

A Week at the Wairarapa Balloon Fiesta

IT'S 8:45am on Wednesday 16th March and we have just started off from Hamilton, destination Wairarapa. I haven't been to the Wairarapa Fiesta for three years, so am quite excited to be meeting up with old friends again. Our plan is to arrive at 5pm for registration at the Hood Aerodrome Museum, which involves showing the Balloon Meister/Flight Director our balloon's current Certificate of Airworthiness and insurance policy, plus my pilot log.

There are 22 balloons attending this year, 20 sport balloons and two special shapes – the 'Cadbury Crème Egg' from Christchurch and 'Sunny Boy' from Ohio, USA. The support of a local donor has made it possible for Carol Wiener and her Sunny Boy team to come to Masterton.

The major fiesta briefing is timed for 6pm. This includes general event information regarding scheduled flight briefings, refuel times, any changes to our flight maps, a safety briefing, and a Crew Chief briefing.

The Event Manager, Jonathan Hooker advises that they are pleased to have been able to secure 98% propane for us for the duration of the event. This is received very enthusiastically by all and even better still – we can fill with tanks in the basket as they have a mobile bowser dispenser. The meeting is followed by a welcome dinner for all, as well as a chance for those that wish to have a short flight after the scheduled Air NZ flight has arrived. Two pilots took the opportunity to fly and provide the evening's entertainment

on the airfield.

And so to Thursday morning which had held so much promise but was blown out, with gusty winds cancelling the morning Mass Ascension from the Pioneer Rugby



Thanks to a local sponsor, Sunny Boy visited all the way from Ohio, USA.



The Night Glow was choreographed in time to music, attracting many spectators.

Contributed by Pauline Hickey

be up early for the Friday morning 6:30am briefing at Hood Aerodrome.

Friday is Remembrance Day for

Christchurch so there's a red and black Canterbury attire for us, and a red & black flag for each balloon. On the schedule was a fly-out from Carterton but due to gusty conditions there, we stayed at Hood Aerodrome which provided a great visual spectacle as the mass ascension rose to follow the Hare. The competition task was Hare and Hounds whereby the Hare balloon has a 10 minute start on the Hounds and lays out a large white cross as the target for the Hounds to throw their newspaper 'baggies' at. The gusty wind that was at Carterton then arrived at Masterton just in time for most of the landings, making it necessary to get out a skill set that is not often required.

Our Friday evening flight was from Wairarapa College where the school was holding a gala evening. As the winds aloft were quite strong creating

a wind sheer at a few hundred feet after launch, the Flight Director called the competition flight off and opened the field to pilot's discretion. About 50% of the balloons flew.

The Saturday morning task was the traditional Splash 'n Dash at Henley Lake. In the lake are hoops to drop tennis balls into and just past the end of the lake, a large cross to throw our baggies at. With variable winds and limited launch places

Grounds. Instead, we drove down to the sports field to talk with the public and show them the basket and burners.

Next up was the Carterton Street Parade at 8pm. This begins in a side street and proceeds through the main street for about 30 minutes with a police escort as the main street in Carterton is also State Highway 2. After the burner parade, the balloon teams were hosted to supper at the local RSA. We don't stay late though, as we all need to

we set up at the southern end of the lake. Watching other balloons fly by us, my thoughts turned toward just going for a fun flight. As we rose very slowly, we caught a breeze that took us toward the cross where we should throw our baggie and although we got a good score, there was already one



Above the Wairarapa countryside.



The Burner Parade through Carterton on Thursday.

The Night Glow on Saturday night was held at the Colin Pugh Sports Bowl. This area has terraced seating and an island in the middle which is just great for shaping a Glow around. Local bands entertain the early arrivals with a variety of music styles. The pre-glow special entertainment was a competition between three small balloons of similar size. The teams raced to set up, tab up and stand up their balloons. This takes co-ordination and experience – first place went to Auckland, second to Masterton and

third place to Carterton. David Paris, who co-ordinates and choreographs the Night Glow uses coloured lights combined with an odd/even system to get the balloons glowing/flashing in time to the music. The special shape Sunny Boy glowed beautifully.

On Sunday morning we all met again at the Aerodrome for a 6:30am briefing. The weather was good at Carterton and so we were off down there to launch from the Paua Shell's large back yard. The task was

to drop the baggie in the sculpture at the Wild Oats Café or on the Town Square. The wind did not take us anywhere near the target so we just went for a nice fly through the valley, over the river and off the map to the other side of Greytown which was a new area for us. This is a long flight for the

last morning, as it is not only pack up time for the balloon rig, but pack up day for us as well.

Michael Oakley won the event competition with the highest points total. Prize giving always has some lead balloon awards (or wally awards), for those pilots or crew that have had a 'blonde' or 'senior moment' during the fiesta and whose crew have 'informed' on them. They are often for things such as the pilot flying off with the vehicle keys in their pocket, flying directly over a target having left the vehicle, or running out of fan fuel during inflation. Peter King has an endless supply of lead balloons on a string for all these hilarious incidents.

Then the time came for final good byes and to head back to our hosted accommodation for packing up. The drive home on a Sunday afternoon is tough having been up since 5:30am but we have had a great time, the night glow went well, we enjoyed three good flights, and we flew in some new places as well.

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