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Interview with Ferry Flight-Legend Margrit Waltz



How EasyJet Switzerland emerged from TEA Basel

Interview with Margrit Waltz, the most famous ferry pilot

"If you call me today, I'll be ready to take-off tomorrow"

In 1976, she was not only the youngest flight instructor in Germany, but also took off on her first Ferry flight. Since then, she has ferried aircraft all over the world more than 900 times. Margrit Waltz has been successfully operating in a typically male domain for over 43 years. In an interview at the St. Gallen-Altenrhein airfield, she tells SkyNews.ch what makes her job so special.

Photo report Hansjörg Bürgi

How many Ferry flights have you made now and what types of aircraft have you flown?

As of the end of July 2022 and counted as of 1979, there are 923 flights. My aircraft range is quite large (see box). For Cessna, it ranges from the 150 to the 421, followed by the prop-jets Conquest I and II. I also own the rating for the Citation Mustang jet. At Piper, a few types come together as well, including the Meridian, the Cheyenne I and II. Beechcraft I'm rated for the German

dealer who worked at the "Hanseatische Luftwerft" in Bremen at the time. However, Aerostar and Socata are also among my Ferry aircraft. I was allowed to fly a Decathlon over to Shannon, and I also flew a Meyers - a four-seater that is suitable for aerobatics. In addition, exotic aircraft like a Glasair or Columbia can be found in my flight book. Since 1991, however, I have been flying mainly TBMs for Daher. On the way back, I occasionally take a Kodiak with me, which is also part of the Daher Group. Then, when I turned 50 in 2007, after an incident I decided to only fly turboprops and

no more piston aircraft. I have experienced some engine failures, but have been fortunate that most of the time the engines mostly started up again. One engine "died" over the North Sea, but I still got the plane to Rotterdam "with a standing bar". These are milestones in life. In the meantime, I have completed over 25,050 flying hours.

What is the attraction of ferry flying?

It is fun - totally my world. This is the kind of job you like or you do not like. You do not do it for the money; it is too nerve-racking

TO THE PERSON

Margrit Waltz

She was born Margrit Budert in 1957 and grew up in Germany. Her father was an air force pilot in World War II. At boarding school in Bonn, she watched from her window over the Rhine the glider pilots at the Bonn-Hangelar airfield. That was a piece of freedom, so she wanted to get her glider pilot's license. Since she lived at a Catholic boarding school, she needed the permission of the nuns to fly permission from the nuns to ride her bike to the airfield on weekdays. However, the club only trained on weekends, when Margrit went home or wanted to do something with friends. However, the North Rhine-Westphalia Motor Flight School offered her flying lessons during the week. Since this involved higher costs, her father suggested that she write good grades to be able to leave the boarding school, then she would be allowed to take flying lessons in the summer at the age of 17. That was motivation enough.

Erich Hartmann - an ace pilot in the Second World War - became her flight instructor. At 19, Margrit Waltz became Germany's youngest flight instructor and at the same time was given the opportunity to make her first Ferry flight. One of her flight students had bought a Commander 112. The Ferry flight took three times longer and was three times more expensive than planned, and she made every mistake that a Ferry novice could make.

But two months later, the next order came, to transfer a Piper Arrow from the USA. In Germany, she previously completed the IFR theory, and in the practical part in the USA, which was financed by the customer. Margrit Waltz then worked for Aero-Ferry in Europe. In 1992, she flew over a Cessna Turbo 210 with extra tanks for this company and registered the aircraft for the non-stop world record flight Goose Bay-Düsseldorf. The media picked up the story. WDR contacted Margrit Waltz and offered her the job as a "weather girl" at WDR3.

She met her future husband, David Waltz, in the USA in 1980 and in 1983 she moved in with him and founded a ferry flight company. During a visit to the Mooney plant, she learned that their Ferry pilot had fallen into the water. Margrit Waltz was asked to take over his flights.

Her marriage proposal was unconventional, but perfectly tailored to her. At dinner, David slid his newly minted pilot's license across the table and asked, "Will you marry me? I'm a pilot".

