

# Reminiscing about air racing



**Donna Davis** talks about her days as an air race pilot as she holds up a photo of a Cessna 172 that she owned.

**Mark DiOrto**  
Daily Sun

## VILLAGER WOULD FLY IN 816-MILE RACES FROM CALIFORNIA TO OREGON

The Villages Daily Sun  
Monday, January 28, 2008  
By Azia Li Forrest

Donna Davis can recall the day she wanted to learn how to fly.

The Village of Summerhill resident used to work for a construction company in Southern California and her boss flew airplanes.

"I remember his wife looking at me one day and saying, 'If something happened to him, I don't know what I'd do,'" she said. "I was married to a pilot as well, and I thought it was time for me to find out what I could do if I ever lost my husband."

So in 1973, Davis trained to receive her private certificate and then bought an aircraft, a Cessna 172. She became a single-engine land and sea certified flier.

In 1975, she joined the Ninety-Nines, International Organization of Women Pilots, a group founded by Amelia Earhart in 1929.

"They asked me if they could race my plane," she said. "I knew nothing about air racing."

However, once she tried it, she was hooked. She thought it was exciting.

As an air racer, Davis mostly participated in the Palm to Pines, starting at the palm trees in California and ending at the pine trees in Oregon. She flew the 816 miles in two days, always finishing in the top 10.

"It's because I had good aircraft," she said. "I have a good sense of concentration and stayed focused."

She explained that air racing is all about exceeding the handicap established for your aircraft, or the ground speed. It's similar to auto racing.

"Navigation is the key," she added.



Submitted photo  
Audrey Schutte and Donna Davis  
were race partners in the late 1970s.

Davis said it was a tradition for pilot and co-pilot to dress alike, and because her plane was blue and white, she and her co-pilot would match the aircraft. Although she considered the air racing to be a lot of fun, she didn't let that distract her from winning.

"Me and my partner always had a firm statement commitment," she said. "Whatever is said in the cockpit is left inside. We never revealed our strategies because it plays a big part in winning."

She said weather also played a big part, recalling times when she had to stand on the ramp and wait for hours in Santa Monica because of inclement weather.

"As a pilot, when you're flying, you're always looking for a place to land your plane," she said. Her husband of 25 years, Mike Davis, also owned an aircraft – a Piper Comanche 250 – and has 15 years of flying experience. He said he's proud of his wife's accomplishments.

"She's excelled in her flight training," he said. "She could have made a great commercial flier."

But, he doesn't suggest she go back into flying.

The dynamics of aviation have changed over the years," he said. "We wouldn't want to change those experiences."



Submitted photo  
Donna Davis flies her Cessna 172 at the Santa Monica, Calif., airport in 1976.

Davis said she stopped air racing in the late 1980s. When she looks at pictures and trophies, she misses flying.

"I love the independence it gave me, but don't miss writing the checks," she said. "Air racing was something I used to do."

However, it's not something to be forgotten.

"Now when people see my pin with numbers '99' in gold they ask, 'Do you fly?'" she said.