



2000 hours in a Gyro

In last month's ZK Review pages, we noted the arrival of a near new Magni M22 Voyager autogyro for Leo Levine. Leo is himself only recently arrived in New Zealand from South Africa, where he amassed more than 2000 hours behind the controls of three gyros he has owned (the first two were essentially worn out). That's quite a tally and certainly more recreational gyro flying hours than any of our New Zealand enthusiasts would have, so we asked Leo to tell us his story and share some of the many aviation adventures he has had. This is episode one of two, and the rest will follow in our next issue.



Leo Levine heading toward the West Coast at Muriwai in his Magni M22 gyro, now based at Parakai.

LEO says that as a young child in the late 60s, he and his friends would always run the few kilometres to the local airfield of their small farming town whenever the occasional Cessna would come in. He dreamed of being a pilot.

After many years of flying radio controlled models, he learned to fly 3-axis microlights, accumulating 500 hours on a Thunderbird (similar to the Bantam), to which floats were fitted "for some very enjoyable off-water flying". He also obtained a PPL and flew Cessnas, before 'converting' to rotorcraft in 2001 when he commenced training on a Magni gyro. In that first year, he flew more than 300 hours in the Magni. In 2003 he added a Helicopter PPL to his licence collection, and has since recorded 250 helicopter hours in his logbook, mostly in R44s. His passion in aviation is firmly with autogyros however, with more than 2000 hours now logged, all on Magni gyros that he has owned, including two M16s, one M24 and now a M22 which he has domiciled at Parakai Airfield. There are just five Magni gyros on our NZ register, and in fact Leo's gyro shares the same hangar as one of

those – belonging to Oskar Stielau who Leo wants to thank for "invaluable help with everything related to licencing the gyro and flying in New Zealand, introductions to the gyro scene, and more. Thanks Oskar!"

A growing community

When Leo started flying gyros in South Africa there were less than 30 in the country. It was a relatively new sport there, operating on the fringe of 'normal' microlight aviation. Now Leo estimates there are more than 350 gyros operating in South Africa! While many of them are 'patch flown' for fun, a large number are used regularly for long cross country trips



Desert sands on the Namibia adventure

such as Leo undertook. Gyros also have a niche use in South Africa for applications such as game park surveys and patrols.

The hours and aircraft

Leo explains: "After going for a flight in the Magni M16 with our local agent in South Africa, on landing I placed my order for a new wide body M16 – and this is when all my real flying fun started. I completed over 1100 hours in that gyro, sold it and placed an order for another M16. TBO for the 914 was 1200 hours at that time.

Whilst I owned the second M16 I decided that the ultimate gyro for me would be the Magni M24 (fully enclosed side by side) and ordered one. However I flew the M24 for only 10 hours before realising that I preferred the open cockpit environment. In the African climate I was simply getting too hot. I did consider adding air-conditioning but the cost, R&D and weight was simply not worth it, so I sold it and went back to flying the M16.

After completing around 975 hours in my second gyro I sold it and ordered a new Magni M22 Voyager. This gyro has some extra packing space on the sides, a little like panniers, and is slightly shorter (to compensate for C of G changes when packing the storage areas). I opted for a carbon fibre body which saves around 7 kg in weight.

I sold my M16 before the M22 arrived. I was gyroless! But fortunately a very good friend who didn't fly much loaned me his for that intervening period. I put about 40 hours on the new M22 in South Africa before packing it for shipping to NZ."

Gyro flying in South Africa.

Gyros are far less prone to turbulence than light fixed-wing aircraft and Leo says that this opened up the whole of South Africa to be toured, including beyond the borders.

His first long cross country trip was from Johannesburg (elevation 5300 AMSL



Leo (pictured right) with his two flying companions.

and a regular density altitude of 8500 ft. in summer) to the Natal coast, a journey of around 350 miles each way. He subsequently did the same trip at least seven times, noting that what started out as "adventure" soon became "a walk in the park". Leo used flight planning software to help plan flights with as little high ground as possible, navigating around the mighty Drakensberg which rises to over ten thousand feet, not a place you want to be in a small open cockpit. The trips usually involved a couple of stops for food, fuel and a rest break.

Gyro enthusiasts have a knack for finding each other (or converting their existing friends) and Leo says that; "After a short time we became a group of three Magni gyro owners and enthusiasts hangaring together. We formed a close friendship and flew away on a regular basis far and wide. It is amazing how one gets to know each other's flying styles and we flew safely together for many years without any incident involving close encounters with each other. One of the memorable trips we did was to the South West – Namibia."

The Namibia Adventure

Talking with Leo, this sounds like an ultimate gyro fun adventure – and it's one of many he has enjoyed. Best to let Leo tell the story; "In those days it was acceptable to land on gravel roads and to clear Customs through the border gates between the countries just by joining the queue with the vehicles. We would simply push the gyros through and get airborne again from the gravel road, then continue on our adventures. These days, this is no longer accepted or done.

Additionally, as we came up to isolated small villages, we used to land on the outskirts on the gravel roads and taxi along the town streets to a gas station, then fuel up, taxi back and take off again.

We were loaded like the proverbial packhorses, the gyro fuel tank capacity on the M16 was 72 litres and we would add another 20+ litres on the floor behind the pilots seat, then strap two twenty five litre tanks onto the rear seat. That gave an endurance of 7.5 hours with a 30 minute reserve.

We would also carry tools, spares, oil, spare tubes, gyro covers, a few litres of water to drink, a fair amount of food and of course luggage for a two-week tour – we were heavy!"

Leo says that in his opinion, a gyro is the "ultimate sight-seeing cross country superbike of the sky". They flew in heat of up to 40 degrees C in the air and took off with ground temperatures of around 46 degrees C from desert strips and roads.

"Naturally, we would fly in a T shirt and shorts in that heat. On our first trip (we did a couple) to the West coast we flew along in the heat and wind over the sand dunes, not being bothered by turbulence at all. The desert stretches to the coast and as we got closer we were surprised by a significant temperature drop even though we were still over the desert sands. We were now flying in just 9 nine degrees C due to the onshore Atlantic breeze. It was becoming seriously misty and we were still a good half an hour out of Swakopmund (a medium size city in Namibia).

...tune in to the next issue of KiwiFlyer for part two of Leo's gyro adventures.

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