Margrit Waltz has lived in Pennsylvania for 40 years with her husband and two dogs. She is the mother of two daughters - the older is a concert pianist, the younger daughter is working on her doctoral thesis.

for that. There are always problems on the flights. Many pilots are afraid of the weather or the long stretches of water. Fear on ferry flights, which is not possible at all. For me, the job has become routine. My biggest challenge today is looking towards retirement. I have decided to quit at the end of this year, because I am 65 now. At some point, you have to draw a line. My husband is twelve years older than I am and I owe him a lot. He never talked against it during my whole Ferry time - a really great partner! But now he also needs me at home more. Many people ask me if I will not miss flying. That can easily be solved by renting an airplane or by taking a ride with friends. I have friends all over the world - the connection between us is ferry flying. I usually see these people three or four times a month in Iceland or Greenland. In 40 years, great friendships have been formed. I am in the middle of the Indian Ocean and I hear on the radio, "Hi Maggie, is that you?" and then it turns out it is someone I flew with 30 years ago. I am going to miss those meetings, those people.



Margrit Waltz in the cockpit of a brand-new TBM 960 at Altenrhein Aviation, a service center for TBMs

Photos Hansjörg Bürgi

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Are you also active on social media?

Of course, you can stay in touch via social media, but first, I am barely social media, and secondly, it is no substitute it does not replace face-to-face contact. I used to have Facebook to check that my kids do not upload anything stupid. On my Instagram account, there are only seven pictures. In principle, I should have taken pictures of everything, as a reminder. However, that does not suit me; I carry the pictures in my head. I have a couple of private clients who would like me to fly on with them, sort of as an escort or safety pilot. I will do that, but not to the extent that I have flown up so far.

Is there such a thing as a routine Ferry flying?

A certain routine already. For the first, second flight to a destination requires a lot of preparation and administration. If you do it on a regular basis, then it takes no more

preparation. If you call me today, I will be ready to go tomorrow. I know what I need and just look at the weather. I can see at a glance whether a flight is feasible or not. I have the flight plans in my head. It is always the same pattern, only the flight direction changes. A routine develops. Not one that becomes dangerous. The preparation of the flights becomes routine, but the flying itself is not.

Woman for decades in a male domain? How do you deal with that?

Quite well, actually. In the beginning, it was difficult to break into this man's world. I was extremely young, looked more like a "Barbie," blond and blue-eyed, and was treated as such. When I wanted to get weather information, for example, I was told to wait for the pilot, who could then explain everything to me. I interpreted this as a compliment rather than a criticism and thought to myself, I must look like a model if the men react like this. They assumed I would give up after the first hard winter - because minus 20 degrees is nothing for a dolly. However, I did not surrender. When I was engaged, they said the fiancé would throw a wrench in my plans now.

Even when I got married and my babies arrived, there was speculation accordingly, but I went ahead and flew even when I was pregnant. In May 1987 I delivered three airplanes and a baby, I would like to see a man do that!

<< In May 1987 I delivered three airplanes and a baby, I would like to see a man do that!

And then the world of men accepted you?

Yes, when I was finally accepted, I was 30 years old and considered "one of us" among colleagues. They mutated into true gentlemen. When I arrived in Iceland in 1991 with a TBM and someone said, "If I wore a skirt, I'd be sitting in a TBM today, too!" the handling agent beat me to it: "Better slow down, boy, she's gonna kick ass!" I had my standard response ready, "You'd look very funny in a skirt, but you still wouldn't get the Ferry job!" I was insanely lucky - so many people supported me and believed in me.

FACTS

Manufacturer	Aircraft Type
American Champion Aircraft	Decathlon
Beechcraft	Sundowner, Baron, Bonanza, Duke, King Air
Commander Aircraft	Single Engine 112, 114, 114TC Aero Commander, Shrike Commander
Cessna	150, 152, 172, 177, 180, 182, 185, 210, Ag Truck (188), 310, 314, 340, 337, 402, 404, 421, Conquest I, Conquest II, Mustang-Jet
Columbia Aircraft Corporation	Columbia
Daher	TBM 700, TBM 960, Kodiak
Glasair Aviation	Glasair
Meyers Aircraft Company	Meyers
Mooney Aircraft	201, 205, 231, 252, TLS, Ovation
North American Aviation	Mustang
Piper	Aerostar, Archer, Arrow, Aztec, Navajo, Piper Cub, Piper Six, Tomahawk, Warrior, Seneca I, II, III, IV, Single Engine and Twin Engine Comanche, Malibu, Saratoga, Meridian Turboprop, Cheyenne I, Cheyenne II
Pilatus	PC-12
Socata/Daher	TB20, TB21, TBM700, 850, 900, 910, 930, 940, 960

