

Taking off from Courchevel:
once you are rolling there is no way back

The French Savoie is easy to reach
and breathtakingly spectacular

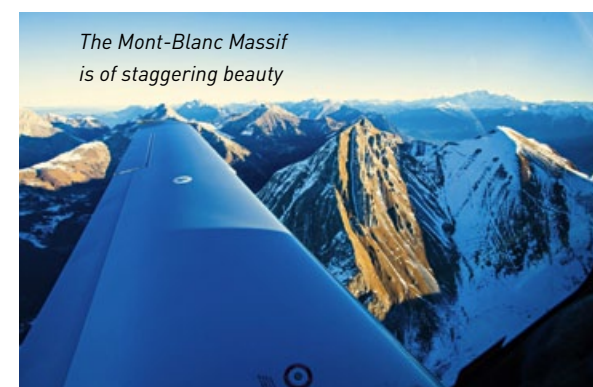
the MOUNTAIN is the BOSS

"Always keep the door open to the safe side" mountain flying instructor **Christophe Chapuis** teaches us while steering our shiny Cirrus SR22 Turbo close to the Alpine cliffs. "If the mountain gets angry, you can get away. Because mountains do get angry, from time to time, and then they strike with downdrafts, you have to anticipate. Give them some space to give you a warning first. That is the first and most important principle of mountain flying."

The next lessons are related to landing on the 3rd ranking most dangerous airport in the world: Courchevel. Sjoerd Jan ter Welle got his Courchevel site license two years ago and returns for some recurrent training. It does not require explanation that a skill like landing at Courchevel doesn't stay with you forever. A lot of knowledge and experience is needed. It needs regular



On final you should point the nose below the runway



The Mont-Blanc Massif is of staggering beauty



The 6-cylinder Lycoming engine delivers 315 horsepower and that is more than enough to carry us four with our luggage at 9,000 feet through France. Flying about 200 knots groundspeed we fly South. "The Cirrus is perfect for this kind of flying", Sjoerd Jan tells us. "And because of the parachute system the risks of night flying on one engine are acceptable."

LANDING

On final at Courchevel the situation is completely different. Christophe: "The Cirrus is far from ideal for this kind of work, because of the small speed margins. The approach speed is about 85 knots and you really have to keep up that speed."

Flying too fast will result in a difficult landing, as you will have to lose all that excessive energy in a very short amount of time. Flying too slow and the Cirrus will drop to the ground very suddenly." Not a very appealing prospect, especially because we have to aim a little bit below the threshold. Against our intuition Christophe forces Sjoerd Jan to put the nose in the direction of the rocks below the runway. With exactly 85 knots we cross the threshold, and fly the aircraft to the runway. Flaring is a separate topic of discussion: The first hundred meters of the runway have a 12 percent slope, then the slope increases to 20 percent before flattening out at the top.



"One should try to touch the runway on the first part of the runway, before the slope gets **too steep.**"

