This Boeing 737 can land in and take off from Cheyenne but the tiny American Eagle Embraer ERJ-135 cannot? Maybe it's not the trees. Maybe it's the equipment. Or the training. Or the pilots.

On Friday, August 20, 2010, I observed the arrival of both an XTRA 737 and America Eagle Flight 2992 at about 1:30 to 1:45 pm. I could not stay around long enough to watch either take off.

What was interesting was that the pilot of the large 737 had no trepidation, nor did the XTRA Airways owner, about landing at or taking off from the Cheyenne airport.

The large jet landed first and was parked nearer the former Heli-Support offices than the terminal. After some time, a ramp was pushed to the side of the airplane but no one boarded or deplaned during my time of observation. It was just parked - for about 30-45 minutes.

XTRA used to be a casino charter and may still be for the predominant reason - flying gamblers into and out of Wendover, Nevada. The plane that landed here (I have a picture of it parked on the tarmac) had 16 windows forward of the two exit windows over the wings and 20 windows to the rear of the wing exit windows. Its identifying no. was N42XA. It would likely seat in excess of 150.

The Embraer that flies between Cheyenne and Dallas/Fort Worth was said to hold 44 passengers but the equipment most prominently shown is the ERJ-135 which holds 37 passengers. It could be the E135/Q (which is the ERJ-140) that does seat 44 passengers. The ERJ-135 cabin configuration is rows of three across, two on one side of the aisle, one on the other. There is no overhead baggage area on the single seat side. In addition, there is a single seat nearest the exit door at the front of the plane. The "ERJ" stands for Embraer Regional Jet.

On Flight 2979 that took off from Cheyenne at 7:23 am on Sunday, August 22, 2010, here are some facts about the flight: Departure was 35 minutes behind schedule, the plane took off to the west, climbing at a rate of about 1,000 ft./minute. About 22 minutes after takeoff, it reached a cruising altitude of 37,000 ft., where it remained for 44 minutes, before beginning its descent. Descent from 37,000 ft. to landing took about 26 minutes.

Top speed reached on this particular flight was 550 mph, reached at 8:13 am, 50 minutes into the flight. Basically, the plane traveled at speeds of 515-540 mph most of the trip, still at 451 mph at 11,100 ft. This plane touched down at 203 mph.

The range for an ERJ-135 is about 1,950 miles and the trip from Cheyenne to Dallas/Fort Worth (route miles) is about 790 sky miles - about 75 miles further than "as-the-crow" flies. From take-off to landing of this flight Sunday morning was one hour and forty-two minutes (1:42).

Back to the issue of this story: If the "jumbo" jets can safely land and take off from Cheyenne, why is there any question about the little regional jets that American Eagle is using? Obviously, there are much more challenging runways around the United States and the world (see below). I was once on aborted takeoffs in Acapulco where the plane twice shuddered to a stop at the end of the runway to return to the terminal for "minor" repairs. Pilots know when something is wrong or may prevent a safe takeoff and won't chance it whether there are trees, water or a canyon ahead. AE can, too.

American Eagle pilots need not apply

The runway pictured to the left is at the Telluride Regional Airport in Telluride, Colorado. It is at an elevation of 9,000 ft. (Cheyenne is about 6,000 ft.). The runway in Telluride is a 6,911' asphalt surface (Cheyenne's is over 9,200' long). Airlines serving Telluride are Great Lakes and US Airways, with destinations of Denver and Phoenix, respectively.

A description of the airport says this: "At an elevation of more than 9,000 feet, Telluride Regional Airport is the highest commercial airport on the continent. It is also surrounded by mountains and built on a cliff. Pilots have to know what they're doing here. The airport is flanked on three sides by a 1,000-foot drop into the San Miguel River, with the Rocky Mountains just beyond."

Doesn't it make you wonder if pilots using the Telluride runway might long for trees at the end? They would break the fall into the canyon beyond the end of the runway.

And, how about the beauty below? That is the runway in Gibraltar. Notice at each end there are no trees. Just very deep and very cold water.

Gibraltar Airport -- Most readers have seen the Rock of Gibraltar in ads and commercials. It is a tiny little place and its airport runway traverses two bodies of water and is an asphalt surface only 5,341 ft. long. Gibraltar sits at sea level and that has a bearing on the ability of planes to lift off. That airport also boards well over 300,000 passengers a year, compared to Cheyenne's 300 or so. Gibraltar has another feature Cheyenne lacks. See that road (white arrow) by the plane near center? That is the country's main highway. Traffic has to be stopped for takeoffs and landings. Think those pilots wouldn't long for 50 or so trees at the end of their take off?