

# MULTITTA



## **THE SPORTSMAN 2+2 IS AN ADVENTURE LOOKING FOR SOMEPLACE TO GO**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SCOTT M. SPANGLER

# SKINNING



The Sportsman called *Gumby* stands proud on its Alaskan Bushwheels and extends an open invitation on the ramp at Tok, Alaska.



✦ **Bound for Anchorage, Alaska,** I'm number two in a flight of five, behind another Glasair Aviation Sportsman 2+2 in the run-up area at the Arlington, Washington, Municipal Airport (AWO). Waiting for the three GlaStars to join us and perform their before-takeoff checks, my mind sequences related thoughts.

I first flew this airplane, on tricycle gear, at Sun 'n Fun. Like its predecessor, the GlaStar, Sportsman N345GS was a docile airplane on the ground and in the air. Apply full pedal in slow flight and it motors happily along sideways instead of flipping you a wing and snapping into a stall-spin. (Not that any pilot should ever abuse its forgiving character—like any airplane it will punish the careless.)

With the stick full

in a power-off stall the Sportsman maintains positive control in all axes, nodding its nose slightly as it descends at 800 fpm. Power-on stalls have a more pronounced break, and the engine and prop's rotating forces can cause a wing to drop. Stall recovery is standard: reduce the angle of attack and add power as needed.

But how will N345GS behave as *Gumby*, a taildragger on 31-inch Alaskan Bushwheels? In the air I expect the same friendly airplane, but it's May 2005—and I don't remember when I last flew a tailwheel. Then a scarier thought:

Will anyone show up for my presentation at the Alaska State Aviation Trade Show & Conference? Will I be there? It's three days and 1,500 miles to Anchorage.

Stop. Focus on the airplane. The Rule of Threes prevails. The Sportsman has three configurations: tricycle, tailwheel (or skis), and floats. There are three parts to the kit: tail, wing, and fuselage/finish. You





**In an hour two  
guys can change  
the Sportsman  
from a tricycle to  
a taildragger to a  
floatplane.**

Opposite page: With his hand on Nick Reid's shoulder, Harry DeLong makes a point during a preflight briefing, with Ted Setzer, Mikael Via, Dave Ammenti, and Todd Uecker.

Top: At Lillooet a member of the flight of five carries his gear to the airplane.

Left: At Terminus Mountain, Rainbow, the pastel-striped zebra waits patiently on top of the gear unloaded for the night, and before *Gumby* dropped in on Gravel Bar International, just up the Kechika River.

