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Small plane from Germany crosses the Bering Strait

Cessna's longest non-stop flight takes around eleven hours

Private pilots on a tour of the world in a single-engine Cessna: 52,000 kilometres (28,000 nautical miles), 30 countries and 50 landings in 80 days. Ferry tanks installed for the Petropavlovsk to Nome leg. Crossing the date line.

On August 25 Russian time (August 24 German time) there will be red roses over the Bering Strait, when pilot Uwe Thomas Carstensen (60) and his co-pilot Hans Christian Albertsen (59) fly roughly eleven hours non-stop from Russia to Alaska on their round-the-world trip. The skin of their Cessna T260H is adorned with pictures of red roses and the name "Marie" – the pilot's declaration of love to his wife Maria Carstensen.

Total concentration and full tanks to meet the challenge

The flight from the Russian city of Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatkan peninsula to Nome in Alaska is one of the most exciting aviation challenges on this world tour. The pilots have planned a flight time of roughly eleven hours for the 2400-kilometre (1300 NM) long route. However, small planes are strongly affected by even the slightest changes in wind speed and wind direction, so that the flight could just as easily take ten or twelve hours. This leg not only calls for total concentration from the two pilots, but also means that they have to sit still for an extremely long time. They have already practised a few small gymnastic exercises in the cramped cockpit on previous flights, which are also aimed at preventing risks to their health such as deep-vein thrombosis.

Even with the extra fuel tanks in the tips of the wings, the Cessna still has a range of only 1850 kilometres (1000 NM). During the stopover in Sydney, the pilots had an additional tank installed in the hold. These "ferry tanks" are used by Australian pilots when bringing small planes from the USA to Australia.

Your personal contact:

Uwe Jahns
Jott & Pee Marketing
Kommunikation Werbung GmbH
Berliner Allee 46
D-30175 Hannover
Phone +49 (0) 5 11 538 398 - 21
Fax +49 (0) 5 11 538 398 - 22
jahns@jottundpee.de

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Marie's fuel tanks had to be filled completely in Asahikawa in Japan, as the special Avgas (aviation gasoline) required by the Cessna is not available in Petropavlovsk.

Safety equipment helps in an emergency

Even though the pilots are well prepared and the plane is perfectly equipped, it is still not possible to rule out potential complications on such a long flight. For example, if the pilots encounter engine problems at an altitude of 4000 metres, the construction of the Cessna T206H means that it would still be able to glide for roughly another 40 kilometres. Before each leg across the sea, the pilots don waterproof survival suits which also have a radio beacon to indicate their position in case of a forced landing at sea. The signal is picked up by satellite and transmitted to the rescue services. They also have a small life raft on their belt which inflates automatically when the release cord is pulled. The safety equipment also includes a desalinator, which can be used to filter sea water into drinking water by means of reverse osmosis, a stroboscope flash, emergency flares, chemical emergency lights and a Breitling wristwatch with integrated emergency transmitter.

Crossing the date line

During the flight over the Bering Strait, the small rose-painted plane will cross the date line on the 180th meridian. This is the point where the positive and negative deviation of local times from standard international time (UTC) meet. This leg of the flight will begin in Petropavlovsk at 9:00 h local time on 25 August and the pilots expect to land in Nome at 22:00 h local time on 24 August. In other words, Carstensen and Albertsen will live through August 25 twice.

World tour began in mid-March

Carstensen and Albertsen are the 139th crew since 1924 to fly round the world in a single-engine small plane. Their adventure began in Germany in mid-March. The flight route has taken them across South-East Europe, the Middle East, Pakistan, India and South-East Asia, right across the Australian continent to Sydney, where the first leg of this round-the-world flight ended after 22,000 kilometres.

On August 1, the rose-painted plane set off on the second leg,



Your personal contact:

Uwe Jahns
Jott & Pee Marketing
Kommunikation Werbung GmbH
Berliner Allee 46
30175 Hannover
Telefon +49 (0) 5 11 538 398 - 21
Telefax +49 (0) 5 11 538 398 - 22
jahns@jottundpee.de



which is 30,000 kilometres long. This time, the route goes from Australia via Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, China, Taiwan and Japan to Russia. On the American continent, the pilots will land in Alaska and Canada, then continue over Greenland, Iceland and Great Britain back to Germany. This extraordinary journey is scheduled to end in Hanover on September 14.

For information about the entire flight route, the pilots' travelogues, logbook entries and background information about this round-the-world flight visit www.globeflight-rallye.com.



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