Hello again Folks.
After the elation of the One Man Meet, and with the weather On the turn with high winds and loads of rain, reality seems to have set in and flying is the last thing on our minds. Funnily, the marketplace seems active, and a recent second hand sale highlighted that things like a Klein fan for example is in high demand with multiple people vying for the one item.
However, with all things aerial the world doesn’t stop just because the weather halts our playtime, and I therefore have some information and points of interest for you to read about whilst we await the flying to return. Hope you enjoy the read.

1. Ed-Speak – The End of Term Feeling

This Newsletter started with good intentions in November, but lack of content morphed it into a November / December joint issue. In the time elapsed I have had time to write a couple of articles which gives me content, but as we near the end of 2015, it is always good to look back and see how the state of the nation is. One article is about my least favourite word …Austerity! This single nine letter word is blamed for not doing so much in life these days and whilst in Government quarters it may have a place, it is not an excuse not to do things and I’d like to point out, in my own usual way, why I think it would be wrong to justify not doing things because of it.

The other thing that the extra four weeks has enabled me to do, is to complete my project of creating the mark 2 I-pad equipped instrument pod. Details of its construction, its weight and the direct costs involved in building it are listed but its as near as I can get to imagining the joy you feel when you have built your own envelope and as such I am immensely pleased with the final result. I only hope it lasts as long as its predecessor, and gives as good a service as the mark one did.

So with time pressing, I’ll get straight into the newsletter and wish you And your families a very merry xmas and happy new year.

Steve Roake
2. Essential Extra’s / Tech Talk-

Slim pickings once again for this section- should this continue; this section of the newsletter may be replaced with another new topic.

3. The Features Section

Austerity –My least favourite word- by Steve Roake

Let’s face it, we are at the end of the year and a time when we reflect on what the year has produced. “Austerity” has a lot to answer for. Everyone blames not doing stuff on the word, I really hate it, it “grinds my tits”! I even went as far as looking up the dictionary definition of the word because it sums up government measures to cap budgets, be fiscally challenged and make general spending reductions.

Truth is this isn’t so. How can I say that? Well here is the truth. If you make a decent product, produce it to a high quality standard and price it according to what the market can stand, it will sell. In recessionary times, yes most of us cut back on what we spend frivolously, but those with savings or wealth don’t get affected by the trait and get better bargains for their money. Canny buyers will use the opportunity to get the best possible price for something they already wanted.

Take ballooning as your example, in recessionary times most people will fly less hours per year or be more efficient on the way they spend their hard earned money when using it on flying activities. I put myself more in the latter bracket, having flown a very reasonable 20 hours in 2015, but with the difference being that instead of looking at flying from home every weekend the weather looked okay, I would target events away where I would fly intensively over a Friday pm to Sunday am period and maximising on the opportunity whilst spending a weekend away. I would call that savvy or pragmatic rather than blame it on the “A” word.

If you then look into the world of Cloudhoppers’ specifically, you realise that actually in our sector of the marketplace, shoots of recovery are everywhere and the word Austerity has no place. Sure there are people getting out of ballooning and selling kit but this is more than matched by progress in the new product market. Without any official figures I can tell you that in the UK alone, there has been at least 5 new purchased hoppers built in 2015.
one lives in Belgium – but it is registered here). One homebuilt hopper supplemented these and to my knowledge at least two good used examples got snapped up recently. None of these were by accident, so let’s look at the reasons why.

Four of the five new builds were the Cameron “Super-light” O-31’s which weighing in at a class winning 30kgs in the bag speaks for itself. Coupled to a very competitive price of around £7,700 plus vat there is no shortage of interest in these craft and if you have flown it (as I have), you wont be disappointed with what you are getting for your money.

This represents a major turn around in the marketplace for Cameron Balloons, as their previous products in this sector were more expensive, heavy and not particularly popular over the last few years. The O-31 has reignited the sales of hoppers in Bristol and looks set to remain popular whilst it has an apparent lack of competition.

The other new built hopper was from Ultramagic. The H series of hoppers is established and once again offers reasonable value for money. The latest one on the UK market G-CIOV is in fact their fourteenth version of this popular model, with also G-CISJ returning to the UK in second hand guise.

Much spoken about have been the exploits of Tim Wilkinson with his Sackville Balloons, building no less than five this year, one in conjunction with another person but his hopper G-CISD shows another way to enter the world of ballooning whilst restraining the strings of the budget. This in no way reflects on what is a quality machine but at approximately half the price of a Cameron balloon, if you have the desire to build your own, under Annex 2 classification, where there is a will – there most definitely is a way. Demand still outstrips supply where second hand craft are concerned, and in G-OBAB and G-CISJ we have two examples of good fantastic condition craft snapped up instantly at the right price. It seems that if you have the money you have to pay what the advertised price is to ensure you don’t miss out on a future bargain.