## AIRCRAFT DATA

### GLASAIR AVIATION SPORTSMAN 2+2—N345GS

**CERTIFICATION:** Amateur-built Experimental

**EQUIPPED:** IFR/Night

**LENGTH:** 23 ft

**LENGTH** (wings folded): 24 ft, 8 in

**WINGSPAN:** 35 ft

**WINGS FOLDED & TAIL REMOVED:** 8 ft, 6 in

**WING AREA:** 131 ft<sup>2</sup>

**HEIGHT** (tricycle): 9 ft, 4 in

**HEIGHT** (tricycle, wings folded): 7 ft, 1 in

**HEIGHT** (tailwheel): 6 ft, 11 in

**SEATS:** 2+2

#### MAXIMUM GROSS WEIGHT

(wheels): 2,350 lbs

#### MAXIMUM GROSS

**WEIGHT** (floats): 2,500 lbs

**EMPTY WEIGHT:** 1,350 lbs

**FUEL CAPACITY:** 50 gal

**BAGGAGE** (maximum): 300 lbs

#### WING LOADING

(wheels, max gross): 17.9 lbs/ft<sup>2</sup>

**STRUCTURAL LIMIT LOADS:** 3.8g/-1.5g

**POWERPLANT:** Lycoming O-360 Series

**HORSEPOWER:** 180

**PROPELLER MAKE & TYPE:** Hartzell CS

**CRUISE SPEED:** 137 kts/158 mph (TAS; 75% power; 8,000 feet MSL; 8.5 gph)

**POWER LOADING:** 0.08 hp/lb

**POWERPLANT:** Lycoming IO-390 Series

**HORSEPOWER:** 210

**PROPELLER MAKE & TYPE:** Hartzell CS

**CRUISE SPEED:** 147 kts/169 mph (TAS; 75% power; 8,500 feet MSL; 10.5 gph)

**POWER LOADING:** 0.09 hp/lb

**V<sub>H</sub> [SEA LEVEL, TAS]:** 145 kts/167 mph

**V<sub>NO</sub>:** 144 kts/166 mph

**V<sub>A</sub>:** 101 kts/116 mph

**V<sub>S</sub>:** 51 kts/58 mph

**V<sub>SO</sub>:** 42 kts/48 mph

**V<sub>X</sub>:** 75 kts/86 mph

**V<sub>Y</sub>:** 85 kts/97 mph

**V<sub>FE</sub>:** 90 kts/103 mph

**DATA SOURCE:** Sportsman Pilot  
Operating Handbook

**PRICE** (complete standard kit, without  
crating & shipping): \$39,950

#### For more information:

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can build it three ways: standard kit, quick-build, or even quicker at Glasair's Arlington Customer Assembly Center (CAC; see sidebar, "Two Weeks to Taxi").

We're ready. A bit of power and differential braking kept me behind Glasair President Mikael Via and R&D Manager Ted Setzer in Sportsman N105TW. Except for its fuel-injected 180-hp Lycoming, smaller 8:50 main wheels, and larger back

**Then reality  
crystallized: The  
Sportsman is  
more capable as  
an airplane than  
I am as a pilot  
and, oh, what fun  
could we have  
as I worked to  
make my skills  
its equal.**

door, it's identical to the prototype I share with Glasair demo-pilot/sales associate (and CFI) Harry DeLong, who adds an item to my multi-tasking mind: "Keep it straight and let me know when you get to 45 knots."

Despite our max gross weight and high-friction tires, *Gumby* surprised me. With full throttle we surged forward. A few rudder taps kept us straight. "Airspeed alive," I

called, and then... "45 knots."

Harry made magic by pulling the lever between us, extending all 35 degrees of Fowler flap. One second we're rolling past the fifth 100-foot marker, and then we're 15 feet closer to the overcast that postponed our morning departure.

In trail, we flew I-5 to Abbotsford, British Columbia (CYXX), and Canadian Customs. Behind us were GlaStar family members who vowed not to miss Glasair's next Alaska adventure, Nick Reid and Todd Uecker from Port Townsend, Washington, and Californians Dave Ammenti and daughter Lisa of San Mateo, and Dave Prizio of Tustin, and Tom Borden of Redwood City.

With the constant-speed prop turning 2500 rpm on 22 inches of manifold pressure, we're at 65 percent power. With normal tires we'd be cruising at 130 knots, but

*Gumby's* big feet cost us

15 knots (but we're still

10 knots faster than the

Cessna 172 I rent). The tall tires also make mounting up a challenge for the short-legged, but I could call the cabin home.

Harry and I are extra-large guys, but the cockpit, 44 inches wide at the hips and 46 inches at the shoulders, did not make us conjoined twins. An extra cushion let me see over *Gumby's* extra nose-high three-point stance, but the skylights were still 5 inches above my head. Reaching from elbow to forehead, the door's convex picture windows gave us even more room, and a great view. *Gumby's* IFR panel is low and wide, but we didn't look at it much because what was outside was more compelling; rivers, forest, and mountains. Behind, on top of a mountain of gear, was Rainbow, Harry's talisman for a safe journey, the pastel-striped zebra that belongs to his little girl, Lindsey.

A crosswind put Abbotsford off center in the windshield. Harry seemed unconcerned about my impending landing; his hands and feet weren't vultures hungry for the controls. His confidence came from



tions. Guided by two CAC employees, the Moores work without wasted time from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call it tag-team home-building. While one instructor guides Al through a task, the other cleans up the task just finished and prepares the next one. Like an operating room, production grade fixtures and tools are organized for immediate use.

