



Small *is*... beautiful

...or how to drive your parents nuts, by the Family Worsman (Robin, Rob, Innes, Francesca and Rory)

Usual pictures of another European meet? Look again. Innes first spotted mini hot air balloons at Metz in 1997 when he was seven years old. The appeal was instant. With a bit of detective work we did discover quite a history of model ballooning in the UK but we couldn't find anyone at that time to ask for advice or share their experience of construction. Dad's full-size balloon just didn't satisfy, especially as the burners were still too high. Persistence eventually paid off and mini balloon fever became an obsession for him, with hours spent pouring over a treasure trove: Richard Bölling's web site.

July 2002 allowed a holiday to Friedrichshaven including visits to the Zeppelin museum and Lake Konstanz, but most of all a visit to Herr Bölling's workshop! The Bölling family can only be described as wonderful; they live in the Black Forest area of Germany, they have a rides business, fly airships and build model hot air balloons. Richard also built his energy-efficient house, entirely sustainable, with wood and clay from the local area.

Richard explained all the details of construction, flying and safety and, once

Innes had flown one around the garden, there was no going back. The trip had originally been planned as an appeasing "look, see" visit - the rug was rapidly slipping from under mum and dad's feet.

At www.modellballone.com you will see the serious pocket money prices, which reflect the quality engineering involved. These are not toys but fully functioning, miniature, remote-control hot air balloons.

Fortunately a solution appeared in the form of a second-hand bottom end to come home with. Richard also gave us measurements for a suitable envelope pattern.

So back home and half a balloon later... envelopes can't be that difficult to make, can they?

"Come on Mum you've got a sewing machine!"

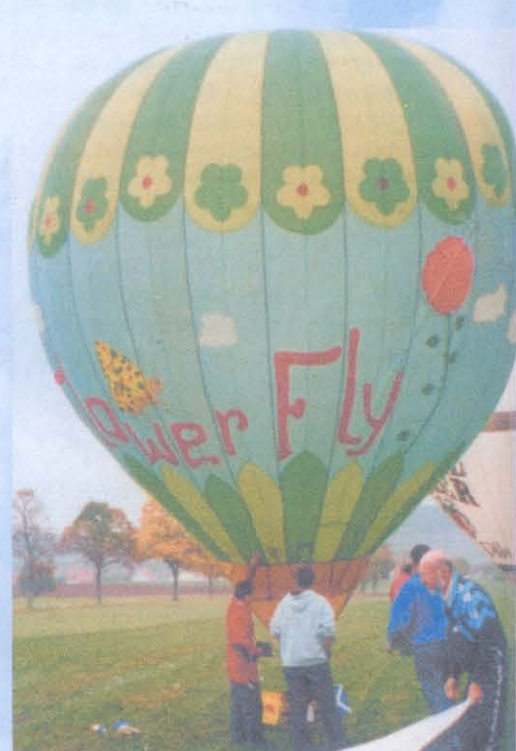
I started sewing but had terrible problems with the seams and time was running out and we still didn't have an envelope. The goal was the 17th Brigachtal International Model Balloon meet in the Black Forest in October 2002, during our half term break. Only the Swiss and the Scots think mid-October is a good month for a two-week holiday but in the Black Forest the weather was good.

