

EINDHOVEN'S 2,400KM O/R

Jeff Warren and Bernie Morris experience 2014's Euroglide. It's a comp with just one task, a round-Europe safari from Eindhoven, flown as quickly as possible



Running the Jura

WE HAVE TIME TO REFLECT ON WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED IF THE MAIN BATTERY FAILURE HAD OCCURRED A FEW MINUTES EARLIER WITH THE PROP OUT

EUROGLIDE is a competition organised every two years by the Aeroclub Eindhoven in the Netherlands. It is a closed circuit of around 2,400km around Europe. In 2014, 65 gliders competed in four classes, mostly from the Netherlands, but with entries from another seven countries. This year there was one entry from the UK: Jeff Warren and Bernie Morris flying their Duo Discus XLT, with Hugh and Daphne Browning as crew.

Day 1: Eindhoven, Netherlands to Weinheim-Bergstrasse, Germany. 270km

The gliding site is next to Eindhoven airport, in a Transponder Mandatory Zone and under Class C airspace from the ground up, so the organisers are understandably paranoid about retaining good relations with their neighbours. They have negotiated a narrow corridor out and we are allocated squawk codes. We are to fly 30km under motor power to a remote start, with the warning that any glider going one metre outside of the corridor will be disqualified. Coming from the UK it seems incredible that there are so many Dutch pilots flying cross-country in such difficult circumstances, but they continue to overcome all obstacles.

Just after reaching the start point, and before we are established, we suffer a complete failure of electrics. Bernie has won the toss for the first day, and I am starting to think it may have been a good toss to lose. We need to land to investigate, but a return down the corridor is now impossible, so we divert to the nearby Venlo Gliding Club.

Once on the ground, we have time to reflect on what might have happened if the main battery failure had occurred a few minutes earlier with the prop still out low over Eindhoven, but we decide it is really better not to think about that.

At Venlo a voltmeter is produced and our main battery is found to be totally dead, potentially threatening our entire trip. However, the club has a Duo and there is an old main battery, no longer used. It's fully charged, and they give it to us; an act of generosity and helpfulness from gliding folk to pilots unexpectedly landing in a strange glider that proves to be the pattern for the week. Our offer to pay for the battery is politely declined, so we make a donation to club funds, which is accepted.

Now we can take a winch launch and set off, although two hours behind the field on what is forecast to be a good day. We make steady progress south through Germany in good conditions, until an unscheduled bank of stratus appears over our track. It's thick and dark and it completely cuts out the sun, but there are pockets of weak lift. Bernie trickles along in the gloom, UK-style, for another 100km to a landing at Weinheim, near Mannheim. We are back in the pack.

Weinheim does not operate during the week, but there is a club member in the workshop. He opens up the office and rings around to find us a hotel, then insists on opening the bar and pouring us two steins of beer. He then set off in his car to meet Hugh and Daphne in the local town and guide them through a maze of small roads to the airfield. It is a day book-ended by encounters with friendly, helpful people.

Day 2: Weinheim-Bergstrasse, Germany to Olten, Switzerland. 452km

The next day the stratus has gone, there is good lift in excellent visibility and we soon knock off the 150km or so to the first turn at Stillberghof. Our route now runs south-west across southern Germany in the direction of Roanne in France and, with the cloud now getting lower and thicker, but still reasonably reliable, we meet up with two Dutch gliders and proceed towards the Black Forest as a trio of Duos.

The advice given at the competition briefing for this part of the route was to



Euroglide is a biennial gliding race over more than 2,000km kilometres through several European countries (illustration enhanced by Steve Longland)

THIS PROVES TO BE A VERY GOOD DAY FOR TWO JURA VIRGINS TO MAKE THE RUN; WE CAN STAY MAINLY AROUND 7,000FT, WHICH KEEPS US WELL CLEAR OF THE TOPS AND PROVIDES MAGNIFICENT VIEWS AS WE GLIDE OUT TO THE RHÔNE VALLEY, NORTH OF LYON

climb as high as possible over the Black Forest and then dive down to the Jura; the series of mountain ridges running for over 200km across northern Switzerland to the Rhône valley. Our route is clear, though we can see thunderstorms in the distance over the high Alps, so we do the recommended dive and start to explore. However, it's late in the day – too late to get established it seems – so we backtrack to a landing at the small gliding club at Olten, west of Zurich.