“The CAC guys are sharp—and patient,” Al says, adding that he’s learning how to maintain and inspect his Sportsman as he’s building it. “I don’t know how people do this at home with no one to ask.”

Ann’s involvement was an unexpected CAC benefit. She started asking questions, asking to try things, Al says, “and it just tickled the hell out of me.” Before she drove the last two rivets in the wing they painted them with nail polish.

Across the shop, Ann is prepping door brackets. “I didn’t think I’d get this involved, but it’s fun,” she says, proudly adding that she found the Arlington hangar where they’ll keep the Sportsman until Al retires. “This was his dream, and now I’m part of it...I can’t wait to fly!”

## RIVER RUNNING

Out of Abbotsford we flew up the Fraser River, British Columbia’s longest. Most of its 850 miles heads north, bisecting the province, a seam that binds the snow-dusted mountains that rose above us on both sides and was our 100-mile straight-in approach to Lillooet, British Columbia (CAR 3). Wingtip strobes winked in the overcast gloom, and Runway 32’s wet asphalt gleamed like a 3,990-foot strip of steel. *Gumby* stuck to it like a magnet.

Only 8 p.m., it seemed that Lillooet’s 2,800 souls had turned in. Calling around for dinner, Dina’s Place said it would mount a Greek feast for us, and we crammed ourselves into two Triple K Cabs. With our bellies full, we spread our sleeping bags on the airport office floor and porch. During the night rain washed the sky nearly clean of clouds.

Chill air made the morning unwell-



Heading up the Trench, Mikael Via and Harry DeLong in the flight’s other Sportsman take a closer look at the river and its gravel bars.

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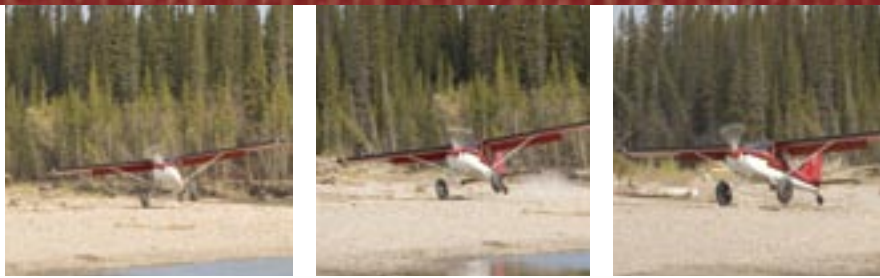
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Ted Setzer puts *Gumby* down in a right-hand turn to avoid obstacles—and the river.

come, but adventure awaited. It's Trench day. *Gumby's* preflight was traditional, except for verifying the security of the robust pins that lock its folding wings in place. Not only were they secure, they, and everything else in the cabin, were dry, including Rainbow, who slept on the cockpit floor.

*Gumby's* big feet put the wing tank sumps just within my 8-foot reach, and they, too, were water free. Ted Setzer, who stands an inch shy of 6 feet, joked that I should be standard equipment, but agreed that a stool weighed less. We'd be flying together, and Harry would be with Mikael, so we rookies could learn from the veterans.

There are two routes to Alaska:


the highway from Dawson Creek to Tok, Alaska, or the Trench, which is shorter but has a 350-mile fuel-free leg through the river valley wilderness between Mackenzie (CYZY) and Watson Lake (CYQH). Because I've followed roads before, I hoped good weather would send us into the wilderness. Fuel wasn't a concern. Sipping its 50 gallons at 8.5 gph, the Sportsman would cover the distance with time to spare, and so would the 160-hp GlaStars. Mother Nature granted our wish, and *Gumby*, with the recommended one notch of flaps, happily lifted off the pavement.

We landed 90 miles upriver at Williams Lake (CYWL), for fuel. Boreal forest, checkerboarded by clear-cut

logging, undulated below us for most of the 200 miles to our next fuel stop. On our way to lunch at the Mackenzie Mall we passed the world's largest tree crusher, a 175-ton yellow behemoth that cleared scrub timber from the Rocky Mountains when the Bennett Dam was being built in the 1960s.

