

The Great British Long

Jump 2000

Report by Pilot Derek Maltby

<i>Flight 1 – Details</i>	<i>Flight 2 - Details</i>
Thursday 19 th October 2000 0808hrs to 1456hrs, 6 hours 48 mins Pilot - Derek Maltby – Solo Ashton Court Bristol to Rougham, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk 157 miles , (136 nm, 253 kms) Cameron Z105 – “Stella Two Toys” 340 litres of propane (9 tanks) Max height – 10,440 Average speed – 23 mph 8 Ordnance Survey maps 7 Air Traffic Controls Car mileage – 230 miles	Tuesday 24 th October 2000 0754hrs to 1517hrs, 7 hours 23 mins Pilot - Derek Maltby – Solo Llangynin, St. Clears, Camarthenshire to Yoxford, Suffolk 259 miles (225 nm, 416 kms) Cameron Z105 – “Stella Two Toys” 520 litres of propane (12 tanks) Max height – 5560 Average speed – 35 mph 12 Ordnance Survey maps 8 Air Traffic Controls Car mileage – 333 miles

Flight 1 – Pilot Report

It all started in reading the challenge so eloquently put in the Aerostat, “A new century demands new champions, and new names to be inscribed on the memorial trophies. So *what’s wrong with yours?*” What’s wrong with mine indeed, this was a gauntlet thrown, the challenge of which had to be taken up! – Anthony certainly has a way with words. Having become self-employed a year ago and now more flexible in my work commitments, I decided this was the year to have a go.

Never having attempted such a venture before and considering myself a hobby balloonist where should you start your planning? I called Muir Moffat and arranged a meeting; he

was well experienced in such things having flown with him over the Swiss Alps in January. It transpired his Cameron 120 may not be available, as he would be taking it out to Chateau d'Oex during the middle of October – but we might 'squeeze' one in! We calculated our 'considerable' combined weights and decided if the 120 wasn't available, we would not be able to fly together in my new Stella Two Toys a Cameron Z105, it would have to be a solo venture. As a parting gift, Muir gave me the air map covering the Scottish area, north of the border, what did this mean?

The weather was not good for ballooning during the early part of the month, or if it was, I had commitments. Typically I was at a conference in Grantham on the 17th of the month, which seemed ideal to fly a 'good distance' and I had missed it. Travelling back to Bristol the next day I did some weather checks, which showed a promising situation for the Thursday 19th. I 'lived' on the mobile phone all the way home and collected some extra propane tanks and radios at Kevin's, my recently fully fledged P1.

With sufficient food and drink prepared, it was a 5am start the next morning to get the basket 'fitted' out with the nine tanks and extra bits and pieces. Julian and Victoria volunteered to retrieve, expecting to be back for their evening engagements in plenty of time! As light dawned, it was very still in the Ashton Court Bowl, so after a quick inflation and still time to position the equipment correctly, a radio check and swapping tanks to leave the inflation one behind, it was 8.08 am and up into the clear blue, sunny sky which quickly gave me a 20 knots at 750 feet from about 260 degrees – perfect. I had no transponder with me on the flight and there was no flight plan filed and I didn't know what sort of reception I would have from the various air traffic controls. Bristol were helpful as always and handed me on to Filton who were also keen to do all they could to assist. I was making a steady pace at about 24 knots at 3000 feet and climbed to 7250 feet near to the M4 with the A46 north of Bath but would soon descend to 6000 at the request of Filton to keep clear of Green 1 Airway with its corridor starting at FL75.

I was passed to the controller at RAF Lyneham and flew directly over the nearby Hullavington Airfield at 9 o'clock. Lyneham had a number of C130 aircraft getting airborne up to 4,000 feet and I assured them I would remain at FL6000. Passed onto the RAF Brize Norton controller and flying towards Swindon and Highworth I could see from my air map the only area of clear airspace with no height restriction was just south of the Brize CTR near the Faringdon VRP. Having studied the BBAC Sporting Handbook prior to the flight, I was aware that to achieve the Silver Badge altitude requirement I would need to fly to a height of at least 3,000 metres. I requested and was given permission to climb to FL100 and achieved 10,440 feet at 9.58 am (proved by photographs and a 'memory' watch altimeter) and 30 knots with a bearing of 070 degrees.

Brize kept me informed of how close I was getting to the next air corridor with a FL85 restriction (I must have shown up on radar to the various ATC's). I descended to FL80 at 10.08 am two hours into the flight and with the first 3 tanks of gas used. I was approaching Oxford at about 24 knots and all was going well, it was novel to fly on my own but the 'workload' wasn't as great as I was expecting and there was plenty of time to take in the unique sights this wonderful platform can offer.

