



BURNING MAN IN A PC-12

By KRISTY BOLINGBROKE

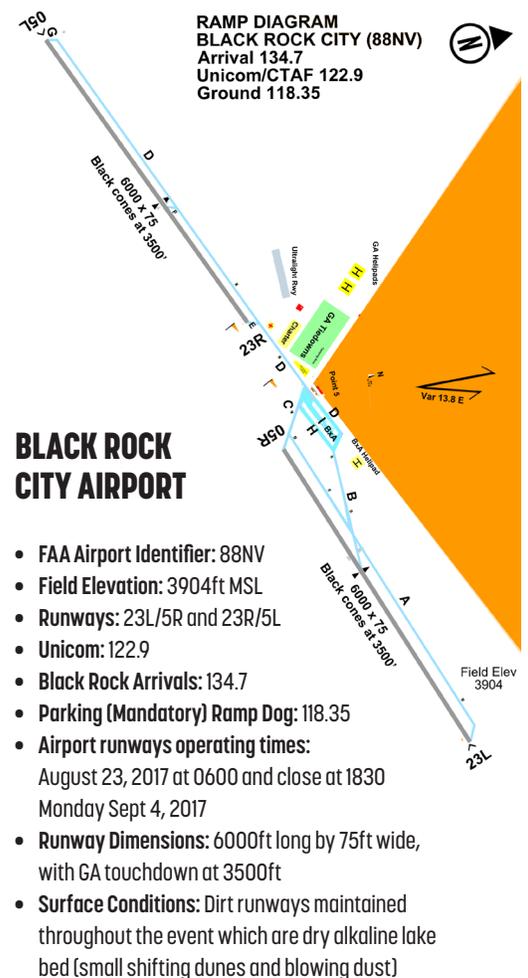
Oh, the places we go... in a PC12! I have flown the PC12 to many fun and challenging airports all over the USA and other countries. This past summer I had the opportunity to fly into the Burning Man Festival.

I landed at Black Rock City Airport (88NV), an airport that is created in the desert to facilitate annual Festival Attendees. What makes this airport unique is the fact it is only open for a couple of weeks each year. Operational dates this past summer were August 23rd to September 4th. The airport has two dirt runways (23L/5R & 23R/5L) on a dry alkaline desert lake bed. The runways are marked by cones and there are no runway numbers ... it's dirt, remember?! Instead, they have large black chevrons that point to the threshold of the runway. Taxiways are marked by blue cones, and there's signage for various parking areas and transient drop-off locations.

The Burning Man Festival is not your regular festival for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it's created in the middle of nowhere. Every year a temporary city is erected in the Black Rock Desert of northwest Nevada, approxi-

mately 100 miles north of Reno, NV. The festival is advertised as a temporary metropolis dedicated to art and community; however, festival goers are well aware it's much more than that. To give you an understanding of the true values of this event, let me refer to the 10 Principles of Burning Man:

1. Radical Inclusion - Welcome and respect any stranger
2. Gifting - Promote the act of gifting with zero expectations in return
3. Decommodification - They create environments free from commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising
4. Radical Self-Reliance - Participants shall discover their internal resources
5. Radical Self-Expression - Basically almost anything goes ...
6. Communal Effort - Everyone must work together to create an environment of cooperation, collaboration and communication.
7. Civic Responsibility - Participants must conduct themselves as a civil society following all local, state and federal laws.



8. Leaving No Trace – After the event, the desert must be left as they found it
9. Participation – Everyone is invited and encouraged to participate in all activities and endeavors.
10. Immediacy – Immediate experience is a very important value of the Burning Man Culture.

The flight to Black Rock City Airport required a lot of pre-flight planning since it is a private airport with its own unique flight procedures. I had to go to their website and complete a pilot test to allow me to land at 88NV. The test was approximately 50 multiple choice questions reviewing flight procedures, desert flying specifics, airport rules, density altitude education, etc. The test was a little long and tedious, but it was very educational. In advance of taking the pilot test, I reviewed a pilot advisory webpage, along with YouTube videos and pictures of important ground landmarks from the sky. Even the advisory page utilized Burning Man “terminology,” which took a little deciphering at first, but eventually I caught on to the theme. After successful completion of the test, I was granted a landing code, which would provide me with permission to land at the airport on the day of arrival. I also needed to submit a flight manifest in advance with all of my passenger names and confirmation they had already purchased tickets to the event.

