

As I write this

At the start of my flight back to Melbourne after one night in Hong Kong on my way back from Serbia. Already I am impressed with Cathay Pacific and it gets my vote as the best airline flight on this whirlwind around the world trip. Discount economy so right up the back but plenty of leg room and power for my laptop on this A330. Entertainment system and legroom were as good closer to the front on the Lufthansa flight from LAX to Frankfurt but the flight from Frankfurt to Hong Kong was miserable further down the back of a 747 – 1” less legroom than the length of my upper leg and an ancient entertainment system. United from Melbourne to LAX was OK but there there must be a way to avoid LAX into the USA next time?

The trip was organised at fairly short notice after I was told that I would be awarded a Paul Tissandier Diploma by the FAI for my contributions to aerobatics over the last four decades. Thanks to those within the AAC and ASAC who came up with the idea and put in the effort to make it happen. My guess is that this came about as one of the outcomes of President Grant Piper's mission to further the cause of Australian aerobatics on a number of fronts.

Something like this doesn't happen often in one's lifetime so I thought that I would go to Belgrade to personally receive the award. One minute on stage with the FAI President and a Serbian TV presenter with a free dinner wasn't quite enough justification for the expense of the airline fare so I decided to go via the USA and attend an aerobatic contest as well.

There's a bit of detail here which may be useful for anyone else considering a trip abroad for an aerobatic contest, whether it be in Europe or the USA, whether its for an FAI contest or an IAC contest. You will find this on the AAC website too and you should be aware of the functionality there for AAC members and friends to be able to login and comment on events and news items. An opportunity for discussion and additional information to be added by others. If you have trouble logging in simply contact the Webmaster. For those of you on Facebook there is that further opportunity for discussion and to look at all of my photographs online.

I got Harvey World travel to organise much of this trip (as I did for my previous visit to the USA). I booked some local accommodation but allowed Harvey to book all flights, hire cars and some accommodation to ensure that everything went smoothly. I'm pretty good at messing up arrangements, For example, I rang and booked a room at Super 8 for the USA local contest but had it in my head that I was staying at the Days Inn! A bit of confusion when I arrived but all sorted happily and I stayed at the Days Inn – much nicer.

On the way home I stopped off in Hong Kong and that proved very effective for a bit of a rest after continual travel and continuous jetlag for the previous 10 days. Harvey had recommended a hotel in TST as I knew nought of Hong Kong, booked and paid for in advance. I was told to take the MTR and walk the 200 metres to the hotel from TST station. When I arrived the local advice was to stop at Kowloon and take the free shuttle bus to the hotel. Return to the airport the same way with luggage checked in at the Kowloon railway station – all very slick. Hong Kong gets my vote as the best airport and public transport. Denver is a close second as a user-friendly airport but much larger. Belgrade was fine but lost points with the “go-slow” by security staff that day apparently. I don't know why they have a second set of X-rays and security checks at each departure gate but the queue for that alone was an hour long.

Well, a little bit further into this flight home and my opinion of Cathay Pacific just grows. Just got this little card with a quote from one of their flight attendants: “Every day I fly is another day to make a difference”. It goes on to say that “Joel is so committed that he would rather fly than have three days off ...”. Reminds me of the bullying currently by CASA of flying schools with respect to flight and duty times in this situation. I take nearly two weeks off work and I won't be flying for a while after that due to jetlag but jetlag doesn't feature in CASA's rules. I did a little bit of private flying and CASA wants me to take a bunch of duty time for it. The flying schools aren't fighting it.

Gee, why doesn't CASA change the rules rather than bully people into something contrary to the law and AAT's interpretation of it. This will probably result in me doing less aerobatic flight instruction in future. Just typical of CASA's illogical onerous approach to aviation regulation in this country. It was a real pleasure to again fly in the USA and consider that some people may simply find it better to stop flying in Australia altogether and simply visit the USA for an occasional fix. After all, Germans have long been visiting Australia to get their gliding fix.