All gliders in the competition are equipped with trackers, which display position and altitude in real time on a website, and this will surely be the must-have gizmo for UK competitions next year.

Day 3: Olten, Switzerland to Montluçon, France. 458km

After launching, we are confronted with something that all who fly from Lasham would recognise as a sea-breeze front, running between the lakes and the Jura, but if so this is the Mother of All Sea-Breeze Fronts. We soar the convergence until we are high enough to cross the first ridge into the Jura proper, where we can see extensive cumulus clouds that seem to be at a good height.

The Jura has the reputation of being a gliding motorway and, while it is not the high Alps, it's higher than anything in the

UK. This is therefore the part of the Euroglide course that we flatland pilots have always had some concern about. I had previously taken the opportunity to have a flight with a Swiss instructor from Montricher, so I know the location of the last two landable fields and where we have to climb high to cross the unlandable terrain towards the valley of the Rhône. As it happens, this proves to be a very good day for two Jura virgins to make the run; we can stay mainly around 7,000ft, which keeps us well clear of the tops and provides magnificent views as we glide out to the Rhône valley, north of Lyon.

As on all days, there is plenty of work in the back seat; navigating through and around unfamiliar airspace, talking to ATC where necessary, and locating the next nearest airfields on track where one could hope to get a launch. The small group of people flying single-seaters have my admiration; the workload must be intense.

The cumulus are smaller here, so the valley is in full sun and we cross the Rhône and start to climb into the hills on the western side. There is a moment



The route from Switzerland to France. With a reputation of being a gliding motorway, the Jura is higher than anything in the UK and, therefore, the part of the Euroglide course that concerns flatland pilots the most



Jeff Warren has been flying gliders for over 30 years, starting with a K-6E based at Booker. Most of his gliders have been in syndicates with Bernie Morris, and they currently fly their Duo Discus XLT from Lasham. Jeff says that gliding always gives you new challenges, and in 2014 it was Euroglide

■ Euroglide is organised by the Eindhovense Aero Club in Eindhoven, the Netherlands www.euroglide.nl

Below: Team KRO (l-r) Daphne Browning, Jeff Warren, Bernie Morris and Hugh Browning



☞ when we find ourselves picking fields in an unfriendly-looking valley, but Bernie climbs away and we go round the second turn at Roanne. The route from here takes us through a section where it is desirable to get into controlled airspace to keep in touch with the clouds, and it soon becomes clear that the magic words are “squawking 7,000”. As we listen on frequency, a series of Eurogliders are given clearance and proceed along track. During our trip we never hear any transponder-equipped glider being refused entry to Class D, or even Class C, airspace. As the day starts to die, we make a landing at Montluçon, about 150km short of the Poitiers turn. Seven Eurogliders accumulate there, including the two from the French Air Force, which are being followed along the route not just by ground crews towing trailers, but also by their own two tugs.

It has been a superb day in the air, but a brutal one for Hugh and Daphne, who arrive very late at our hotel, just in time for us to eat at what seems to be the last open restaurant in town.

Day 4: Montluçon, France to Montargis, France. 398km

This is forecast to be a day with extensive showers, so we are anxious to get going as soon as possible. It starts well, with good streets running along track, and I am able to glide the first 50km without turning. After that showers start to appear, but they are isolated at this time and when we reach Poitiers it is in sunshine. When we identify ourselves as a glider, the Poitiers controller just gives us a transponder code and asks us

to confirm that our turning point is the end of the runway. We are not the first to pass this way! Times have changed since we used to fly on Michelin road maps from Le Blanc.