Given all of my pre-flight reading on this airport, I was most vigilant about the desert flying conditions and unique flight procedures. Desert flying conditions included high velocity winds with updrafts/downdrafts, high density altitude, and frequent dust storms with white-out conditions. In the pre-test material, they even talk about proper procedures if you get caught in a dust-storm or whiteout conditions. I was fortunate to avoid any dust storm conditions, but they advise if you get caught inside a dust cloud that you fly straight and level (to avoid special dis-orientation) and if close to the ground,

do a go-around if necessary. Because of the weather conditions, it's best to fly in the morning or early evening before the airport closes. Lucky for me I am an early morning type of pilot!

The morning of my flight to Black Rock City Airport, I did my usual pre-flight brief and the weather was looking great. We departed Aspen direct to 88NV which was about a 2.5hr flight. When we were about 30 miles out, I decided to cancel IFR and proceed inbound per the Black Rock City suggested arrival routing from the southeast. 10 miles outside of the airport, I contacted Black Rock City Arrivals (BRA) with the requested transmission of “current location, destination 88NV, and tail number.” Once they pulled up my airplane on their system, I next had to advise of “pilot name, landing code, and confirmation of all airport documents on board.” BRA provided me with “permission to land at Black Rock City Airport,” and they were also courteous enough to provide winds and weather. Once this check-in was complete, I switched to the CTAF (122.9) so that I could continue to communicate for position reports and intentions.

“My trip to the Burning Man Festival and Black Rock City Airport was just another example of why my boss bought the PC12 and why I love this airplane so much.”

As we turned inbound and around a mountain range, we could see the city in the distance, and it was an amazing sight! To spot a whole city erected from the middle of nowhere was very cool, and it was huge too. I proceeded inbound and joined a downwind leg for 23L and was searching for the runway, which seemed to blend in well with its desert surroundings. Fortunately with not too much effort, I spotted the airport and Runway 23L which was marked by

cones. I continued to my base leg then final and had all my soft-field landing techniques ready to be executed. All the larger aircraft are advised to touch down at the beginning of the runway, and smaller GA airplanes are advised to touch down mid-runway. The Pilatus PC12 is one of the “large aircraft” at 88NV, and I touched down at the beginning of the runway on the mains let the nose rest lightly on the ground. Ramp Dog advised me of where to park for transient parking to drop off my passengers and we taxied over that way to shut down.

We were met by the “Interceptor” at the airplane to make sure I had all my documents onboard and he showed us where to go to check in with “Customs.” We opened the cargo door and unloaded the airplane and walked through the dusty terrain towards check-in. Wow, was it dusty! Even with my sunglasses on, I was getting dust in my eyes. No wonder people wear goggles at this event all week long. During this brief walk to check-in, accompanying my passengers, I realized how crazy this event was going to be. I saw festival goers in crazy outfits and eccentric signs all over the place. We were not the only people arriving by airplane; actually the airport was quite busy with small private airplanes. Many attendees were arriving in Burner Express Airplanes... essentially a shuttle service from Reno. Once my passengers were taken care of and checked in, I headed back to the airplane. I flew back to Reno, NV to keep the airplane at that airport for the week. I did look like a mess when I showed up in the Atlantic Aviation FBO. Luckily, they had the Burning Express Airplanes staged at that location, so I wasn't the only one!

The Pilatus PC-12 is such an amazing airplane which can facilitate short runways, desert landings, and haul lots of stuff! My trip to the Burning Man Festival and Black Rock City Airport was just another example of why my boss bought the PC12 and why I love this airplane so much. I have to say that wasn't an average day at work, but who likes “average” anyway?! 