

Quite the model pilots



Burner test: as a PuT, Stanley likes to do things properly



Stanley and Monty kindly took their bigger friends with them when they went to their rather special balloon meet in Germany. Report by Andy Booth (crew).

A large group of balloonists were standing around in a field at 7.30 in the morning. Gassing up was at 6.30am, breakfast at 7am, first pilot briefing at 7.30 and now they were waiting for the mist to lift – so what's new?

The difference is that these were all model balloon enthusiasts and were taking part in the 19th International Brigachtaler Modelballontreffen in south west Germany, organised by Richard and Michael Bolling.

My wife, Mel, and I had flown in to meet our friends Ann and David Thomas from Honiton in Devon, who had driven down a few days previously with our two balloons, Flamingo and Honey Cloud.

Forty balloon teams from ten countries had gathered at the Tannenhof hotel in Wolterdingen to take part in the event. We were the only Brits there and were immediately made very welcome by the enthusiasts who had gathered from all over Europe for the event.

Saturday morning unfortunately was wet so a visit to a local clock museum was organised, but by lunchtime the weather had improved sufficiently to promise some action in the afternoon.

With great excitement we drove to the launch site about 10 minutes away from the hotel and prepared for the first flight of the event, a hare and hounds race, and a fly-in to the centre line of a road.

Our pilots were Monty, the well-known teddy bear pilot, flying Honey Cloud and a new bear, Stan, in Flamingo. Monty was off like a rocket with David trying to keep up with him – there's no holding that bear when he gets going. Stan was a little more hesitant, as a PuT. He wasn't quite certain what he was doing and was found upside down in the bottom of the basket when he landed.

The hare lifted off and on the given command the rest of the balloons



Easy does it: Mattius helps inflate Pingu...

prepared to follow. The array of colours and designs of envelopes was amazing and even included several shapes.

The road we were aiming for was only about three fields away, but as German fields are something like twice the size of ours it was quite some distance. This was our first experience of competitive free flying with our remote control models and we were a little apprehensive about their performance – but our only problem turned out to be running fast enough to keep up with them.

We enjoyed this first flight so much that we decided to return to the launch field and have a second attempt.

It was really good fun and we were soon feeling much more confident. After a quick meal back at the hotel, all 40 teams re-assembled at a local children's hospital for a nightglow. We had a wonderful reception from the children, some of whom were able to mingle with the balloons while others watched from windows and balconies. Mrs Bolling, the organiser's wife, gave us all a bag of toys to distribute amongst the children and I think we all felt a great "glow" of satisfaction at the children's delight. Afterwards we were entertained to supper and drinks in the hospital.

The next morning started very misty but by about 7.45 the cloud had started to lift and the first of the morning's tasks was ready to start – a Limbo Rodeo.

Two poles were set up with a line stretched between them about 8ft off the ground. Each basket had a streamer attached to it about 1 metre long. The object was to fly over the line and touch





it with a streamer to gain an extra 500 points. Each balloon was allowed to make as many attempts as it wished in a given time (about half an hour). We lined up for the start, the whistle blew, and off we went. Back and forth we went, with the judges sounding a toot on a hooter every time someone scored a hit. Monty tended to fly too high in Honey Cloud but eventually scored a touch just seconds before the final whistle blew. Stan tried very hard but didn't quite make it.

Then it was off on the second task – to land on a narrow track about two fields away. Stan managed to get quite close to this but Monty in Honey Cloud soared off into the sky and eventually landed some distance away after dragging face down across a turnip field. A very muddy bear was eventually rescued by one of the Swedish balloonists who had landed nearby. “Is there a prize for the dirtiest pilot?” we asked.

Sadly, this was the last event and it was time to return to our hotel for lunch and prize giving.



“A very muddy bear was eventually rescued by one of the Swedish balloonists who had landed nearby”

Some very handsome trophies were handed out to the winners and everyone received a very attractive glass plaque as a memento.

All too soon it was time for people to leave, many of them having a long way to travel home. Everybody made a point of saying goodbye to us and we felt that we had made some really good new friends over the three days, with invitations to take part in a lot of future meets. We were really impressed by the enthusiasm shown by all those taking



part in this model balloon meet, many of whom also fly conventional balloons and some of whom are commercial pilots. It was also good to see whole families involved.

If anyone would like to chat about radio-controlled model balloons my email is andy.booth@balloon60.fsnet.co.uk or you can ring 0117 9099010 in the evenings. Who knows, if we find enough model balloons in the UK, we might be able to organise a meet or two.

Technical detail: Our two balloons are 1800 cubic ft and are single burners, most of the fuel system was supplied by Bolling balloons (www.modellballone.com) Both balloons fly with three 1 litre fuel tanks and run vapour pilot lights. The radio controls have a fail-safe attached so if the balloon goes out of range or the batteries go flat the main fuel line is shut down.

Flamingo, our newest, has a manual main burner control in the basket, so the radio controls don't have to be worked during inflation. The three litres of fuel last about 45 minutes of tethering and a bit more in freeflight.

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