There is one other factor not yet influencing the marketplace namely Lindstrand Technologies Ltd. The manufacturer used to be fairly active in the hopper market in years past and whilst it hasn’t indicated any desire to produce hopper sized envelopes (with the current range starting from 70,000 cubic feet and upwards), they haven’t ruled out subject to demand re-entering this sector and I for one will watch this space keenly.
Summing up the marketplace at Christmas 2015, those that have money probably always will, those who have a desire for something specific will invariably find a way to make it happen, and those who produce goods to a standard fit for the market will always find buyers subject to the right pricing of the product.

Austerity – isn’t an excuse for not doing something. It is a way of slowing things down, but please let’s get off the subject and put that word where it needs to be …In the trash can once and for all.

Steve Roake

The second generation I-Pod (instrument pod) by Steve Roake

Over a particularly quiet Christmas break in 2005 whilst bored, I decided it was time I improved my hopper flying experience. I had analysed what was the worst part of the flying experience and what was the most time consuming part of the process, and the answer was tying all your instruments in place having inflated the balloon. The sheer amount of wasted time and gas in what is a gas limited environment was apparent and anything that could speed up the process had to be of benefit. The answer was obvious, I needed an instrument panel that would house everything and speed up the pre-flight preparation. The available of the shelf options didn’t “float my boat”, so I was going to have to create my own. Size was also a critical thing since I envisaged this panel sitting on my lap once in the seat arrangement. Some cardboard templating with instruments then gave me the basis of my panel, and then it was just down to what was the thing going to be made out of and what was my desired level of finish. From work I had managed to scrounge some 10mm MDF fibre board and some Rohacell core which I had machined down to a 30mm thickness.
Using a template, I traced out where I wanted which items on the Rohacell and set about cutting out the core including a hole for the radio aerial to protrude through. Then I set about sticking the core to the MDF board and started cutting and applying the Cordura covering which would give the product some weather and dirt resistance. Once all the areas around the instruments were covered I could consider the attachment of the straps and D rings before finally covering the outside section to complete the task. The Variometer was fixed utilising its own screw from the reverse side, and the other instruments were held in place using elastic strapping.

Showing how rugged this design was, I have used it from 2005 until 2015 with very little maintenance or repairing. So why change now and make a mark two version? If it works why fix it?

Time moves onwards and so does technology. Hopping is about keeping it simple for sure but reluctantly I saw the potential for moving map technology and how it can assist your flight management and help you to decide where and when you are going to land without having to grab the map case. Christmas 2014 I convinced myself I would buy an I-pad Mini with the express view of utilising “moving maps” in all of my
flying so in the application of hopping the obvious choice was to evolve the instrument panel to include the new addition. Templates followed with the remit to keep the four instruments as small as possible and to be fair even with an I-pad measuring 200mm x 135mm, the overall width has only increased by 80mm and the length by 90mm. Once the idea of manufacturing a new instrument pod was sewn in my mind then came time to get the materials. The Cordura cloth which would cover the final version was purchased from Zebedee List at a very reasonable £10 for the 1 metre squared amount. The MDF board and the Rohacell inner core was “sourced” for free via friends in the motor trade and then it was really down to getting cracking on the project. I decided that along the way I would take periodic photographs to show the cloudboppers community how the task was progressing and if anyone wanted to adapt the design to suit themselves, the various stages were documented for all to see. The first task was to template the design and see how the instruments could be arranged so that the new panel was still small enough to not be a burden in use.

The design is determined.
After some changing around, the final arrangement was decided along the lines of the above photograph. Once the instrument positions were set in stone the template could then be cut around and used to mark out on the Rohacell core the exact cutting places (which was really the only part of the whole task I dreaded, because I only had two pieces of the core and couldn’t afford to scrap them). The answer was simply to take more time and consideration and cut the main bulk of the core away leaving enough of the edging so that finite accurate sanding could be done one instrument position at a time.

