

NY Black-Out, Mooney Style

My Personal Black-Out Experience

Firstwords: *If you are like us, you were probably wondering what it was like to be flying a Mooney into or out of the "black-out" Northeast. Listen to a fellow Mooniac tell us how he got out of town the day the lights went out. Who knows, someday if it goes dark where you live....*

BY RON SCHNELL

I was on the 17th floor at an office on 31st Street and Park Ave South when the lights went out. Unfortunately, my hotel was the Essex House on Central Park South, and a considerable distance west of there. So I walked down the stairs and the several miles to the hotel with my laptop and associated hardware. On my way to the hotel I remembered 1977 and the violence, etc., and decided that this was one of the reasons to have your own plane. I was determined to get somewhere with power before night-fall. The two major problems were that I only had \$41 in cash (with no way to get additional cash), the rest of my luggage was on the 15th floor of the hotel. My muscles were sore enough from walking that I didn't think I'd be able to make it up to my room and back down before

nighttime. There were no taxis taking fares, so it would be difficult to get to the White Plains airport. I decided to just take these problems one step at a time.

My first realization was that in times like these, the difference between \$40 and \$0 is nothing. If you don't have several hundred dol-

down. Then I started working on the

doorman. I told him I needed to get to White Plains airport, and it probably would have to be a limo since they can sometimes take an

etching of a credit card. We spent the next hour and a half flagging down limos who would not even consider taking me. Everyone just wanted to go home, and I guess even the limos that take credit cards at least phone them in to check their validity, which they couldn't do because there was no cell service. At

8 pm I decided to give up on this tactic and see if I could hitch a ride with a stranger. Before

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*Looking up 8th Avenue at Sunset
Photo by Tony Hightower*

lars, you might as well have nothing. So I paid a bellman \$40 of my \$41 to go up to my room, pack my bags for me, and bring them back



*A Helicopter flies over NYC during the Black-Out
Photo by Tony Hightower*

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I could implement that plan, a different bellman came down and told the doorman he was going home. The doorman joked with him that he should take me to White Plains before he went home, and they both had a pretty good laugh over it. I said, "I'll give you \$200," and he said, "Okay, let's go!" I also told him that he would have to trust me to FedEx him the money, and gave him my business card and he said that was okay and that he trusted me.

We had an interesting ride up to White Plains, driving through the city, through Harlem, The Bronx, etc. It was really a party atmosphere, and everyone was having a good time. The traffic was

(Panorama) was surprised to see me and seemed dubious about my ability to actually leave. I had heard on the radio that the 3 NYC major airports were "closed," but knowing

surprisingly light, and it only took us an hour and a half to get there. The FBO

how the media interprets things, I didn't read anything into that. So, I went out to the plane and started the engine. I called ground control and they told me about the "2 hour ground stop" in effect, and how it will "probably be much longer because they are having generator problems at New York Center." He also said that they were giving Class B clearances to aircraft flying locally, but not for long distances. I assumed that my trip to Miami would not be considered local. So I asked about straight VFR flight without Class B clearance, and the controller told me that I could try that if I want. I told him I wanted to taxi for departure and that I was planning a northbound departure. I wanted to head north, at least for

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*Outside Grand Central Station
Photo by Tony Hightower*

THE ROAMING MOONIAC

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a while, to avoid any incursions into any Class B or TFR airspace.

I haven't flown VFR since my last biennial, and before that on the previous biennial, so I wasn't confident in my ability to avoid these airspaces without going in the opposite direction. I was cleared for takeoff and started heading north at 3,000 feet. Five minutes later I called NY Approach and identified myself:

N794RS: NY Approach, N794RS off of White Plains, over.

NYTRAC: N794RS Squawk 0436 say type and destination

N794RS: N794RS is a M20T, destination Miami

NYTRAC: 4RS is radar contact, be advised you are heading the wrong direction for Miami

N794RS: NY, 4RS, roger, I'm aware of that.

NYTRAC: 4RS would you like clearance into the NY Class B?

N794RS: NY, 4RS that would be great

NYTRAC: 4RS you are cleared into the Class B at 6,000, maintain VFR. Would you like to proceed at a different altitude?

N794RS: If I could get 16,500 that would be great, 4RS.

NYTRAC: All Right, 4RS, climb to 16,500 proceed on course to Miami.

N794RS: 4RS on course at 16,500.

As I turned around, I noticed that I was the only plane in the sky. I flew right past Manhattan (completely dark), right over Newark, and right over Philadelphia, and I saw and heard nobody. Only after I was switched to Washington Center did I start hearing and seeing other planes. Unfortunately, my GPS failed (lost power for some reason) about 10 minutes into the flight, so I needed to follow airways, but that was good practice, anyway. So I flew and flew until I was too tired and hungry (there was no way to get food in NY without waiting several hours in front of a hot dog vendor) to fly anymore and landed in Charleston, SC. I got out

of the plane and spent my last \$1 in the vending machine for Doritos. I booked a hotel room at the nearby air-conditioned Sheraton, and a courtesy van picked me up at the FBO. I went to sleep, and woke up first

thing Friday morning and flew down to Miami.

Just another example of the usefulness of privately-owned aircraft. Right now my calves are so sore that I still look at the experience as a nightmare of sorts, but as the pain wears off, I can start to see that soon I will remember it fondly. I know that in the past (I was in Miami for Hurricane Andrew and in Los Angeles for the big earthquake), I learned the importance of having enough cash on me at all times, but I guess I lost that somewhere. I think I'll remember it for a while again. ■

By Ron Schnell

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About The Author

Guest contributor **Ron Schnell** has been an IFR pilot for more than 17 years. Around 1800 of his 1900 hours of flight time are in Mooneys and in February 2000 he finally got his first plane, N794RS, TLS/Bravo serial number 7. He is based at Miami's Opa Locka airport and enjoys flying up and down the east coast regularly with his Monroy aux tank equipped super fast Turbo Lycoming Saber (TLS). Poor Ron...Somebody has to do it...

About the Photos

Tony Hightower is a freelance writer and journalist who lives in Midtown Manhattan. He was fortunate enough to have his camera with him when the lights went out. He has more photos and writings at his website www.tonyhightower.com.



Sunrise on 42nd Street
Photo by Tony Hightower