I had never given it a thought before but having drunk water, coffee and Coke the time had come to want a wee, how do you go about it? I've heard Brian Jones give his account of their toilet arrangements in Breitling Orbiter 3, this wasn't on the same scale but the same needs were apparent. I was flying in an Aristocrat Basket with sweeping sides but wasn't 'man enough' to get my tackle over the side; I had finished a can of Diet Coke and knowing my aim was quite good decided this was the best option and commenced filling – what I now realize is that the 'first' wee is always a 'good' one and soon the can was full but I

wasn't yet empty! Without thought for the folk below, I had to discard the contents over the side from about 5000 feet before finishing the job in hand – I would be more careful next time and plan my jettisoning! Sorry Oxford!

I had been unable to speak to the retrieve for some time having got well ahead of them and hoped they would anticipate my track; I had given them an incentive and promised them a bottle of champagne for each of them if they were in the same field when I landed.

I crossed north of RAF Benson towards Aylesbury and into the Luton CTA at 5000 having just completed 3 hours and my fourth tank – five to go. Luton were exceptionally helpful and allowed me to pass 5 kilometres north of their runway at 4,000 feet ensuring traffic was routed around me. Stanstead weren't so co-operative and requested I descend to 2,400 feet, 100 below their LTMA CTA of 2,500 feet.

I continued to be fascinated by the laws of physics and how a fluid falls before dissipating into smaller droplets and so it was that I looked forward to filling the Coke can. Each time I would virtually fill it without it going over the top – I was getting the measure of this! I would rest the full can on a tank top, being careful to ensure there were no 'targets' below. I would then empty the can and watch the contents spill out, breaking into tiny droplets but the whole, staying together as a pack. I would watch it 'sway' in the wind on its way down and on one occasion saw a beautiful 'rainbow' cast through it by the sun before hitting a wood. Fascinating stuff, funny how incidentals stick in the mind!

Large cumulous clouds were beginning to form around me, an unusual sight for balloonists to be up with them and not well below; my only concern was that other traffic would see me, there was plenty about and I could hear their engines very clearly I had slowed to the typical ballooning pace of 14-16 knots and it had become a pleasure flight after the earlier anticipation of a fastish one. At one point I reduced my height by 500 feet to get clear of a big cumulous that was forming around me.

I changed to my last ATC at Lakenheath who kept me to around 4000 feet. The retrieve frequency came to life around this time, not with my crew who I still didn't know where they were but another balloonist and their ground crew around the Northampton area, could they be 'Long Jumping' or was it a fun flight?

I was now south of Cambridge and descended to 680 feet to phone up my crew to let them know where I was, they could see me about 20 miles ahead. I told them to drive towards Bury St. Edmunds where I expected my fuel to run out, I now had two and a half tanks left. Having taken the BBAC Master SA list with me, I started to draw my likely route and mark the SA's I might be flying close to. I now had two tanks of fuel left, what I hadn't considered was having used the vapour pilot lights for the past 6 hours there was virtually no pressure in either tank and each responded with the efficiency equivalent to 10% in each – this would certainly affect my fuel consumption and distance.

I passed 3 kilometres south of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk and needed to land, I was conscious of the power wires around me and my lack of burner pressure and selected a cut field half a mile away, unable to round out as well as I would have liked it was a heavy touch down but I tried without success to keep the balloon standing up. After 80 yards it came to a halt on its side next to a barn in the village of Rougham, the farmer sitting in his tractor in the same field and then to be greeted by my crew running around the corner of the barn – amazing since I hadn't spoken to them in ages. Six hours and 48 minutes after taking off in Bristol having used 326 litres of propane and left with just 14.

The farmer John Prewer was amazed and delighted to discover we had flown from Bristol 157 miles away and happy to oblige, he held the GPS in his hand beside the basket whilst I took some photos to prove the map reference was accurate. I had completed the BBAC Gold duration and Silver altitude and distance badge requirements.

In my opinion, it was a great achievement for my first ever attempt at the Long Jump but it was time consuming in the logistics and preparation; The actual flying wasn't difficult and was a lot easier than flying around the Bristol area. I didn't intend to do it again though, this or any other year, I had done it and this was a respectable distance and potentially winnable.....