I wonder if Grant's mission includes more lobbying with CASA. For example, the low level aerobatic approval system was improved with the release of CAAP 155-1 a while back but in the absence of any regulatory change. The new regulations for flight operations and licensing have been under development for around 20 years with ever more unacceptable draft regulations being presented. Every now and then we hear about outcome-based regulations using world's best practice similar to EASA. Sounds good at first until you see the draft rules – not outcome based but more prescriptive than anywhere else in the world. If any of the reasonable FOIs in CASA had anything to do with the rules then their views have been totally overturned by people with no idea of how small aeroplanes are operated and then further rewritten by lawyers.

Just one feature of aerobatic flying in the USA is that the IAC has long ago negotiated a deal with the FAA whereby members practicing for contests and competing do not require a low level waiver (below 1500 ft there). Peer pressure, the discipline of competition flying and self preservation are responsible for the personal safety of pilots. The FAA and the community only have a real interest in safety of third parties and any adverse effects on others – noise mainly, as it is here. The FAA deals with that by requiring that all practice and competition must be done within an FAA approved “aerobatic box”. Of course, IAC members need to jump through hoops to get those boxes approved so there is some work involved. Contrast that with the situation here. Some-one with a noise aeroplane and a 500 ft approval can do aerobatics most places in the country and create noise complaints from locals afterwards with the result that no-one will be happy. CASA may ring us up to follow up on those noise complaints but see how we have to deal with the real issues back the front to the way they are dealt with in the USA.

Parachutes is the other obvious difference between Australia and USA regulatory requirements and for club contests. Of course, some of us in Australia choose to wear chutes in competition and practice as it gives us another option in case of a problem. Consider the US requirement if it were to be applied to aerobatic training or private aerobatics here using the Decathlon as an example. To start with the useful load is maybe 215 kg in aerobatic category depending on which model and how much extra equipment is fitted. Feel free to comment on my weight but some of us are fairly big so even with a less big passenger that may total 175 kg leaving 40 kg for fuel which is OK for a typical training flight. Now add two parachutes and we can't carry enough fuel to do anything more than taxi around – if you want to debate that further first have a look at CASA's onerous draft new rules for minimum fuel on a flight.

The second issue with parachutes is the plan required for their use. Sport Aerobatics Magazine of, from memory, May 2011 had an excellent article by John Morrissey – a surprise problem in the air resulting in a decision to evacuate will require something like 23 seconds from that event to when you will be clear of the aeroplane. That is solo in a Pitts S-2S. Perhaps quicker from the double bubble canopy of later S-2s which can eject very rapidly but consider the added complications if two people need to jump. Now consider the Decathlon again. If it is a training flight then the instructor must ensure that the student ejects the door and gets out first. That 23 seconds becomes what? The next consideration is what decision height do you set for a training flight eg passing through decision height not in control such as in a spin and not yet an obvious recovery is what you need to fix on the ground and make clear in the pre-flight briefing. I wonder what that altitude would be so as not to dispose of perfectly good aeroplanes too often. That decision height must be significantly less than the minimum height at which you would normally perform these aerobatic training flights or passenger flights. So, we'd end up routinely operating with a base height of around 5,000 ft instead of 3,000 ft. That would be the logic in my view. Of course, you could

simply take the view that the chute just gives another option so forget the above rationale. How valuable then is it to then have chutes with two people in such an operation?

Rocky Mountain Invitational

I've just got back (well back as far as Denver) from Lamar, Colorado, USA after competing in this aerobatic contest. About 26 competitors altogether and half of them were flying gliders.

I competed in Intermediate using a Pitts S-2C. Lots of fun.

