

Euroglide 2006

By Jac. van Stratum, team DM.

Prologue

The Euroglide was on the menu again, this year, and as Euroglide fanatic I had felt enough regret missing the 2004 edition. So I registered in time. With a beautiful task, that would bring us even to Switzerland, it took long for the 12th of June to be there. Unfortunate my son Bart couldn't be part of the team for study reasons, but club member Toine Bloks was available and willing to be my retriever. This turned out to be a golden choice, as will become clear during this story.

The briefing on Sunday 11th of June was instructive and sociable. The weather forecast predicted good conditions east from us in Germany, so the Euroglide organization chose the task to be flown clockwise via the turningpoints:

1. Neustadt Glewe, between Hamburg and Berlin,
2. Aalen, 75 km east of Stuttgart,
3. Montricher, 15 km west of Lausanne,
4. Denis de l'Hotel, 15 km east of Orleans,
5. Dahlemer Binz, in the Eifel, 50 km south of Aachen.

A lot of former Euroglide contestants were present. It was sociable, but nevertheless I drove home early as it would be flyable the next day and some preparation and packing still had to be done. Yes, I am a person who kicks on the last minute stress. I found my bed after midnight and closed my eyes with the thought: when will I find such a nice bed again in the coming days.

Monday, the first day.

Early up, the last bits and pieces in my retrieve car, a VW Caddy, kisses to the wife and EUROGLIDE-time!!!. I picked up Toine at his house, where I found out I had, as always, forgotten something: my pillow. Right away Toine came with a solution.

On the airfield, we rigged the DeltaMike, put it on the startgrid, and went to the briefing. My head was not yet "Euroglide ready", but I thought, we all go the same way, with the same weather, and that as far as possible. That's all! Blue thermals were predicted to about 1200 m, or as the meteo forecaster Ronald Kaay said: Hot, weak and low.

At 13.20 I was towed up and found a weak thermal that brought me to 1100 m. So carefully I went on my way. At checkpoint Leende I reported off and told Toine he could start driving. On course everyone flew in gaggles of 5 to 10 gliders which made things easier as the average climbing was not more than 0.6 m/s. At 16:30 it is getting weaker. We have passed Venlo and Wesel by then and near Stadlohn. At the end I land without damage in a cornfield 15 km before Osnabrück. Toine is there very quickly, derig the glider and drive to Osnabrück-Atterheide, where it is busy with 17 Eurogliders. Everyone is nearby; competition is still open. We have made 180 km on the first leg and still have 336 km of the 350 km credit for driving.

Tuesday, the second day

It looks as if the weather is going to be nice, though from the west worse conditions are predicted. So, quickly to the east!! Glider rigged and moved to the start grid. With my low handicap I am one of the first to start at 12.40 h. behind a Dimona. It is difficult to find good thermals. I see no other gliders at all, but in the end I can climb to 1700 m. QNH. Again blue thermals. I decide to go on course and make no detour via the Porta Westfalica, as the others do. After 100 km I am getting low near Hoya end must take zero climbing to maintain myself. In the end I climb away with 0,8 m/s. A bit further the same happens near Walsrode. Again I can save myself. Now I am at the Lünenburgheide and near Soltau I can climb to 2000 m. Everyone seems to pass the military shooting ranges of Bergen-Hohne on the south, as I still see no gliders at all. I pass north of it and recognize some points during my stay there fulfilling my military service, almost 40 years ago. When I hear the position reports of the others, I come along reasonably well, in spite of my handicap and at 17.15 h. I pass turning point Neustadt at an altitude of 1800 m. Now to the south. I still haven't seen any glider all day.

A bit further one my retriever announces clutch problems with the VW Caddy. He advises to land on airfields, where I can start again, as it not sure he will make the next airfield. I put the message aside and concentrates on flying. First I come within gliding range of Luchow. Further on I see the first glider of the day circling and together we reach after 3 thermals again an altitude of 2000 m. Quietly I glide

the 60 kilometers towards Gardelegen, almost 100 km south of Neustadt. I do not try to come any further and land at 19.00 h. after a flight of 375 km and with still 336 km driving credit. First thing to know is the situation with my retriever. 20 minutes later he enters the airfield, stops. And that was it. The Caddy won't drive any further.