Behind the dam is Lake Williston, North America's largest man-made reservoir. From Mackenzie we sailed up its ice-sheathed Parsnip Reach to the Finlay River—and the Trench. In minutes civilization dropped below the horizon and we were specks on a wilderness ocean, clean and untouched. It was a place few people had been, and few airplanes provided a better view.

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Navigation wasn't a worry. Better than GPS, we had the river. We passed the time looking for critters, keeping score of who saw the first moose, caribou, swans, or elk. With his hunter's eye, Ted led the pack. When I couldn't see the grizzly bear, *Gumby* patiently stood on a wing until my eyes caught up to his.

My gaze frequently found *Gumby's* wing-root fuel gauges. They measure the contents of each 15-gallon main tank, not the outboard 10-gallon auxiliaries that feed the mains via an electric pump. Seeking more knowledge, I reached for the Sportsman's professional and thorough operating manual.

Based on a stock 180-hp Sportsman, in nine sections the manual covers everything from General Information and Emergency Procedures to Weight & Balance and Flight Test. My search ended in Normal Operating Procedures: Fuel Management: "Turning on the pumps with more than 10 gals in the mains risks pumping fuel overboard through the vents. It takes the pumps approximately 20 minutes to drain the auxiliary tanks."

Located under the glare shield and left of the avionics, the switches glow when you activate the pumps. Watching the needles on the main tank gauges climb back toward full is a comforting sight when wilderness is all you see from horizon to horizon.

## GRAVEL BAR INTERNATIONAL

On their first Alaskan adventure Mikael and Ted met the owner of Terminus Mountain, a rustic hunting lodge on the Kechika River halfway up the Trench. We had permission to spend the night, and Ted deftly put *Gumby* down on its uphill gravel strip carved into a stand of tall trees.

The next morning, while the others enjoyed a leisurely breakfast, Ted took Nick in *Gumby* (empty except for survival gear) for a gravel bar checkout. Then it was my turn. Ted returned to "Gravel Bar International," a level 100-by 1,000-foot field of river rock peach pits and oranges. Breathe. I've landed in less space—but never on rocks in a

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Alaskan lakes still have hard water in May, and this sheet led to a glacier that's slowly flowing out of the mountains.

river valley wilderness. Fly a normal pattern, Ted says. Okay. Because the Sportsman is a slick bird, it doesn't slow down like a Cessna; my goal is to be at the 75-knot pattern speed when abeam the touchdown point. I almost made my goal.

Well within the 42- to-90-knot white arc, I pull on the first notch of flaps. Slowing to 65 knots after turning base I pull half-flaps, and—when a dry arrival was assured—full flaps. Because the Sportsman doesn't float like the airplanes I usually fly, I aim for 60 knots on short final and pull the power to idle as we cross the threshold.

*Gumby's* Bushwheels made the rocks feel like macadam. We had room to stop and go, but we stopped. Stepping off the gravel bar's size in different directions Ted and I enjoyed the silence. Only the river spoke in whisper. A pavement pilot from "down south," I was feeling pretty proud. At my feet I found a memento of my accomplishment: a stone, its charcoal and vanilla striations polished by the river.

I babbled about *Gumby's* capabilities after making a short-field takeoff from where we stopped (full flaps, lift off at 42 knots, accelerate to V<sub>y</sub> in ground effect, and climb), and Ted smiled. He'd spotted our next gravel bar and prepared to recalibrate my impressions.

After careful examination for obstacles on the approach and on the surface, he put *Gumby* on maybe 700 feet of granite oranges and grapefruit, landing in a right-hand turn to keep dry and avoid the tangled driftwood snags on our right. We stopped with

**TWO WEEKS TO TAXI**

In homebuilding history are events that changed the way we build airplanes. First was the kit, led by the Christen Eagle, and then quick-build kits. Glasair Aviation is taking the next major step with Two Weeks to Taxi. That's how long it'll take for a quick-built Sportsman to leave the company's Customer Assembly Center under its own power, says Glasair President Mikael Via.