Left Melbourne last Thursday and arrived in Denver that night. Drove to Lamar the next morning - quite a culture shock:

(thumbnail doesn't seem to work but click on it)

I had been delayed the previous night as Denver was closed for a while due to 60 kt winds. By the time my practice slot came around the wind was picking up again, didn't get as bad as the previous day but I didn't want to risk it. So, no flying that day which meant no practice at all. Our Pitts S-2A had been U/S recently (the trip was at short notice so little opportunity to practice) so hadn't flown a sequence in it since April. My only practice was the Sportsman sequence in the Decathlon. I was flying Intermediate in a Pitts S-2C at this contest. I had first met Dagmar Kress in 1996 at Oshkosh when a few of us got together to fly to Oklahoma City for the World Aerobatic Championships. Dagmar Bassett? [website info](#) now runs a flying school in Denver. She recently purchased this 2008 S-2C with only 90 hours on it and generously let Dieter XXX, Dave Watson and myself fly it in Primary, Advanced and Intermediate categories. Dagmar and xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Sergei Boriak flew her Extra 330XC?? - a former Red Bull raceplane which the factory had reworked to competition aerobatic configuration.

I had also connected with Contest Director Jamie Treat (from IAC Chapter 5) and D.J.Molny, President of Chapter 12 which had run their contest at the same venue only a few weeks earlier. Jamie had also told me that a Super Decathlon would also have been available for me to fly at the Contest. I was appreciative of the efforts of all in the planning stages. I would have been very happy just to have come along and watched the contest – it was a real bonus to fly the contest. A great bunch of people overall – those of you on Facebook may have noticed a bunch of new friends that I have in the USA.

I walked into the registration room - “G'day Betty” I said only to be greeted with a blank look. It had been a very long time since I had met her in Australia but after a little while she remembered that I had been Contest Director of the Philips World Aerobatic Challenge. 1980 Female World Aerobatic Champion Betty Stewart was of the judges this weekend.

Friday night I heard that there was a tornado watch current for the area. 2" of snow forecast for places just west of us.

Saturday morning briefing was at 7 am. I was one of the first competitors to fly - the Intermediate Known. Californian Dave Watson was pilot-in command in the front seat as my US licence was not current. Dave has shares in a Laser and a Pitts S-2B. Pre-flight briefing included a refresher of IO-540 operations, hand-over/take-over procedures, parachute decision height and bailout procedures plus my plan to fly the sequence. Elevation was so high here that we can't wind the altimeter back to Sea Level – Dave said that they were using 4,000 ft to make the arithmetic easy but I decided to keep it at airfield elevation. Jetlag was such that my brain wasn't functioning well enough to see the logic in that. I had already flagged jetlag and lack of sleep as a major safety consideration so we'd agreed that if either one wasn't happy with something that Dave would take over. It was also a consideration in my performance in the contest but not an issue as I just wanted to fly for the fun of it. As Sergie Boriak said to me then – isn't that's why we do it anyway.

Wind favoured 18 so we used that for both take-off and landing. Not far to taxi for take-off but it took a while to get the temperatures up for take-off. With Dave with me I didn't bother refreshing

myself on the procedures, being satisfied that the US procedures would be close enough to the current Australian procedures that I couldn't get into too much trouble. Jetlagged and disorientated by the position of the Sun I decided not to bother with any consideration of which way North was etc. I'd just point and go.

I had to fly the low line for the judges to get their eye in. Then delays as the judges decided that the wind had changed so needed to change direction of flight resulting in new paperwork etc. By the time I go to start my sequence I had burnt 10 USG of fuel.

I started my run in at 8,000 ft. Airfield elevation was 3,700 ft. I wanted lots of airspeed for the first manoeuvre - a "P" loop with a snap roll on top. 190 mph worked very well but chewed up a lot of height. Spin at #3 lost more height so by the time I had finished the humpty at #4 I decided to stop and climb back up. I was down to 5,500 ft. Bottom of the box for me was 4,900 ft but being at a low situational awareness state (jetlag, strange aeroplane, strange country) I wanted some margin.