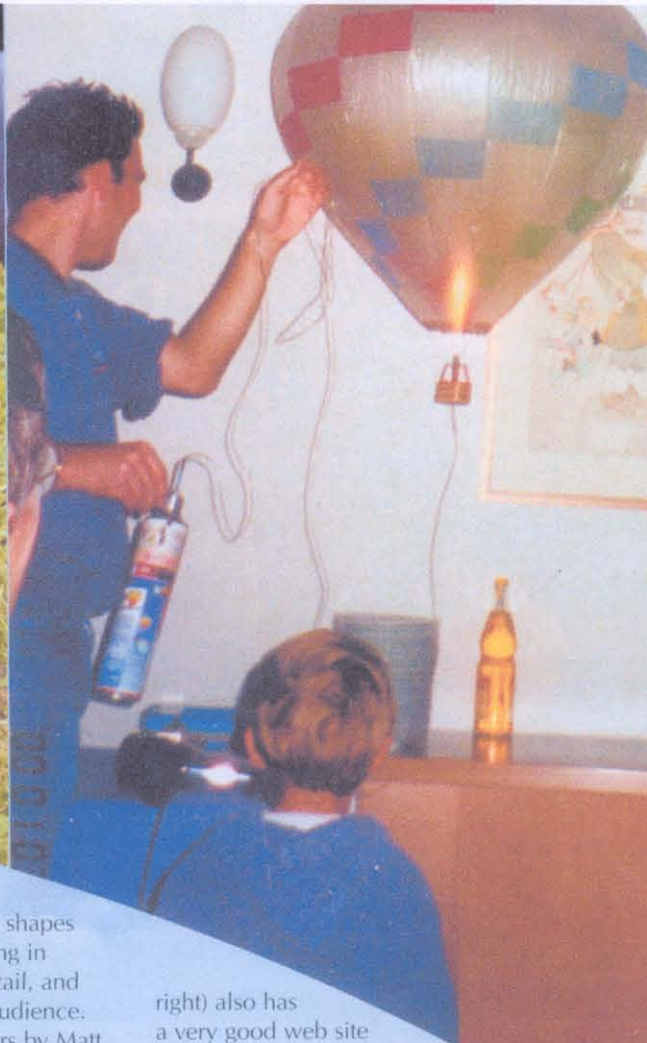
We arrived after midnight. It's a long way from Aberdeen for a weekend, but looking back, as I'm normally the retrieve, I can honestly say I haven't had as much fun at a meet for years. Richard solved the envelope problem by lending us their 15-year-old "Flower-fly", a beautifully detailed envelope. This was a scary

prospect, as we'd never flown a mini balloon before.

Saturday morning brought a familiar routine beginning with a pilots' briefing at 6 am, (translation care of Michael Bölling), followed by the launch of 30 balloons, all shapes and sizes (most around 8 meters in height) using 30 remote control units on different channels.

There were pilots from Germany, Switzerland (pictured below right), France, Belgium... and us. Also two Italian teachers had come to see what was going on and told us all about the Italian





tradition of building highly decorated paper "Fire balloons" for church festivals. It was a real mix of enthusiasts: "big" balloon pilots; families; and mini balloon pilots.

We flew four times, with competitions where, if your first attempt was no good, you just picked up the balloon and started again. "Hare and hounds" enters a new dimension and requires a healthy sprint if the balloons get whisked away and then descend quite fast. Then there are the very delicate tasks, which require split second precision in dropping markers and negotiating obstacles for those all-important points. Much to his pleasure, Innes actually won an event.

On the Saturday night we all

performed a glow at the local children's hospital for post-cancer recovery. Special shapes appeared that were mind-boggling in their design and construction detail, and were much appreciated by the audience. Then we were entertained indoors by Matt Schlegel who had become addicted aged six and has been making model balloons ever since, including really tiny ones made from plastic bin bags with the aid of a soldering iron. His penguin special shape is the famous German cartoon character Pingu. His father related a story of a childhood passion that sounded ominously familiar. Matt (pictured top

right) also has a very good web site with lots of info and downloadable material including a wonderful game of competitive target flying for aspiring pilots. This can be found at: www.pinguballon.de

All in all it was an exhausting, action-packed weekend with a fantastic, welcoming group of people, wonderful food, beer and apfelsaft. Flower-fly was returned unscathed with a very big thank you to the Böllings for organising such an enjoyable weekend. Brilliant fun!

Post script: Returning home with tips from the Belgian De Wulf family, who had just finished their envelope, construction on "ickle G-IGLE" continued, and with the help of Santa's elves it was finished on Christmas Eve 2002. Unsurprisingly Christmas Day was mostly spent in the garden - flying.

Innes has become an accomplished mini pilot and the big balloon's burners are now accessible. The sewing machine needs an overhaul but "ickle G-IGLE" continues to delight. The International Brigachtal Meet is held in October; I'm sure we'll be back some time, and if the sewing machine recovers, maybe with a special shape. We're all addicted, just look at those grins on the Böllings web site!



Pictures by Michael Bölling