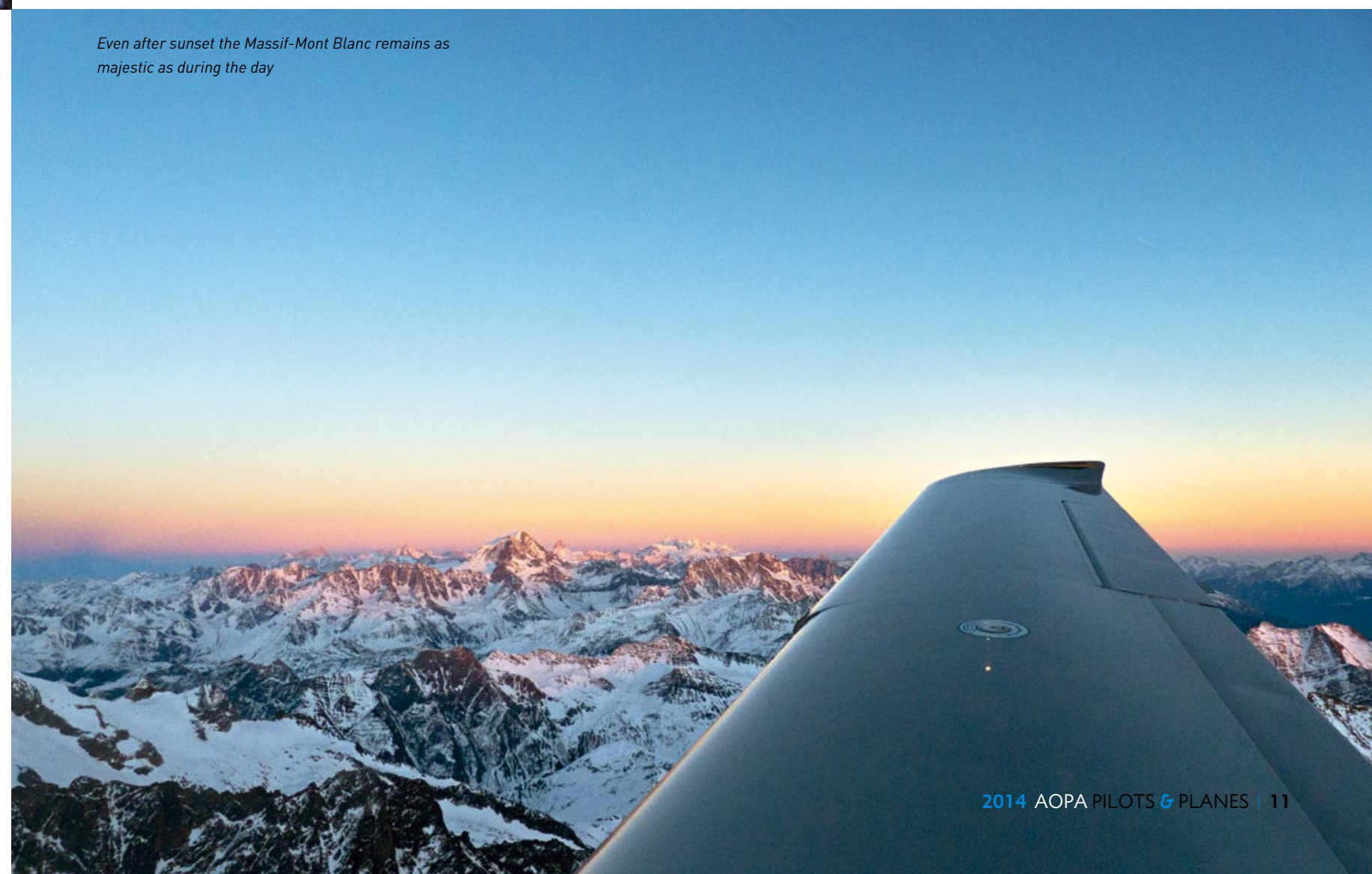
practice. The reward for all that hard work is one of the most spectacular experiences you can encounter as a GA-pilot.

AEROPLUS

We arrived at Chambéry via Lyon-Bron a day before. Sjoerd Jan is founder and owner of AeroPlus Aviation Software and offers applications for the iPad

and iPhone. Creating and filing a flight plan was a matter of minutes with his Flightplan app. We obtained all the information about the weather conveniently through the AeroPlus Weather app. Because of the advanced autopilot and the user-friendly Garmin G1000, the flight to the Alps is very relaxed and French ATC gives us one direct after another.

Even after sunset the Massif-Mont Blanc remains as majestic as during the day



“You first need **to understand** the mountains before you start flying here.”

