

DAILY BLOG - YOU'VE GOT WINGS

by: Rob Donaldson

New pilot Rob Donaldson in his brand-new XT-912 Outback with Streak 3 wing accompanied by his wife Fiona as ground crew joined the "You've Got Wings" group for part of their flight around Australia to raise funds for the RFDS. Work commitments prevented them from completing the entire circumnavigation but they flew Perth to Darwin with the group before returning on their own.

A truly epic flight and a great adventure for a relatively new trike pilot — this is the first part of his blog which will be continued to completion in the next edition of Triker News..

Day (-2) – July 9

(*Nowergup.*) This evening my wife, Fiona, and I met all the team members partaking in the "Across Australia Challenge" and for the Australian Crew, the "Around Australia Challenge". A lovely barbeque dinner was put on at Dress Circle Farm, preceded by a quick introduction to all of the participants and then the first of our "briefings" which were to become a daily event.

Ian discovers that his radiator has developed a crack and is un-serviceable, thus grounding his aircraft. He is devastated, having spent the last two years planning this trip only to be denied participating on day 1. Well, John Sharman took up the challenge to fix the radiator in time for the start of the event. It was a difficult task as Ian's radiator is plastic not metal, so it couldn't be welded.

Day 0 – July 11

(*Nowergup.*) It is my 40th Birthday. This is my first day of leave from work for the next five weeks. It is the day I bring the trailer with all of our equipment and microlight to the start point, Nowergup (a northern outer suburb of Perth). I set up the wing and give the microlight a full pre-flight check. I spent the rest of the day running around town getting together the final items required before departing on our great adventure.

The radiator saga continues. The repairs made by John Sharman unfortunately didn't work under pressure, but he did find a plastic radiator repairman nearby

who offered to help and to have a solution by morning when it was required. We all crossed our fingers in the hope that he was right.

Day 1 – July 12

(*Nowergup to Riverside Sanctuary at Kalbarri, 276.6 nm, 5.2 hrs.*) Well if we're not ready by now, it's too late. The countdown has just completed and it's time to start our adventure. The team is joined by a crowd of family and friends, media and representatives from one of our donation recipients, the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). I was "buddy" partnered with Dave Seymore for our flight today. Our flight path is due to take us up the Western Australian coastline to Jurien Bay and then on to Kalbarri. I have a passenger for the first leg of our flight to Jurien Bay. Our passengers are donating at least \$80 (to commemorate the 80th anniversary

year of the RFDS).

Ian conducted a quick check flight to test the repaired radiator and all looked OK. So with all eight microlights ready, all checks complete and passengers strapped in, we taxied out to the Nowergup runway and took to the skies to commence our journey. The day had started with some light rain showers, but by takeoff time a nice gap had appeared and all was clear. In the skies, we had to dodge a few incoming showers but in the whole the flight to Jurien Bay was dry and enjoyable. Just prior to landing at Jurien Bay, I took Dave over the Pinnacles. At Jurien Bay we disembarked most of our passengers and took to the skies once more. Not long after departing from Jurien Bay, Ian radioed that his engine temperature had suddenly risen and that he was going to land immediately.



Day 1, 12 Jul 08, Departed Nowergup and heading for the coast



Day 1, 12 Jul 08, Dodging scattered showers north of Jurien Bay

The coastal road north of Jurien Bay was relatively free of traffic but just as he was about to land on the road, along came a bus and a group of bikies, so he darted across to a side road and landed safely there. Unfortunately the repairs to the radiator had given way and this effectively grounded his microlight until a replacement radiator arrived in Australia. Seeing that Ian was safe and the ground crew was soon to arrive to collect him, we headed north to Kalbarri and then to Riverside Sanctuary. The runway was a makeshift clearing in the middle of a wheat field. With Dave close at hand, I conducted a quick fly past inspection and then landed on the narrow and soft runway. This was not a problem for my wide fat tyres (tundra undercarriage), but would prove to be very interesting for all those with thin small tyres (Jon, Ian and Dave).

The ground crew arrived after dark, having spent an hour collecting Ian and his microlight. Thankfully our trailer was able to accommodate his plane with limited disruption to all the gear so carefully packed on the other two trailers.

The group was met by a very disgruntled Inn-Keeper. To call him a "grumpy old man" would be

polite. He upset my wife, who had been driving for several hours at this stage, towing a full trailer, and was not expecting such an unfriendly welcome. However the lodgings and meals provided were very satisfactory.

Day 2 – July 13

(*Riverside Sanctuary, Kalbarri to Denham, Shark Bay, 178.7 nm, 3.0 hrs.*) Today I changed my "buddy" partner to Derek due to a closer airspeed match with our wing/engine combination. Again we followed the beautiful WA coastline northward. Along the way we spotted whales and dol-

phins in the water. It is amazing to watch a whale so close yet unobtrusively. We flew all the way up to Dirk Hartog Island, before heading inland to Useless Loop and climbing to 5,000 feet to make the water crossing to Denham. Damn it was cold up there, however, necessary in case we had to glide back to land. Thankfully we crossed safely and quickly and flew into Denham (Shark Bay). While crossing the water I could clearly see the sea floor and its shallow and deep ravines. The water changes color from mild greens to deep blues and sometimes to brilliant aqua depending on the depth of water and its underlying sand and rock formations. The mix of colours was just spectacular. This is a World Heritage area and one of only 15 places in the world which meets all 4 criteria for eligibility for World Heritage (you only need to meet one criteria to be eligible for World Heritage listing).