The showers are now becoming more extensive and are joining up, potentially blocking our route, but we keep diverting around them. Suddenly we break through into a completely different air mass, with sunshine on the ground and occasional cu. This is over a large area of forest with numerous small lakes, which we were always warned to steer clear of when flying from Le Blanc as it is a dead zone for gliding, but today it is just fine. As the day starts to die, and the sky starts to go blue, we cross the Loire and land at Montargis, to the south of Paris, with three other competing gliders.

Day 5: Montargis, France to Dierdorf-Weinau, Germany. 462km

Montargis is inactive, but local tug pilot Jean-Louis spots the gliders and thoughtfully leaves a message on the Euroglide notice board, giving his mobile number if anyone wants a tow.

Today will be a “Back to the Future” flight: a downwind dash for maximum distance, with a 25km/h tailwind more or less on track; just like the Old Timers used to do it, except that we have GPS and mobile phones. We fly over what seems to be a never ending agricultural plain, alone in the sky. As we approach the border we have a decision to make; do we route through what seems to be the Byzantine military airspace in southern Belgium, or through Luxembourg, which has controlled airspace to a low level, but the locals tell us we will be allowed in. Luxembourg it is then.

From the start of the day we have never been high enough to relax, but never low enough to be seriously worried, and that’s the way it stays. In Luxembourg and the neighbouring areas of Germany, the land rises 1,500ft or more from the plain in Northern France, but cloudbase rises in step, giving us a maximum of 3,000ft over the ground. The outlanding options are restricted, however, and from time to time we are picking fields. Showers are also developing and spreading here, and they are pushing us constantly to the south of track. Our mobile phones have stopped working on crossing the border, so we have lost contact with Hugh and Daphne, though we know they are a long way behind. Rather than pressing on, we opt to glide it out across the Rhine to a landing at Dierdorf-Wienau.

On the ground we re-establish contact with Hugh and Daphne, who are 200 road miles behind us. We tell them to look for a hotel for the night and join us in the morning, as the forecast suggests we are unlikely to fly the next day. The airfield is not active during the week, but club members Marvin and Steve appear and offer to squeeze the Duo into their hangar, given that a thunderstorm is approaching.

Unfortunately, a man with a JCB down the road has cut through the power cable, and the hangar door is operated electrically. Marvin suggests that we de-rig and fit the glider in their workshop, which we do just before it starts raining. He then drives us to the local Gasthof, where we share some beers and book in. The next morning, the trailer arrives in Dierdorf town and Hugh and Daphne tell us that people seem to be competing to guide them to the airfield, but Marvin happens to drive past and claims precedence.

Bad weather has now set in over a large area of northern Europe. Several competitors have finished in four days, but the rest are scattered across 1,000km of route from Roanne in France to northern Germany, and none will move in the air for two days; some not for three. However, all gliders have a "displacement allowance", which allows the glider to be moved by road or under motor power for around 300km. This is obviously essential if you land in a field or somewhere else where you cannot get a launch, but it can be used for any purpose, including finishing. We have not used any of our allowance, and we calculate we are within



Convergence over the Jura and Lac de Neuchâtel (all photographs by Jeff Warren)

range, so along with nine other gliders that day we drive through the rain to Malden. (Though we subsequently find out we got the calculation wrong. Memo to self: read the rules more carefully!)

Euroglide is a brilliant invention, and it has been a unique and rewarding gliding experience for both of us. We flew over 2,000km in five days through six countries, in interesting and varied conditions and over often spectacular terrain, and we made new friends along the way. What more could we ask for?

**A DOWNWIND
DASH FOR
MAXIMUM
DISTANCE,
WITH A 25KM/H
TAILWIND MORE
OR LESS ON
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THE OLD TIMERS
USED TO DO IT**

An advertisement for 'GLIDEOMARAMA.COM' set against a background of a glider in flight over a mountain range. The glider is on the left, flying towards the right. The mountains are rugged and partially covered in snow, with a layer of clouds below them. The text is centered and includes the website name, 'New Zealand', and the slogan 'The World's best Mountain Soaring'. At the bottom, it lists 'Ridge, Thermal, Wave - October through March'.

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