



2000 hours in a Gyro Part Two

In the last issue, our gyro story told of recent NZ immigrant Leo Levine's flying adventures in Africa, where he has amassed some 2000 hours of gyro time touring the country. We paused as a long flight over Namibian desert sands met with the coast, the temperature dropped from 40 degrees to just 9, conditions were becoming seriously misty, and there was still half an hour of flying to get to the Swakopmund Airfield. Leo picks up the story...



Leo refuelling at a farm strip in South Africa on one of his many long distance cross country flights.

"IN ALL THE confusion of the unexpected mist and cold conditions whilst communicating to ATC I followed a peninsula out to sea and then routed towards the airfield only to find myself 7 miles out to cross the bay. I could have backtracked but just wanted to land and get warm as soon as possible so continued across the bay to an uneventful landing at Swakopmund Airfield.

We continued touring Namibia and enjoying the amazing landscapes and abilities of the gyros. We flew around the huge Messum Crater where the beauty to tour and see from the air and to leave no vehicle tracks was awesome. Many ancient Welwitschia plants were also seen from the air. These plants are estimated to be between 1000 and 2000 years old and absorb water through their leaf structures, harvesting moisture originating from the desert morning fogs.

Routing back we landed at Uppington Airport which has a runway of 4900 meters (over sixteen thousand feet) in length! This airport was apparently an alternate option

for the space shuttle.

As you can imagine, gyros are not particularly well known and more particularly in faraway areas these 'flying devices' attracted a lot of attention wherever we landed. So all we had to do was orbit the town a few times and land at the airfield – sooner than later some local folk would arrive at the airfield and be happy to provide transport for us to collect much needed fuel.

Of course, where we had planned to stay for a few days at various camps we



One of the game farm residents (no zoom used!)

had previously arranged that fuel would be available to us. These camps we visited were invariably like an oasis in the desert, a stark contrast to the hostile surroundings, with fairly luxurious accommodation, good food, ice cold beer and good wines. Swimming pools were also a welcome relief from the searing heat.

The longest distance we covered in one day was over 500 miles which was pretty tiring and with stops, took the whole day.

Another amazing area that we flew (partly) along which was a previously prohibited area for vehicles and aircraft for as far back as one can remember until recently, is the west coast called the Skeleton Coast. The Skeleton Coast is worth having a search with Google – it is fascinating and known to be one of the most inhospitable and desolate environments on earth. In earlier days, alluvial diamonds would be found lying in the sand with relative ease. These were not simply there for anybody to help themselves. The area was fiercely protected by the De Beers – a South African diamond family.

Other trips to game camps were equally exciting and enjoyable. One camp in particular had a large fenced off area next to the runway that all aircraft used park in. The reason for this is that the Hyenas and lions would chew the tyres and parts of any unattended aircraft. Another beautiful part of South Africa is the far north towards Mussina where there is a lot of game to be seen from the air as well as an abundance of Baobab trees. These trees are actually giant succulents.

In all the years we had two emergency landings but no damage or injuries. In both instances we repaired the faults, both of which were fuel related (not running out in case you are wondering). One of them was in retrospect humorous, but not at the time.

My friend reported a loss of power and could not maintain height. We were over bush with no suitable landing area, but



Leo's current Magni gyro, now based at Parakai.

fortunately there was a dam nearby and there had not been any rain recently so the dam edge was a fairly level spot to land.

As we approached the water I spotted a number of hippos in the water. I radioed this to him and he said that he had no choice as his motor had quit and he had to put down near the hippos. I orbited a few times and saw that the hippos were not vaguely interested in him or the gyro so I landed next to him.

We removed the blocked fuel filter and attached the fuel pipe directly to the fuel line running to the two pumps. The motor ran smoothly and all Magnis now have two fuel filters in case of a blockage as per our experience.

We were preparing to get back into our gyros to take off again and were suddenly surprised by three army clad, rifle bearing rangers who instructed us to remain clear of our gyros, which of course we duly did. They accused us of poaching the animals in the national park and flying off with them. Our explanation of fuel starvation and that there was no place to load a whole animal in the gyros fell on deaf ears and we were instructed to wait for their superiors to arrive while they wrote down every serial number that they could find on the gyros – from propeller hub serial numbers, registration markings to engine numbers.

Fortunately, three senior rangers arrived and one of them was a commercial pilot. Once we explained what had happened they assisted us on our way. The take-off was rather daunting but all went well and we headed back to our base to fit a new fuel filter."

Flying in New Zealand

Once settled in New Zealand, Leo had his gyro shipped from South Africa and set about getting all the legal requirements completed. In Leo's words, "It was an absolute pleasure dealing with the NZ CAA (Tony Hansen), RAANZ (Stuart Parker) and Gordon Swan to get everything up to speed. I also had the pleasure of staying with Garry Belton (Autogyro Association CFI) and his lovely wife Gaye in Marton and meeting with other gyro pilots that stayed over and visited during a wonderful gyro weekend. What a privilege to have met a bunch of really fantastic guys."

Leo has now flown some 50 hours in the gyro around Auckland and Northland areas. Fellow Parakai gyronaut Oskar Stielau has shown Leo around the harbour and Whenuapai transit lanes, across the city and out to Rangitoto, and around the Kaipara Harbour to Dargaville, where Leo has since returned several times for the famous Aero Club Saturday lunches.

Leo says that as soon as he gets some clear weather he will be off to Whangarei, the Bay of Islands, Kaitaia, Cape Reinga and all airfields in between.



Leo tracking down the coast, west of Parakai.

He has been amazed by the increased performance of his gyro operating in a cool climate at sea level, achieving solo climb rates of 1300 fpm and consuming much less fuel than at the hot and high altitudes of South Africa. Leo says "At a 90mph solo cruise I'm using 27" MAP, compared to 30" in South Africa. At 23" I can amble around at 65mph just sipping fuel."

Leo loves flying here and says he thinks the scenery is simply stunning. He is also enjoying the social side of NZ aviation; "I look forward to many safe hours in the air in New Zealand and am keen to meet as many pilots around the North Island as possible. No doubt the guys in the South Island are great people also, but I'm not too sure about flying across Cook Strait yet!"

KiwiFlyer warmly welcomes Leo to our gyro scene and wishes him thousands more great flying hours here in NZ.

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