Wednesday, the third day.

The Caddy is picked up by a nearby Volkswagen garage for repair. Toine and I decide that I will fly on. He will see that the Caddy gets repaired. For me to fly carefully enough, that I always can land on airfields, where I can start again.

On the start grid some teams try to force me to start with the threat that otherwise I have to backup completely. I interpret this as a negative interpretation of the contest rules. There is no start grid in handicap order. I let the LL start first and I will start second. I get a threat again that they will file a protest and I answer they should do so when they feel like it. I will see and starts at 11.55 h. Thermals are reasonable and the second one brings me with 2.5 m/s to 2400 m. Toine needn't to be informed, as he can't drive along with the Caddy anyway.

Conditions are OK, though big areas of blue sky have to be crossed. The Harz brings me to 2400 m. again and near Erfurt, just before the Thüringer Wood, I ask en get permission to pass their TMZ area without transponder. After passing the Thüringer Wood again big blue areas, but the towns give reasonable climb rates. I continue criss-cross to the south avoiding areas without airfields with no start facilities.

At 18:00 h. I pass the second turning point Aalen at 1700 m. and plan to reach Kirchheim Teck. A bit further I am within their gliding range, but the MA with Jacques Kolpa has already landed on the airfield Blaubeuren, near Ulm. He says that they have start capacity for the next day as well as sleeping facilities. So I decide to go there. Blaubeuren is 400 m. higher than Kirchheim and probably not as crowded with starting gliders in the morning. I don't want to take further risks and land at 18.55 after a flight of 480 km with still 336 km driving credit. I probably could have made 50 kilometers more, when Toine had been nearby, but I am satisfied. Jacques Kolpa was right. I find him drinking beer with the locals and I am invited to lessen my thirst. The family Hofbauer invites me and another pilots and retriever to stay in their guest facilities, which is very comfortable. I have no toothbrush or underwear with me, but who cares?

We eat together with the teams MA, NR and the English pilot Rory, who is alone as well without retriever, in the town Blaubeuren. A telephone call with Toine tells me that the complete clutch mechanism of the car was gone and is being replaced. He can drive tomorrow at 10.00 o'clock. This brings after a beautiful flight and agreeable evening also comforting thoughts to go sleep with. Retrievers are important in an Euroglide!!!!

Thursday, the fourth day.

After a perfect night sleep, a perfect breakfast with the family Hofbauer, a perfect gliding club, who lends me a flight map of Switzerland and an advise how to approach and tame the Jura mountains, I am ready to start.

At 11:45 I am airborne. The Airfield is on a hilltop with on the south side a steep down slope towards Blaubeuren. It looks like a real thermal source, but it isn't really working yet. Somewhere else I finally can climb to 2100 m. and I am off. From time to time it looks as if it will overdevelop but each thermal brings me to 2700 meter. I pass Klippeneck and Donaueschingen and fly into the Black Forest where it goes to 2750 m. again. The first hurdle comes near: the entrance into the Jura mountains via the restrictions of the Zurich TMA. This TMA has a lower limit of 1980 m. In the last thermal I climb to an altitude so that I will arrive at Huetten, where the TMA begins, at 2000 m. . From there starts the crossing of the Rhine valley. I decide not to keep right, passing the Basel airspace restrictions, but to glide south via Fricktal to the gliding site of Olten. In the hills south of the Rhine valley I find a weak thermal that brings me a gain of 100 m. with an average of 0,3 m/s climb rate. Olten is within gliding range but is behind a range of hills. Approaching these I see more and more of the land behind and I am still within range of Fricktal. With a weak wind from behind, there will be little turbulence, so I go on. Just above the hilltop I find a weak thermal, but then I see the gliders of the Olten aeroclub above the valley on the other side thermalling. At 950 m. (450 m. above ground) I join them in a 1,5 m/s thermal that brings me to back 1800 m. The hurdle is taken. Now up to the Jura.