There have been very few female Ferry pilots, but never with a full-time workload. I was able to take over the ferry job from the American Louise Sacchi. She was from the World War II era and was a ferry pilot for Beechcraft. Alexandra Keuper, a Dutch woman who was in a fatal accident with her daughter off Goose Bay, was also one of the few female Ferry pilots.

■ The best flight of your career?

One of the highlights of my career was flying the TBM 700 when it was launched on the market. There was no such aircraft before, the concept was completely new. On my first flight with the TBM to the USA - we did not have GPS at that time, but a Loran mixture - the Loran failed, it was only usable near the coast, and I had already been flying by "Dead Reckoning" for ten years anyway. Then an English controller asked what kind of plane it was. A jet? We were flying at 31,000 feet at 300 knots. I replied: "Single engine turboprop, 31'000 ft, we are doing 300 kts and we rock!" It was unique to be there at the very beginning of the production. The 301 from Mooney had a similar concept, but a piston engine, pressurized cabin, room for six people. However, Piper came to market with their Malibu before Mooney, which meant the end for Mooney. Socata bought 49 percent of Mooney and knew that with a turbine it would not only be competitive, but would bring a very new concept to the market. a very fast single-engine turboprop. That was the birth of the TBM. When Mooney went bankrupt again, Socata in France continued to develop the TBM. I still have pictures of the 301 as a prototype. That's nice, because I worked for Mooney for 20

years and then I was there at the beginning of the TBM; I was taken over by the company as a ferry pilot for the TBM.

■ What about your worst flight?

There were a few bad flights. At 30 degrees west, in the middle of the Atlantic, the engine of a Mooney 231 stopped at 22,000 feet. I went into glide and talked on the radio to a Pan Am plane. I did not have GPS for positioning and was asked which of my engines had failed - they assumed a four-engine plane. At first, this annoyed me, "The only one I've got, the one in front!" In typical PanAm voice came the reply, "Oh my God!" I had already put on the survival suit and the dinghy was beside me. At 3000 feet, the engine started again after several attempts to start it. It ran very rough with vibrations. I stayed at 3000 feet, trying neither to climb nor descend, and sat on the edge of the seat for over four hours before landing in Ireland. A really uncomfortable flight! The reason was that the plane had no "pressurized magnetos". On another flight, the vacuum pump went out and the alternator a minute later. The standby vacuum pump was electric, but there was only one alternator.

<< I had already put on the survival suit and the dinghy was beside me. At 3000 feet, the engine started again.

■ And are there any other such adventures?

Funny in retrospect - young and arrogant as I was - I sat with my feet on the copilot seat reading a book while the autopilot flew. Every time I turned a page, I checked the instruments. And suddenly the horizon was crooked - over northern Canada and in the clouds. My reaction came without thinking: the autopilot is nuts! I righted the plane and promptly put it on the cross.... it picked up speed. And what do you do when the engine picks up speed? You pull... and promptly the stall warning came. Now a Mooney is not designed for 4g. I went into a spin, at 2000 feet I was able to catch the plane, but I was still full in the clouds. At Lac Eon in Quebec there is a small runway for maintenance work on the ADF antenna. I landed there after pumping out the landing gear. I turned on the ELT, since I no longer had a radio, and was eventually picked up by a helicopter. The factory asked me if I could fly the plane back, it was one of the first serial numbers of a new model and not a good advertisement had they officially lost that serial number. Two days later the weather was good again and I flew back to the Mooney with a bush pilot in a Piper Cub, a charged battery in my luggage. I had agreed with the factory to bring the airplane to the USA, but to leave the landing gear outside. Easy and gentle was the motto.

■ Surely, you have another story like this in store?