This also ensured that the fit of the instrument into its recess was both snug and to my satisfaction. I certainly didn’t want a sloppy fit and whilst most instruments would be held in place with elastic for protection, it was my desire that they would if possible be a push fit where the the edges would hold them in place. The actual hardest instrument position to cut was always going to be the radio position on the left hand side, because as well as opening up the recess for the main body of the Icom A3 radio it would also require an accurate hole inserted horizontally for the stubby aerial to protrude through. Therefore, I left this one till last and concentrated on covering the
The instrument pod was also going to utilise the same attachments as used on the mark one version so successfully. Some adjustable straps with nice locks would be stuck to the underside of the MDF base board, but I needed a trip to Easy Balloons for John to produce a couple of new straps for me. I had the lengths already sorted out successfully and so it was just a case of removing one part from the mark one and with new sewn sections attaching them in place. My thanks to John for his assistance as I don’t own a sewing machine.

Beautifully finished with those lovely clamps, these really give a professional look to the home build. These were then super glued to the reverse side of the MDF board and awaited the mating of the core before being filled and covered in Cordura cloth.

My biggest concern from the manufacturing stance was how to glue the Rohacell core to the Cordura cloth. My previous version of the instrument pod had (to my knowledge) been made out of a lesser grade of Rohacell and the one supplied to me this time around is classified as 71 grade which is the densest and hardest.
Whilst this wasn’t a problem, initial tests with the “super-glue” showed that the bonding wasn’t great and so I turned to the Cloudhopper’s Facebook page and asked the professionals for their opinions on what to use. With thanks to all those who responded, the unanimous reply was Evo-Stik contact adhesive.

The only bug bear with this type of glue is the time you need to leave each piece before you can tack it together. 5 minutes’ minimum is suggested after coating both parts, but what you forget is that not only are you fixing the mating sidewalls of the pod, you then have to do both the flanges and so each and every section of cloth once cut to suit, takes 15 minutes to perfect.

Needless to say, production was staggered over a number of days with the glue work hardening over 24 hours, and by the time the final result was achieved I had used 600 grams of glue and my wife was sick of the smell as I worked away at the dining room table each day.

Eventually I had all the interior work completed and it was a case where the next stage was to mount the core section to the MDF base unit. Again 24 hours was required to achieve maximum bold and then I could start the process of wrapping the
outer surfaces in Cordura, in the knowledge that I would fill all the inner spaces for an even coverage prior to the final “bullshit” finished layer.

Once the edging had been completed I could concentrate on making the necessary drill holes for the instrument retentions, and then cover the exposed areas with Cordura for a finished look. The interest that this project generated on Facebook surprised me, as I wasn’t aware that others would be keen observers, and my motivation was driven by my own specific needs rather than those of others. However, weighing in at a finished weight of 400 grams or 1.25 kilos with instruments I am pleased with the final result. Costs for the whole project (without the purchase price of the IPad mini) have totalled under £25, and I hope to get at least another 10 years out of this version.
Final frontal view of the Mark two Instrument Pod.

Comparison photo with its now retired brother! Should anyone wish to do a similar project and needs help – give me a shout.
4. Homebuilding – It’s not just about Envelopes and Baskets.

This section of the Newsletter always seems to be about the big stuff. Envelopes and Baskets get all the glory but Homebuilding can be about any part of the equipment that is manufactured in house and not bought from a manufacturer. My recent Instrument Pod probably should have been classified in this section of the Newsletter but lack of content had me place it in the features section, but if you have a unique home made solution to your hoppering needs then if you made a solution let me tell the world about it in 2016.

5. Seasonal Photo –

Nice seasonal fun with F-HHOC Cameron Z-31 with “additions”
6. Gallery Pages – where are they now?

In a new feature started on Facebook, I’ve started where are they now? Designed to generate interest and debate on older rare balloons that seem to have disappeared without trace. In many cases there may be a plausible explanation and the balloon may be still active and fine, but in some cases there is a chance to stop rarer envelopes from being disposed of and scrapped.

This particular envelope photo was by Mel Kirby / Peter Bish with only G-BI?? As its known registration. Through deduction it has now been confirmed as G-BLXY. Note the unusual Duo bottom end. Last sighting in poor condition was by Phil Dunnington in 2011 at Wilson Nairobi airport in Kenya in storage.
The second envelope is believed to be in the USA with Leslie Pritchard and At one time was UK registered as G-BKIV. This old Colt 17A dates from 1982 and c/n 442 was believed found some years ago with its panels stuck together from dis use.

Any update on its status and condition is most welcome.
And Finally Happy New Year

Facebook membership continues to rise with the current level of 771 increasing by 7 in the last month. All that remains for me to say is thanks to everyone for your contributions in 2015 and Happy new year to all, see you some where in 2016.

Steve Roake

All articles for inclusion in future issues will be gratefully received by your editor. Please forward them to steve.roake33@gmail.com and feedback good bad or indifferent is always welcome. Views aired by contributors may not be those of the Editor Safe and happy hopping!  Steve Roake.

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