Flight 2 – Pilot Report

I spoke to Lee Hooper on the Sunday morning to ask how he got on with his Long Jump; he told me he didn't get away due to dense fog. I told him I had seen the 'Farmers Forecast' he should go on Tuesday, the isobars would be tight and he could go from one side of the country to the other. "No thanks" he said "but I'll retrieve for you if you want to go". "Thanks but no thanks" I said, "I've done it already and it was a lot of hard work setting it up". Well I pondered on this and although I thought what I had achieved was good, I knew that whoever flew on Tuesday would beat this – these appeared to be panning out to be ideal conditions. Did I want to go through it all again? No, but at the same time I could prepare and really have a good go for it; I would give it a go.

I chased around on Monday getting tanks from Muir and a transponder from Andy Elson (of various long distance fame). He told me to file a flight plan, as this would assist getting through the various air traffic controls. Although the original wind directions were to be from about 250-260 degrees, the charts were now showing the wind to be coming just north of west at about 100 degrees, this would take me to Heathrow and Gatwick; Andy said I should be able to steer between them and with a transponder they should be co-operative.

That evening we set off with the crew of Lee, Scott Ellis and Julie King a BBAC Observer who shuffled her commitments around to make it. On the M4 towards Milford Haven we came across many heavy rain showers and it was very gusty, was this a good thing to be attempting to fly in the morning? I filed a flight plan with Heathrow on the phone as we travelled and gave my destination of Broadstairs in Kent.

We arrived at friends of mine who run a very 'plush' B & B at Llangynin, three and a half kilometres north of St. Clears and 15 miles west of Camarthen. The sky cleared and we could see thousands and thousands of stars, perhaps it would be a good morning.

We rose at 5.30 am and I did the weather checks – gusts of 33 knots at the coast 25 miles to the west, perhaps I wouldn't be flying. Not able to take advantage of the cooked breakfast I reversed the trailer onto the selected field, jack-knifing it in the process as it slipped away on the incline on the wet ground – another reason we won't be flying, all omens sent to warn me. I was due to go on a ballooning trip to India in one months time, is this wise to be flying in these conditions, will I be able to walk away from the landing unscathed?

We worked through each problem and got the balloon inflated in relative calm, this time I took 520 litres of fuel, I had two 60 litres titanium tanks I borrowed from Muir would this help? The transponder was a bit of a 'beastie', it was small enough but the battery Andy supplied weighed 23.5 kilograms and there hadn't been time to see if I could power it off of

the other power pack I had taken for the radios and GPS, more importantly did it work, there were no instructions! Would the weight outweigh the advantages?!

It was a muddy field and there was mud over most bits in the basket by now. A few neighbours came out to see the unusual spectacle and see me off. At 7.54 I was ready to go and released from the tether and was away *very* quickly. I climbed to 1,500 feet and was already achieving 25 knots from about 100 degrees, I could see the Bristol Channel and Camarthen Bay but felt I could keep clear of the sea and pass over Bristol and on towards Heathrow. I booked on with London Information who had a copy of my flight plan. The phone rang just before 8 am; it was Andy returning my call to tell me how the transponder worked!

I was quickly onto the second OS map for Swansea travelling at about 3,000 feet over Camarthen. I had the map laid out on the tanks in front of me, travelling this fast I wanted to see the 'whole' picture! I busied myself with something else and turned back to find my map gone – it had 'floated' out with wind sheer during a change of height, oh well. I had recorded information of height, bearing and speed on it; I would have to ensure I weighted the other maps down!

The 3,000 feet Black Mountains were approaching and I was achieving 28 knots, I didn't want to pass over them at just 1,000 but the cloud base was at 4,000 feet. I was now booked on with Cardiff airport and told them of my intention to climb to avoid the turbulence. It was an 'interesting' climb through the cloud, not knowing the depth of them. I continued and it began to become brighter, I was nearing the top; At 5,000 I emerged into clear blue sky above the cotton wool buds as far as the eye could see, solitary and alone. I was grateful for the transponder; this was the safest place to be.

I had spoken briefly to the retrieve crew but with the mountains and my pace, RT was virtually impossible, imagine my surprise then to hear Roman Mohr calling "Clic to ground". It was amazing I could hear the Bath area but not speak to my crew somewhere below the cloud.

I then heard another balloon on the Cardiff frequency asking the controller how thick the cloud was 'I hope he doesn't tell him' I thought 'I don't want him up here with me taking advantage of the 30 knot winds'. So the controller asked me to tell him so I had to oblige – by this time it was about 500 feet thick. I later discovered that Roman wasn't in Bath, he was in a Cameron 120 out of Swansea with Rob Bailey, they popped up through the cloud and there we were, about 8 miles apart with them slightly ahead, we were to keep company for the next 7 hours.

