

Team Kiwi does well at the Australian Junior National Gliding Championships

IN December, two young New Zealanders set off for their first attempt at an international soaring competition. Alex McCaw (20) and Nicholas Oakley (19) were heading for Joeyglide, the Australian Junior National Gliding Contest. The international definition of a junior is 25 years old or under. Along for the ride was team manager (and driver, and cook, and crew, and gopher, and water boy) David Tillman and his wife, camp mother Lynette.

Alex and Nicholas have gliding in their blood and in spite of their youth already have an impressive list of soaring achievements under their belts. In their first ever competition, the South Island Regionals in 2011 they flew in the Club Class. They cleared up on the trophies for meritorious flights, fastest flights and such, as well as Alex winning the class and Nicholas coming in second. They have both flown odd days at contests since and have placed consistently well. How they would do flying in completely different conditions in Australia was an open question the boys were itching to address.

Just as an aside, yes, Alex is the author's son, and yes, you have seen Nicholas mentioned elsewhere in this magazine. Nicholas is the son of Michael Oakley, featured in the Kiwi Flyer Interview this issue. He is also a passenger rated balloon pilot.

Alex and Nicholas were founding members of Youth Glide Canterbury, learning to fly in the mountains of Canterbury and spending their summers honing their skills in Omarama and the big mountains of the Southern Alps. Joeyglide was being held at Lake Keepit in NSW, about 50 km from Tamworth. There were mountains of a sort over part of the area, but most of the contest would be tasked over flat land and all flying would be in thermals. As an added complication the boys would be flying gliders they'd never even flown the type of before.

Another complication was the heat. Alex says this of his first day. "We had a quick check-flight with one of the instructors from the Lake Keepit club. Once we'd got this out of the way, it was about 1300hrs and the day was just getting hotter and hotter. We later found out it got to 42°. I jumped in the Cirrus, did my pre take-off checks and closed the canopy. Shit. Suddenly I was baking in the oven that the cockpit had become. I learnt later it was best to leave the canopy open almost until the tow plane was all out."

Fortunately the team spent a week on site before the contest, learning things like this. They were also able to tweak the gliders, sort out minor problems and learn the area a little. This stood them in good stead for when the contest started. Alex says, "Lake Keepit is a really easy site to fly out from, with large landable paddocks in almost every direction. As the name indicates, the airfield is right next to a large dammed lake. The lake and surrounding dams turned out to work quite nicely as thermal triggers."



Nicholas Oakley returned with the Junior Trans-Tasman Trophy.

"There were 18 pilots flying in the comp. The competition was organised and run by juniors, and ran like any other competition - except for a few odd things, such as it being compulsory to wear a bathrobe to the pilots meeting, a tradition that has been around for a few years now. There was lots of friendly banter. There was lots of non-standard radio talk on the competition frequency, with the occasional sing-along and plenty of Kiwi jokes. The flying was very competitive, with many of the pilots having competed at junior world and national competitions. It was great to have a chance to really test ourselves against good guys."

"The competition went pretty well for me. I learnt lots and reckon I will be able to do way better when I go back again. I only really made one major mistake. I stuffed up my final glide and had to land in a paddock on the other side of the lake from the airfield. I had the choice of a dodgy glide across the lake or a safe landing in the paddock. I chose the paddock. I was gutted, because I'd flown through a few 10 knot thermals but decided not to take them. Bugger. Oh well, a lesson learnt. When you did manage to make it to the airfield, the final glide across the lake was awesome fun. You could fly across the lake on the deck and land straight ahead."

Nicholas had extra pressure to do well. He explains. "Joeyglide was just one part of the competition for me as I was also selected to represent New Zealand in the Junior Trans-Tasman Trophy. I was competing against Eric Strauss and was lucky enough to lead right from day one, because unfortunately for Eric, he landed out on the first day. This took a bit of stress away. I knew all I needed to do was be consistent and get home every day. It came down to the final day. I was leading by just 200 points and I knew I was going to have to fly well. He ended up 2nd for the day and I got 3rd but that was still enough for me to win the trophy."

So how did they do overall? Nick came 8th and Alex 9th. The boys are very happy with this. Alex says, "Most of the people who finished in front of us are at the end of their time as juniors. This puts us in a good place for future comps, and for the 2015 Junior Worlds. Overall, the trip was a great success and we will be going back to Australia. The next three junior competitions will be held in Narromine: Joeyglide 2013, the pre-Junior Worlds 2014 and the 2015 Junior Worlds. We're aiming to be at all of these, as well as other practice trips in Australia."

The boys would like to thank all those who sponsored them, loaned them equipment, gave coaching and advice, both in New Zealand and Australia. The trip couldn't have happened without this help.

I'm Jill McCaw, editor and publisher of SoaringNZ, NZ's magazine about all things gliding. For subscriptions email me at soaringnz@mccawmedia.co.nz



Most of the contest was tasked in thermals over flat land.



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