The people at Blaubeuren had told me that on approaching the Jura from the east, you would see three Jura mountain ridges in front of you, one of which would give the best climbrates and that most of the time it would be the middle ridge. They were right: the middle ridge was the best. Between 1500 and 2600 m. I came within gliding range of successively the airfields of Grenchen, Courtelary,

Neuchatel, Motiers and at the end the turningpoint Montricher. A 140 kilometer of landscape with astonishing beauty passed below me with on my left first the Neuchatel lake, then the snow covered Alps far away and at the end the Geneva lake. Fantastic.

On arrival at the turn point I have covered 325 km with still 336 km driving credit. Flying on would have been possible, but the risk of an outlanding with Toine still far away on his way to the south now didn't attract me, so I finished the flight at 18:30 hrs at Montricher. The field is completely desolated. Later on someone arrives, who very hospitable offers me the keys of the clubhouse.

Over the phone Toine tells me is just approaching Basel. His TomTom navigation aid however shows him not the most ideal way, so he arrives at 23.45 hrs at Montricher with 1100 km on the clock and.... sausages and schnitzels. The kitchen at Montricher is well equipped so we enjoy the hot food in the middle of the night. Toine has deserved a long night sleep!!

At the end, the defect of the Caddy has had little influence on my progress in the Euroglide, but it had a big influence on the way I admire Toine now as retriever!!

The fifth day

After a good night sleep it turns out that the weather is not so suitable to cross the Jura towards France. Bad weather is approaching, which will push up against the Jura and it seems wise to start tomorrow as far west as possible. We decide to drive to Nevers, something like 260 kilometers more to the west in straight distance. After a perfect breakfast with lots of fried bacon and eggs (what a perfect guy is Toine) we depart rather late. On the way we can't restrain ourselves from drinking a good glass of wine, when we pass the Burgundy wine area, so it gets later and later and it will be dark on arrival at Nevers. To our luck we pass the city of Autun, where we pass an airfield with some glider trailers. We get in contact with the club and it turns out that there will be a tow plane to pull me out tomorrow. So we stay at Autun. The restaurant at the airfield however is not willing to prepare some food for us. Only a Turkish restaurant in the city serves us at 23.00 hrs a perfect meal. Early in the morning we hit our sleeping bags in tent and trailer after another beautiful and relaxed day. After this transfer over road we still have 177 km driving credit left

The sixth day

We make contact again with the tow pilot and he expects to be at the airfield at 13.00 hrs. The weather seems to develop well and at 13.40 hrs I release from tow at 950 m. QNH. In front of me I see the Morvan hills with tops of 850 m. which I have to cross. Above the hills I huge CB has developed and releases tons of rain just north of my track. After some doubts about what to do I finally decide to go on, as I see sunshine on the other side of the hills. Toine can start to drive.

Past the CB I find a thermal quickly towards 1650 m. Progress is reasonable. After passing Clamecy I cross the Loire at Cosne, as I expect better conditions on the other side of the Loire. I must be careful not to come too near the nuclear plants of Cosne and Gien. There are big cumulus clouds above them, but also huge penalties when you fly above them.

With altitudes in between 600 and 1300 QNH I slowly approach turning point Orleans, where I meet the M3 of the Amsterdam Aeroclub, thermalling. I decide not to turn at Orleans, but to spend some 5 kilometers driving credit and follow the M3 and later on the LL. In the end I loose contact with them again and after digging myself out at Bellegarde I finally come within gliding range of Montargis, where I land at 18.40 hrs after some 210 kilometers with still 173 km. driving credit.

I decide for a transfer by road to Pont sur Yonne, some 55 kilometers further on track. I will than still have some 120 km driving credit left, which will be enough to drive home finishing the Euroglide by road, when I will succeed to come as far as Aachen the next day.

The seventh day

There are a lot of Eurogliders at Pont sur Yonne. In the 18- en 25 meter violence I may again start as one of the first at noon. The thermals are very weak still and with 0,4 m/s I go on trach from 950 m. QNH. The cumuli look very watery but the thermals are getting slightly better. At Romilly I even have 2 m/s integrated to 1100 m. It is the best and highest thermal of the day. West of track it looks better and via Cezanne I follow the champagne hills towards Epernay and Reims. More easterly I hear the others complain, but my track looks right. I stay as high as possible but all thermals give less than 1 m/s. Just past Reims i get very low but I can save myself. On the radio I hear the position of the XX, the leader in the "pure" gliding class, and I am only 60 km behind him. I fly in second position! Not bad for a DG-300 in an unhandicapped race.

