multifunction Display, TCAS and even has TAWS, a Terrain Avoidance Warning System. The flight was spectacular both because of the aircraft and the rarity of flying for an extended period over fog. There were some spectacular views on the way down - we passed over Farnborough where there was a small hole and we could make out the apron and control tower. Passing south of Midhurst the fog started to reduce and we saw a hot air balloon recently lifted. Approaching Shoreham we flew low level towards the South Downs so that John could demonstrate the TAWS system. Using GPS terrain data the MFD paints a picture of the terrain ahead and when a potential collision is evident a "PULL UP" message is generated.

At Shoreham we stopped for tea and coffee and Charlie and I swapped seats. Although Charlie has been checked out in FreeFlight's SR20 for a while, it is older and has a conventional six pack of instruments, so this was her first go with a Primary Flight Display, as well as the TAWS system.

On the way back the fog had started to clear, however west of the Chiltern Hills the lower ground was covered for miles around. We diverted towards Didcot power station which was buried in the fog and blasting cloud of steam from the cooling towers up through the fog bank. Also nearby was a bubble of dark smoke protruding from the fog like the Loch Ness monster in a sea of white. Although the cooling towers are invisible at 325ft, you can just see the main chimney (650ft) in the closeup picture.

For more pictures, visit the Fog Gallery in the Weather and Meteorology section at FotoFlight.