The rest of the sequence went fairly well until #12 - a simple half loop up, finishing inverted straight and level. I started it at too low an airspeed. Stalled at the top and it dropped a wing. The next manoeuvre was an inverted steep turn so I thought I might try and fool the judges by leaving the wing down, trying to unstall it and easing it around a turn. Bright idea but it didn't work, started an inverted spin - drat.

Overall score was 76.28% - quite respectable but about 7% behind the leader.

Just as I finished low cloud swept in across the box below me. End of all competition flying until an hour before last light.

Flying resumed late in the day and I was out on the judging line for Unlimited, Advanced and Sportsman Glider. Transport out to the line in that remarkable yellow limo. Cold out on the judging line that afternoon.

Sunday morning briefing was at 8:00 am. IAC rules aren't the same as the AAC so my Free Sequence was new with no practice. I had made it a fairly easy sequence to fly and therefore to maximise the points. Quite a strong crosswind across the box - another feature of my sequence were the two wind correctors so that was easily handled.

When packing I had held several pairs of shoes in my hand for consideration. Rivers Airforce Rockers were great for long periods on my feet at airport terminals but the soles weren't ideal for the Pitts rudder pedals. The 15 year old sneakers I used when flying the Pitts S-2B around back then were long past their use by date so not very comfortable on my feet although I knew they'd be ideal in the aeroplane. Black Rockers plus an old pair of Joggers that I'd been using in the S-2A were my selection but I had overlooked the tunnel over the rudder pedals in the later model Pitts. My size 12.5 feet in the Joggers were just too tight in the S-2C which made it somewhat difficult to get the right amount of rudder or brake on just when I needed it. With the crosswind today I decided that it would be less stressful if Dave did the take-off and landing. He chose to depart on 26 and land on 36. By now I had worked out which way was North.

Being slightly more familiar with things for the second flight and a better plan the flight started off well. Turned bad when I stopped following the plan. I should have broken to climb for height before the spin, instead having to keep my eye on the altimeter after the spin resulted in a couple of sloppy figures. Broke for height then came in for the final five manoeuvres still mad at myself for not following the plan then made it worse by flying one incorrect figure - it was a good one just not the right one - pulled instead of pushed over the top of the humpty.

Scores were generally better than for the first flight although the zeroed figure resulted in a slightly lower overall score. Only two of us flying Intermediate - Phil flying his Giles G-200 came first.

The contest was all over, trophies awarded and airfield emptied by 4 pm.

Lessons Learnt

Including some stuff that I wouldn't have wanted to do in the first place but mentioned here for future reference. I had planned to do one practice flight the day after I arrived from Australia on that very long trip. I knew that I would be tired and jetlagged so planned to fly dual only. Even then it was obvious that two or three days rest is a good time to allow in advance of even the first practice flight. For a serious competition with solo flying I'd allow at least 5 days rest in advance.

I have a US CPL but need to update the licence to the new style requiring identity confirmation including an interview by the FAA. To fly solo I would also need to get a US medical and a BFR – altogether a bit of time and effort – that's where I'd use that jetlag recovery time on my next trip.

Well into this Hong Kong – Melbourne flight now and still feeling good as a result of the stopover and the excellent Cathay Pacific service. Perhaps I won't need that long recovery time when I get back home? Or perhaps the trip was so short that jetlag just cancelled out being back in my home timezone and the stopover provided enough sleep for now.

I must update my suitcases. The one I used was from the '80s so not as easy to drag along on trips like this as the current styles. My carry-on bag is a soft one without wheels so expands as required so pretty useful anywhere any time but on a trip like this the contents are fixed and it gets heavy on those long walks around places like Frankfurt airport. Next time I'd prefer a small one to wheel around – small for it to be more manageable on US internal flights where overhead baggage space is at a premium.