20 km Past Reims I come again below 300 m above ground, but I can dig myself out. I never come higher than 1000 meters now. Via Rethel I approach Sedan and the Belgian Ardennes. Past Sedan It won't go up anymore and I can't get high enough to climb up to the Ardenne hills. After a 40 minute struggle I must land on Sedan at 16.15 hrs after 200 km. What a shit!

There are no possibilities to get an aerotow and St Hubert, 60 km north isn't willing to send a plane, so I am stuck. I had hoped to arrive at Eindhoven today, as many others do. The XX arrives at Eindhoven and wins the gliding class. I am still in second position. De NC en NR follow closely, land south of me and drive to St. Hubert.

Also my retriever, who for the first time followed the advise of others, is more than 250 km away! He has a bad temper as well. In the end he arrives and we start thinking how to get on. The weather forecast is not very well

The eight and ninth day.

It is monday and we decide to transfer to the south-east to Thionville. Distance 90 km, but a forward move of only 16 km. Still enough to drive home from Aachen. The intention is to follow track south of Luxembourg into the Hunsrück and Eifel hills without the altitude limits of the Belgian airspace. There is always a tow pilot available when we need one. The rest of the day we play tourist again. The weather is not flyable on Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday should be better. We are patient. On St. Hubert however the NR and NC started in a small flyable weather window and reach Eindhoven that day. Very well done! I am in fourth position now.

The tenth day

The weather looks reasonable and we prepare the DM. At 12.30 hrs I am airborne and the second thermal gives more than 1 m/s. So I go on track. I slightly touch German part of the Luxembourg TMA. Just before Trier I can climb to 1300 meters and continue to Dahlemer Binz, the last turning point. Near Bitburg I get low but slowly can climb back to 1200 meters. Further on I cant find any more thermals and I land 35 km from Dahlemer Binz at an altitude of 500 m uphill in a beautiful grass field. Toine arrives quickly and we drive to EDKV, where we meet the team LV. We take the small hotel at the airport.

In the meantime I am getting some stomach ache. Maybe from the some overdue French cheese I ate. At dinner it gets worse and I take an early night. It will pass!

The eleventh day.

My stomach problems are almost over and I feel well. Cautiously I skipped breakfast. The weather is not glidable. Team LV decides to transfer to Aachen, 50 km more north. We meet the tow pilot, who is very kind and helpful. He takes us home to look at the weather forecast. Tomorrow should be good. For the rest it is a very quiet day.

The twelfth day.

Blue sky, clair and fresh air. Stomach feels good, so....an early start, as many will try to finish early today. I big cloud street develops in westerly direction towards St. Hubert. For the rest it is blue sky. At 11.00 o'clock I am airborne and directly I find good climbrate untill 1600 meters. Off we go. Thermals give 2 m/s and at 11.35 I fly off the Eifel towards Aachen. It looks as if the instability hasn't yet developed here in the low country. So I continue carefully. At Aachen I can climb again to 1600 meters. At Aachen-Merzbruck I hear that the teams there must still start when I pass them at 1600 meters. Further on it goes well now and at Nederweert I come within gliding range of Eindhoven. I glide over my house and land as first on Eindhoven at 13.05 o'clock on our completely deserted grass strip. But I am home, by flight, after a fantastic Euroglide adventure.

Epilogue

The Euroglide 2006 was a great race, with all the elements, that makes this race so special. All ingediants were there, including long flights, carbreak down, late diners, sleeping in the trailer, or comfortably at hospitable people or in club homes, days of waiting for better weather, etc. etc.

Thanks a lot, Euroglide organisation. In two years I will be there again!!!

But my special thanks go to Toine, my retriever. He drove 3200 km, all alone in a VW Caddy. He solved all problems, stayed two days behind for car repair, drove 1100 km on his own to Switzerland to reach me again. And all of this always with a big smile on his face saing: this is fun!!