The cloud thinned towards the River Severn and I could see both bridges although we were to cross well north of them. I had now *carefully* filled my first Diet Coke can (which I bought especially on the way to Wales the night before). I had to ensure no repetition of the problem the people of Oxford may have experienced and selected a target as marked on the BBAC SA list; it said "2,500 feet – Queen's Horses worth millions", this was the place to drop the first consignment!

The wind was backing to that needed to reach the east coast – could we have selected the ideal conditions? I crossed the Forest of Dean and Mitcheldean at 33 knots. Someone, a balloonist, on the ground was interested in my progress and called me up to discover my intentions, "was it the long jump, how fast are you going?" I was wished luck and continued on across Gloucester and Cheltenham now at 4,000 feet but achieving 34 knots. Two RAF jets flew past directly below me – I presume they had seen me; they were not on the ATC frequency with Gloucester with me!

It was about this time I peaked at 40 knots at around 4,000 feet; I didn't go higher as the cloud base was at about FL45. We carried along at relatively the same height and chatting over the RT with each other now and again. It was all uneventful and I was able to take in the various landmarks; I passed 2 kilometres south of Silverstone where I could see motor racing taking place and over Milton Keynes, a very 'regimented' town which is very ugly from the air perhaps better when you are on the ground and part of it. I now had 160 litres of fuel left but this time I had learnt to switch my vapour take offs around and would put it onto the tanks which I had burnt out – this would ensure no loss of pressure on my final two tanks – or so I thought!

I was now being 'handled' by Cranfield and flew directly over their field at 4,000 feet. Two great sheds appeared and a quick check with the map showed this to be the famous Cardington Airship hangars. They were active today but agreed to let me go through at FL40 as opposed to 6,000 feet. I took a picture for posterity! Cambridge was active but helpful and let us though close to their centre line before handing us on to Wattisham, just north of Ipswich.

I approached Bury St. Edmunds again, the second time in five days and actually flew within 3 kilometres of my landing position from last week! I continued on past Stowmarket and could clearly see the bridge spanning the River Orwell at Ipswich. I wonder if my mum can see me, she was travelling from Bristol to Ipswich by coach today and should be arriving there about now, "Hello mum!"

I was now onto my twelfth OS map, the last before the North Sea, this one had the title of "Saxmundham and Aldeburgh" the main towns – never heard of them! I had to be aware of the copious amounts of rain we had had and the fact that there are wetland nature reserves around here. I was on my last two tanks of fuel, I was concerned as I expected the penultimate tank to be registering, I kicked it and did all the things you might do to someone/thing to get an answer but no response and still not reregistering 30% - I didn't like it. This was a tank I borrowed from Muir and didn't know its characteristics.

I flew over Framlingham and its castle at 2,000 feet, "I bet they don't see many balloons around here" I thought. I needed to land in the next 10 minutes; I was registering 30% on my last tank but still nothing on the suspect one. The North Sea was clearly visible and I was still making 25 knots although the direction had swung around to about 210 degrees the lower we were. Rob and Roman were probably about 5 miles behind me now so I couldn't learn anything from them. I descended to about 200 feet from the ground and was getting between 14 to 19 knots of speed. I saw a LARGE field about a mile ahead at Yoxford calling me in, I agreed and lowered Stella to 50 feet off the ground – we were still doing a respectable 18 knots and that was to be my landing speed.

I dumped and rounded out a couple of times but was misled by the 'false reading in that 'iffy' tank. I didn't have enough 'umph' to round out with both burners as I would have like and hit the field prior to my intended one and dragged 20 yards before going through the boundary hedge Stella didn't want to stop; we dragging for a further 120 yards before coming to rest safely to the astonishment of the farm workers nearby! I had landed 9 kilometres from the coast, 15 miles south of Lowestoft after a journey of 7 hours 23 minutes, covering 259 statute miles; This was more like it, this was the weather to get you there! An average speed of 35 mph.

I was on the phone telling my crew where I was and giving an account of Rob and Roman who were approaching – fast! I got the camera out and took some pix of them with my basket on its side in the foreground; They landed after a couple of bumps in the same field

after 7 hours and 200 miles in the air together, now that is what I call a real 'Hare and Hounds'. A wonderful end to a wonderful flight that Lee should have flown and not me, I had already done one remember?

A distance of 416 kilometres qualified me for the BBAC Gold distance badge, authenticated by Julie who travelled 333 miles to get there (a round trip of 800 including getting to the launch site the night before!) Thank you team for retrieving this special flight – I couldn't have done it without you.

But - never again!

PS I spent virtually as long on this flight report as I did flying the balloon!