What makes this possible are the choices builders will make before starting work. From a list of pre-built choices, they'll pick an instrument panel, a Lycoming engine, and a prop. All the VFR and IFR panels will be all glass, and the 210-hp Lycoming IO-390 may be on the engine list.

Glasair beta-tested the program by assisting a customer in his assembly and test flight of a Sportsman in 18 working days. The inaugural IO-390 installation added the extra time, Via says, but it was worth it because initial tests are revealing "phenomenal" performance.

"Bundled" pricing is another innovative aspect of the program. Because everything needed to fly is included, builders will know the airplane's true cost before they build it, Via says, adding that Glasair also offers financing. Before flying, builders must complete the necessary operational and safety checks before the FAA inspection.

To verify compliance with the "51 percent rule," Glasair invited the FAA to inspect Two Weeks to Taxi. The FAA assigned a DAR, who blessed it without reservation, Via says. If builders continue without a break, they could be flying within a month of starting Two Weeks to Taxi, and in homebuilding, "that's about as close as you'll get to immediate gratification."

room to spare.

Leaving me behind to capture a different perspective, his next landing was just even more spectacular. Then reality crystallized: The Sportsman is more capable as an airplane than I am as a pilot but, oh, what fun could we have working to make my skills its equal.

## ON THE ROAD TO ANCHORAGE

Leaving Terminus Mountain we followed the Kechika River to Watson Lake, gateway to the Yukon, Mile 635 of the Alaska Highway—and fuel. Down low we danced with the river, and *Gumby* was the perfect partner. Pitch, roll, and yaw play well together, and one requires no more attention than another. Cables conveyed my inputs to the control surfaces without slack or noticeable friction, and I felt lithe and carefree.

Refueled, we get on the Alaska Highway, climbing to our highest altitude so far—7,500 feet—to jump a mountainous oxbow. We take the Northway, Alaska (ORT), exit to clear U.S. Customs, and then make a quick 35-mile run to Tok, Alaska (6K8). Most of our party went across the street to the motel. Nick, Todd, Ted, and I camped and cooked next to the transient ramp. We talked until sunset at 11:30 p.m., and listened to the airport beacon squeak on its white side.


Preparing for our final leg to Anchorage *Gumby* attracted a lot of attention. The bush pilots' questions were pragmatic, about how it performed and what it could carry. They liked the welded-steel tube safety cage that connected the wings, powerplant, and fuselage, but they wondered how well the Sportsman's composite shell would withstand abuse. Their skepticism diminished upon learning this was *Gumby's* second trip north, and that it spends a lot of time in the backcountry. Scrutinizing it closely they found nothing more than the usual scrapes and scratches. Several surreptitiously rapped the tailcone in attempts to audibly detect the multiple reinforcing laminates Ted mentioned when addressing *Gumby's* durability.


Just 240 miles separate Tok from

the gravel strip at the Lake Hood Seaplane Base at Ted Stevens Anchorage International (ANC). We must have flown twice that distance, detouring to explore something not seen down south: serial glaciers. Big ones. The Matanuska Glacier measures 4 by 24 miles, and the ethereal blue ice entranced us.

The subdivision of our attention increased as we neared Anchorage. An AM radio announcer must have recorded Lake Hood's ATIS; it seemed appropriate for an airport that mixes an endless stream of jumbo freighters

with an uncountable herd of floatplanes, Super Cubs, and Skywagons. The controller cleared us to land with a hearty, "Welcome to Anchorage!"

Shutting down on the transient ramp we all multitasked our new priorities. Check in with loved ones. Unpack the airplanes. Get *Gumby* ready for display. Mentally rehearse presentations. Look for a ride to the hotel. Thank everyone for an amazing voyage. Connect with Chapter 1390 in Homer, my next stop. Bid them all a safe flight home. Wish I were in *Gumby* going with them. 



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