Trousers – my Rivers things whatisthe name again – with lots of pockets, studs to secure some of them and a zipped one for wallet and passport – seemed to be ideal until I suffered the security check departing LAX. Empty everything including tissues from our pockets they said so not surprisingly the machine did not like the metal studs and zips resulting in a full pat down check. The good news was that the security staff there were quite pleasant.

I have previously mentioned the importance of shoe selection. While in Denver I spent some time shopping and came back with a neat pair of shoes which should be ideal for competition flying in future.

Paul Tissandier Diploma

A number of these are awarded each year by the FAI for XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. The blurb for my own award was:

“XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX”

There were only a small percentage of the winners present to personally receive them. There are other prizes as well – the group awards and the more prestigious awards to a very small number of individuals.

At the Conference Dinner that evening I found myself at a table with NASA Astronaut Nick Patrick, This reminded me of a discussion I'd had with former NASA Director of the Space Shuttle Program, Aaron Cohen about twenty years ago. His plan back then was for the next project to mine the moon and produce power there which would be microwaved down to Earth. I'm surprised that this plan hasn't surfaced recently or perhaps it is on the table but I just lead to much of a sheltered life that I haven't seen it.

2012 Plan

We hear about the teams to WAC and AWAC but there are international competition opportunities for those of us in the lower categories too. I had hoped to compete in the '97 AWAC in the USA but my travel plans just didn't work out at the time and my flying has decayed since then. I had worked

my way up to Unlimited and currently working my way down to Graduate. Paul Bennet recently kindly remarked that I could put our Pitts S-2A through Advanced. There are some older pilots around who do continue to fly at more serious levels than I do and they are a real inspiration – names such as Bill Finagin and Chris Sperou spring to mind. Events like this certainly promote enthusiasm so right now I am tempted to have a go at the new Advanced Q for 2012. Who knows, I may decide to change my plan for 2012 but currently this is it.

A small regional contest in a place like Lamar, despite being the centre of the universe, is not normally the destination if that is the main purpose of the trip. Everyone should go to Oshkosh at least once. The plan for 2012 is an assault on the USA National Aerobatic Championships to be held during September in Texas. There are a few others already intending to come with me. There has been some recent discussion within the IAC about the eligibility for foreigners to take trophies home – doesn't matter to me at all. It was marvellous to take home something solid from Lamar but whether I or I get enough points for a trophy regardless of whether that results in hardware per the IAC rules then it is not an issue – enough of a trophy to have it on record along with memories and photographs of the experience. It is early days so plenty of time to get organised but a few things need to be lined up in advance for it to be a successful trip:

- aircraft availability. I haven't started to make enquiries yet but this is obviously essential and I would want to have a backup plan as well. I'm not flying for sheep stations so I don't care whether I fly a Pitts, Decathlon or Clipped Wing Cub. Thus the advantage of going to the US Nationals rather than something like AWAC – if Plan A falls in a heap at the last minute then there is a very good chance that Plans B or C would work.
- The others coming will need to join the IAC and obtain a US pilot licence if not already.
- We'll need to get the licences current with a medical and Flight Review plus aeroplane checkout.

The plan can work in reverse too. On this trip, as I have on past trips, I spoke to people who said that they'd like to visit Australia. One friend many years ago was quite blunt "... but Melbourne is not on the way to anywhere." We've had overseas visitors competing in the past – one even won Unlimited at the Nationals but the rules prevented him being the Australian Champion in the same way that IAC has framed its rules. The security rules from the Department of Transport makes it much more difficult for visitors so enough time must be allowed to work through the process.

CASA's rules for aerobatic endorsements require them to be issued by an authorised Australian instructor. i.e. training overseas (as well as in the RAAF) cannot be used to automatically add the endorsement when the temporary licence is obtained. USA has no aerobatic endorsement so there is nothing to be carried over.

If anyone else is interested in coming along with me in 2012 then I'd be happy to share information and plans. US visitors to Australia can be assured of being looked after but be warned about the plumbing, the beer, driving on the left, drop bears, strine and please do not tip.