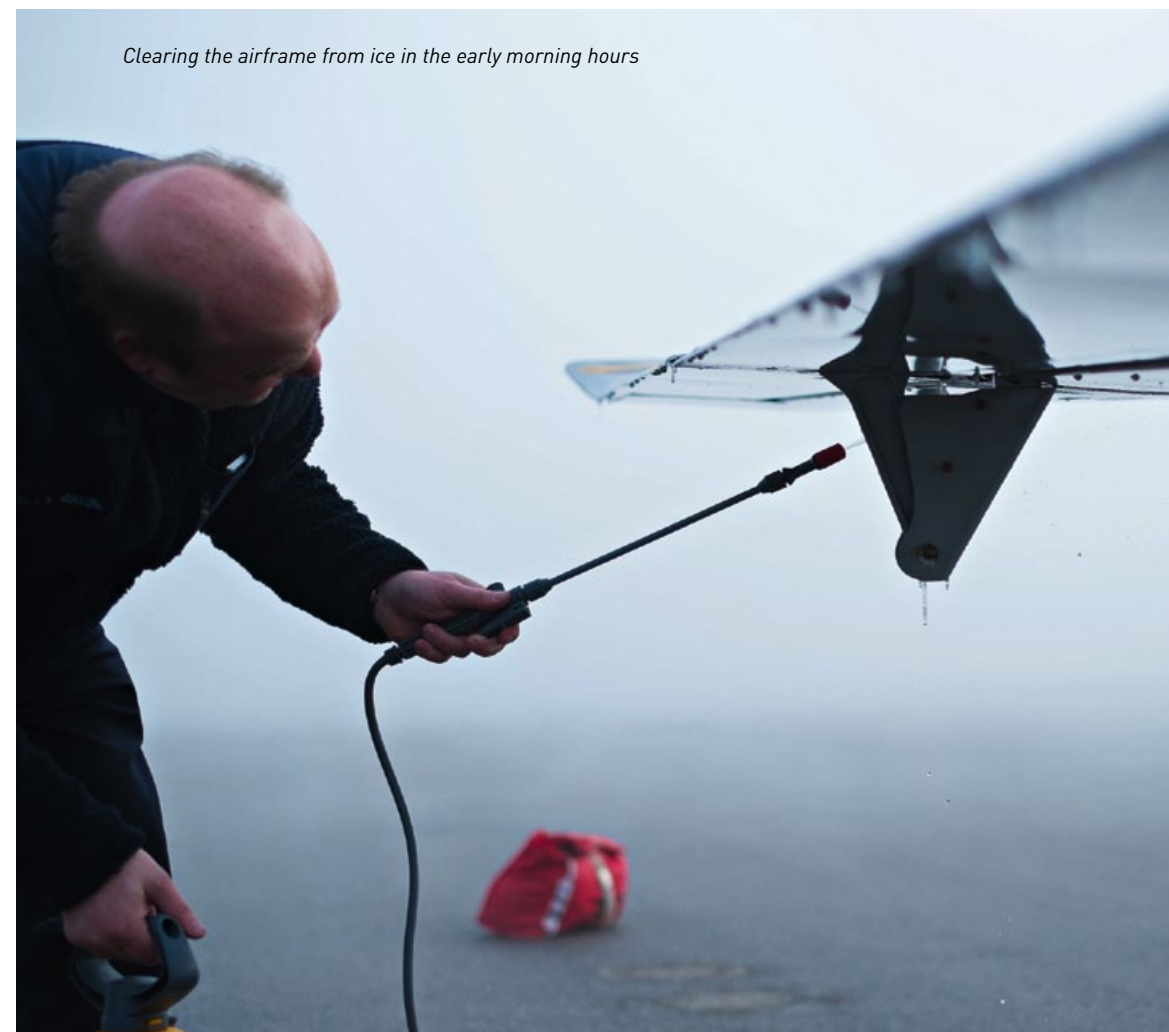
One should try to touch down on the first part of the runway, before the slope gets too steep. But none of the aircraft we see coming in that day seem to manage this, forcing their pilots to add more power to keep pace with the steep slope. Once you land you might have to further increase power to reach the top of the runway slope.

RUSSIAN JETSET

After arriving on the platform, we parked

the aircraft and had a well-deserved hot (and expensive) coffee. Others leave again immediately after landing. Christophe explains why: “At the moment landing here costs you nothing, but in a couple of days the tower will be manned again because of the holiday season. Then you will have to pay 65 euros for a single landing. Weight and passengers do not matter, as Courchevel will then become the domain of the skiing, mostly Russian jet set. So now, everybody flies

Clearing the airframe from ice in the early morning hours



Probably the best view from any airport apron



here to get some experience for free before the fun time is over.”

PASSION

While admiring the skills of fellow pilots at Courchevel, we talk with Christophe about mountain flying in this scenic region. Christophe was born and raised here, and knows the area like nobody else. It's the perfect recipe for the good mountain flyer, Christophe tells us in all modesty. “You first need to understand the mountains before you start flying here.” Working as a captain on a Boeing 777 for Air France, Christophe explored Chili. There, in the mighty Andes, he fell in love with mountain flying. And the love lasted when he came back home, as he founded AeroSavoie with two other locals. The flying school, based at Chambéry (LFLB) is specialized in

teaching mountain flying. They can help you flying your own airplane, but you can also rent a Mousquetaire ski-plane. After an impressive tour through the Alps and the Mont-Blanc massif we were a little exhausted though, and elected to fly home. Nous serons de retour!

For flying to the Alps www.aeroplusaviation.com

For flying in the Alps www.aerosavoie.com

Text **Erik Brouwer & Goof Bakker**

Images **Erik Brouwer & Martin Hogeboom**

