

KOEHLER KORNER

This month I will again confess to a personal error, but I do it to hopefully pass down the experience so that you will have a lessoned chance of doing the same thing.

I have just returned from AirVenture 2025 (AV25) and this event occurred as part of that trip. On the Friday prior to AV25 I flew to St. Mary's Airport (near NAS Patuxent River) MD to pick up two friends there. Did an RON at Bill and Genie's house and launched on Saturday with Bill (Pos) and Dave B, an engineer and program manager with the Naval Air Systems Command. All three of us are A&Ps, by the way. The trusty Mooney was near max gross weight, and fuel limited, so we stopped at Findley, Ohio (KFDY) for fuel and free hot dogs, then on to Fon du Lac (KFLD) with an IFR arrival slot. All went well, and it turned out we were about the fifth long term parking plane at KFLD, so we were parked way out west on the grass just south of RWY 09-27, which was NOTAMed closed.

A friend picked us up and we were off to AV25. Sunday we prepped for the Composite 101 class, including making 850 composite kits and setting up for the two day SportAir Electricity Workshop that I also taught. We were busy all week, doing 13 Composite classes, six special lunch presentations, the Electricity Workshop, and assisting in a Sheet Metal SportAir Workshop. We wrapped-up on Sunday morning, packed everything for next year and were driven back to KFLD to fly home. The Mooney had been sitting out on grass for eight days and was now one of the last to leave. We did a thorough preflight, including fuel sumps and an oil quantity check via the dipstick. Just as I was buttoning the cowl up I was distracted by one of the guys having concern that the plane had sunk in the sod and might be hard to taxi out, so all four of us (including driver) decided to push the plane a couple of feet out of the ruts. I was distracted from my oil check job!

All three of us piled in the plane, fired it up, got taxi and IFR clearances, and blasted off for the first leg of the flight home. Since we were heavy and it was hot, climb was slow and laborious up to 7000 feet. Just after we went feet-wet over Lake Michigan, Dave in the right seat pointed out that oil was leaking out of the oil filler access door on the right cowl and starting to stream down the right windows!

I am embarrassed to say that I knew instantly what had happened. The oil dipstick was back at KFLD somewhere in the grass where we were parked. I confessed to ATC, did a 180 and got a clearance back to KFLD. I did not declare an emergency since I knew the oil loss would be minimal, but messy. This is what I was greeted with when we stopped in the area where I had left the dipstick:



Although the plane looks very messy, in reality I only lost about eight ounces of oil. We spent several anxious minutes searching the grass field in which the Mooney had been parked until finally I found the errant dipstick in about six inches of grass and clover. Looking back at the picture above, you might see that by the time of the photo, I had put the dipstick back in place. It is the yellow dot in the top center of the oil door.

We cleaned the plane with paper towels, bought some more fuel, filed another IFR flight plan, and launched off again on our way on an otherwise uneventful flight home via KFDY.

Lessons learned:

1. After being distracted, do a double recheck of everything.
2. Do not panic if you happen to leave off the dipstick. You will create an oily mess, but the oil lost will not be great. We lost about eight ounces in 45 minutes. Fly the plane. Land where appropriate, not necessarily immediately.
3. Tell your passengers to bring anything unusual to your attention immediately.

I hope this discussion of my mistake helps you more successfully understand, operate, and maintain your plane.

Keep building, flying, and maintaining.

Dick

08/2025