Yes. On my 50th birthday, I was flying a Cessna 421. The left engine failed and the right one was not running smoothly either, the temperatures were not right. I was flying between Greenland and Goose Bay. A U.S. Air Force low-flying group that was training intercepted me and accompanied me to the coast. Then the planes had to say goodbye, they did not have enough fuel to continue escorting me in slow flight. My dispatched "Mayday" was immediately picked up and I heard on the radio, "Maggie is in trouble!" and similar messages. I received incredibly good support and was still able to fly the plane with one engine in very bad weather in a snowstorm to Goose Bay and land there. This incident was decisive. I decided not to fly "piston shakers" in the future. My principals had enough turbine aircraft for me to fly over - Kodiak, Caravan, Cheyenne, TBM, King Air, Meridian.

And property damage never occurred?

In my career, I have only wrecked one airplane. A V-Bonanza, where everything also failed. I landed at Gander in freezing rain. The controller gave me a non-radar approach, although Gander was not designed for that, but he had plenty of experience, having practiced non-radar approaches with the military frequently at Goose Bay. He did his best and it was good enough to get me on track. The aircraft was very icy before landing and the engine was running very rough. I was already below glide angle, at full throttle. I did not want to extend the landing gear too early that would have been bad. When the controller told me I was above threshold, I extended it. Visibility was just under 50 to 100 feet above ground. At the last minute, I turned off the ignition and closed the fuel tank. The landing gear punched through the wings on landing - total loss. The investigating authorities certified that I was not to blame; the weather had developed differently than predicted. So, I am considered to be an accident-free pilot.

Have you flown the new TBM 960 yet?

Yes, I brought the first 960 with French markings to North America. A fantastic aircraft. Many little things - an understatement - make this machine. Thanks to "Low Beta", brakes and fuel are saved. The auto-throttle is now controlled via a kind of "spring", you don't have to do anything. The seats are much more comfortable, which is important on long trips, such as to Australia, where I am on the road for five and a half hours non-stop.

<< *However, I have two passports. In the US, I used the American one, in Europe, I used my German passport - that helped.*

Were there any adverse effects due to the pandemic?

At the beginning we were all shocked, we were not allowed to fly anymore. Then the plant called me and asked if I could come to France to fly a plane back. There was a used TBM in the USA that had to go to England, this at the beginning of the pandemic. We had just arrived in Bangor (USA) when customs told us that if we



Bozi Filipaj, a pilot from Altenrhein, flies a TBM 850. He is friends with Magrit Waltz and has also visited her in the USA.

would have a problem with the onward flight to Goose Bay (Canada), a return to Bangor would no longer be possible. The Canadians already did not let any more airplanes out. However, I have two passports. In the USA, I used the American one, in Europe I used my German passport - that helped. The problem was that I could not fly out of the U.S. privately, but I could not fly in on a scheduled flight because of Covid regulations. Therefore, for the customer, I flew out of the U.S. to England, but did not know how I would get from England to France. The factory promised to pick me up in Bournemouth with a TBM. Everything went smoothly. In Keflavik, I had to be driven to the hotel and there I was given the food put in front of the door.

The next day I was taken to the airport again. I also got back to the U.S. without any problems, because I was on a private plane with an American passport. The authorities apparently assume that you do not catch covid on a private jet, but you do on a commercial airliner - a strange train of thought, isn't it?

What are your plans for the future?

Travel a lot with my husband. A couple who are friends - he's a pilot - think it's great to travel with us because they know if something goes wrong, there's still a pilot on board. I do not necessarily need to be flown around, but I still want to see a lot. 🍷

KEYWORDS

Aircraft that thrills me the most

Very clearly, the TBM 960.

My favourite foods and drinks are

Fruits and vegetables are my favourite to eat. At home during a snowstorm, a nice glass of red wine or on holidays a glass of champagne or sparkling wine.

Music I particularly like

I like music from the 1970s and 1980s, but also songs by Reinhard Mey, something like "Above the clouds..."

Favourite destination

On the way to Australia, I like to spend time in Singapore or Bali. However, it is difficult because it is often also because of how nice the people are and where you have friends.

Biggest hassle

The paperwork that is going on today, especially on the computer, and these programs do not work reliably, especially since the Covid thing, but that is dissipating now.



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