While waiting for the ground crew to arrive, we made small talk with three guys who were waiting to be flown to the Useless Loop Salt Mine. We all watched in shocking amazement when their pilot came roaring into the airport parking lot, skidding to a stop, sideways! She was obviously not



Day 1, 12 Jul 08, Windmill farm at Jurien Bay

in a good mood and proceeded to throw things around, conducted the briefest of preflight checks possible and then demanded to know who were her passengers for this “bloody trip”. The three guys timidly raised their hands and left with her. Now that was a flight I would have refused to have boarded. We made camp at the airport behind the hangers.

Day 3 – July 14

(Denham, Shark Bay to Coral Bay, 195.8 nm, 4.2 hrs.) I took Richard (the group photographer) up as a passenger today. Again we had to climb up to 6,000 feet to make the crossing to the mainland. It wasn't as cold today, but chilly never the less. We caught up with Howie on the mainland side and pulled in close for some nice aerial photos. As we reached Carnarvon for our lunchtime stopover, I flew over towards the Satellite dish that was used during the late 1960s to communicate with the Apollo spacecraft. We stayed in Carnarvon for lunch which turned out to be quite amusing. Angus corrected the wait staff in relation to the fish of the day “Spotted Red Emperor” saying no such fish existed. The cook brought out the box confirming the name of the fish, which Angus still refuted. Not surprising, but our lunch came out very late.



Day 2, 13 Jul 08, Flying over Shark Bay towards Denham

The Airport Refueller came over and topped up the fuel in each of the microlights. Ian and Jon, in Jon's microlight bypassed Carnarvon and did not refuel. The decision to either fuel up or not would prove very interesting later in the day.

After refueling, Angus had a lot of trouble starting his microlight. He finally got it to cough to life and floored the throttle to keep it firing. Unfortunately this moved the microlight forward and it struck Warren's microlight, wing leading edge to wing leading edge. No apparent damage done,

but egos dented never-the-less.

After taking off from Carnarvon, I took a flight path along the coast and over towards the blow holes. Richard took some great video of this part of the coast and I think we even got a blow hole in action.

Hit turbulence at about 1,500 feet along the coast and lost the left hand outside batten from the wing. The microlight rolled suddenly and significantly. I brought this back to a level attitude and spotted a homestead airfield nearby and aimed for a controlled forced landing. I found that the slower I flew the more control I maintained and was able to safely land at the airfield. After a close inspection of the wing, finding no other issues or damage, decided to continue to fly on to Coral Bay, some 30 nautical miles to the North.

Just 3 nautical miles from Coral Bay, and with the airfield almost in sight, Dave made a may-day call indicating that he had just had an engine failure and would conduct a forced landing in the low lying bush. From his approximate 1,500 feet altitude, he picked a relatively clear patch of bush and landed the microlight. Unfortunately for Dave, to make matters worse, his radio battery was almost out of charge and he was



Day 2, 13 July 08, Denham Airport, Microlight lineup



Day 2, 13 Jul 08, Howie flying towards Kalbarri

of the microlight unhurt. We were able to keep some occasional radio communications before his radio died completely. I continued to slowly circle, in continual left hand circuits, due to my own wing problems until the failing daylight forced me to leave him, but not before his location was radioed to our ground crew who quickly mobilized into action to collect him and Sharon.

I slowly limped into Coral Bay and made a nice gentle landing. At least Richard was very impressed given our issues of the day.

That looks like a good place to leave Rob's blog for now. It will be continued in the next edition of Triker News.

only just audible over the radio. As I had a good visual of him, I followed him down and circled his

position when he landed. His landing looked relatively good and I was pleased to see him climb out

■ ■ ■

COMING CLUB EVENTS

♦ SAAA Chapter 10 FLY-IN at Bunbury

Saturday 21st March 2009 at Bunbury City Airport.

All Western Microlights Club members are invited to attend. If the weather is OK and we have a few willing pilots, we have been asked to provide a "Fly Past" of Trikes.

♦ The Great Trek North to Carnarvon

May 2009. Actual dates not yet been set as arrangements are still being made.

Details in brief: Trailer up there (could be a big convoy or some may fly), stay where you like (we'll have a range of options) — some camp (tents), some stay at caravan parks, some prefer motels, some stay with friends or relatives. Duration is whatever you want it to be over a total period of 7 to 10 days, or so (pretty flexible) — The plan is to leave on one Friday, be there for that weekend and the next week, then leave after the following weekend.

Some will come for the whole time, some for one weekend or the other... again, pretty flexible.

There is only limited accommodation for trikes — most tie-down outside ("Screw-Its" needed).

Some of the guys from SAAA Chapter 10 could fly up in their RVs for one weekend or the other. (Apparently, they've heard there's some good fishing up that way.)

REMINDER: If you haven't yet done so, please pay your annual club fees (\$48) to Treasurer Julie as soon as possible.

Western Microlight Club, Inc. Postal Address: 25 Taylor Street, EATON WA 6232

Keith Mell, President: 08 9797 1269 (H); 0417 240 038 (M); e-mail: kmell@westnet.com.au

Brian Watts, Vice-President: 08 9795 9207 (H); 0407 552 362 (M); e-mail: bwattspanel@bigpond.com

Paul Coffey, Newsletter Editor, Secretary: 08 9725 1161 (H); 04285 04285 (M); e-mail: paul@trikernews.com

Brendan Watts, Chief Flying Instructor: 08 9795 9092 (H); 0408 949 004 (M); e-mail: brendan@southwestmicrolights.com