

# THE NATIONALS

Jan 2015 | Waikerie | South Australia

## Departure Time

2000kms is a hell of a long way to travel by car, especially when the temperature keeps hovering around the high 30s on both days. Chad, Deakin and I cocooned ourselves in the air conditioned Subaru Forester and, packed to the gunnels, with glider trailer in tow, Chad pointed it towards Waikerie, South Australia. Its ironic that Waikerie was the town Heather and I had passed through twice on our 2 months SA holiday trip a couple of weeks previous.

Now we were going back for some serious competition. You see, in two years time, the World Championships will be held in Benalla. The "worlds," as they are nicknamed, are seldom held in Australia so every glider pilot worth his salt is striving to to become part of the Australian team. Representative points are assessed over the next two years. Good results in Waikerie will be important.

I met my boys at Darling Downs Soaring Club on new year's eve. Chad normally enjoys coming to the club at this particular time because there are usually lots of fliers making whoopy and celebrating the arrival of a new year. Old recycled gliding stories abound. This year the place was empty and therefore extremely quiet. The distant clouds told the story as I drove in - it had been extremely wet during the last few weeks. Most fliers stayed at home.

We packed as much in as we could that night and took off very early in the morning. We had to leave behind a number of luxuries such as Deakin's scooter and my tungsten cooker because they simply did not physically fit in the space available. We couldn't overload the trailer either. So, loaded to the roof, with Deakin squeezed in the back, we took off on our long trek.



## The Nationals

Each year, for the last 5 years, Chad has competed in the National Gliding Championships. He needs a ground crew to support him, especially a retrieval if he outlands. Someone has to pick him up from a paddock and I guess it's better that it be one of his own. Besides someone has to cook and wash and pamper the pilot. Luckily we have only had to retrieve Chad only once over the last 6 years. That was 2 years ago when he outlanded after only 10 minutes of flying. Chad is quite determined never to do that again.

Heather always comes along to lend a hand but decided not to go this year. 2 months on the road in SA only a week before was enough. 2000kms is too far. So this has now become a boys trip, just like the Omarama NZ trip we did together a couple of years ago.



### *On The Road To Waikerie*

Cocooned in our travel capsule the high speed trip was a bit numbing. There are areas where towns are far and few between and the scenery was very uninteresting. The area around Hay, for example, (called the Hay plains) is simply saltbush and dirt and nothing much else for as far as the eye can see. Watching the rather bland countryside wizz by is a perfect recipe for becoming lost in ones thoughts. Its easy to become reflective and forget about what's passing by outside in the heat. Unless of course when someone starts to talk. We listened to quite a number of ABC radio "Conversation" podcasts which Chad and Deakin found very interesting. I thought that driving this long distance would gave me an opportunity to talk with my boys about "important life matters" but I quickly sensed that both Chad and Deakin felt more than a little captured so I backed off and decided instead to wait for other appropriate times to probe, make comments and ask questions. I am sure they hate my pontificating and moralising as much as my Heather does. I am certain that neither of them relish being forced to think too deeply either. Despite this its was very satisfying to be together.

My boys are great company and I feel very comfortable with them. Its great too to see the interactions between Deakin and his dad in particular, and vice versa. Deakin's greatest achievement, prior to my arrival, was that he cut the grass with the club's ride on mower. All on his own! He also drove the club's tow-car around. He proudly announced that he even got to second gear using the clutch but never got over 35kph for fear of getting booked. My grandson is growing up! His dad gives him calculated risks to conquer, something he seldom gets when he is with his mother. Deakin acknowledges this indirectly by stating "how can I learn how to do something if I don't make mistakes - mum worries about me far too much."

After 10 hours driving we arrived in West Wyalong. It was 11 hours actually because I had forgotten about daylight savings. We slept in air conditioned comfort at one of the many cheap motels and then it was on to SA. We had to wind back our watches 30mins at the border after winding the clock forwards 1 hour prior to that at the NSW border. Our car and trailer were searched for fruit fly. The daylight lasted longer and longer as we traveled west. Chad noted with interest how the different crops caused subtle but amazing changes in colour. The juxtaposition of deep rusted reds of the sorghum and the olive green of the cotton bushes against the bright yellow of the sunflowers was actually interesting to realize once Chad pointed them out. Even the muted colours of the silver saltbush against the grey soils on the Hay Plains started to look more interesting when there was nothing really to observe except bitumen and a treeless horizon. It was very dry and hot outside.

And so we finally arrived at Waikerie Soaring Club. It was late in the afternoon and oppressively hot so we left rigging the glider till the cool of the next morning. After offloading our personal gear in our rather austere club rooms, we did a quick food shop and spent the rest of the evening communing with the other early arrivers. Chad was able to catch up with competitors who he only sees once a year at the nationals.

An early morning start to rig KYF was followed by a brief shakedown practice flight. KYF 15m is so much easier to put together than Girffo's 29m monster. 20 minutes later and



Chad was ready to fly. The weather was unstable on his short flight but it was enough for Chad to get a feel for the surrounding area. He explained to me how different Waikerie flying conditions can be to other regions such as Darling Downs, Lake Keepit, Benalla and Omarama NZ. Soaring conditions can vary quite markedly because of the terrain, the mountains (or lack of them), the type of crops on ground (or lack of them) and obviously the climatic conditions with such things as sea breezes and cold fronts. Waikerie has its



own particular idiosyncrasies. I can only imagine what it would be like to fly overseas in totally unknown conditions.

On the Monday Chad was only one of 3 fliers who were prepared to brave the conditions. A cool change was expected. Almost immediately after Chad took off the sky darkened considerably and a huge storm threatened to blow in. We have a CB radio so I can listen in for Chad and know when he is about to land. The radio also allows us to listen in to general chatter between gliders and get to appreciate what sort of things are going on up in the air (amongst all the radio static). We

also can see a record of Chad's trek online - GPS settings that are plotted on a map when he remembers to push his SpotBuddy button. There has been many a time when he has been so busy concentrating on getting home that he forgets to push the button not realising that there is a stressed ground crew thinking the worse because there have been no plots on the map for a long period.

On this particular flight Deakin and I could see ominous dark clouds rolling in from the west. We also watched Chad's Spot records on the map which were some distance away from the airport. The airfield radio warned the 3 glider pilots that a storm was about to hit Waikerie. Panic and stress all round. Would Chad make it back? He seemed to be flying sideways and away from base and safety. We could only assume he could be in difficulty? After an hour watching his dad flying erratically on the map Deakin retired to his room quite stressed. I remained in the car watching and listening and checking my phone. It seemed to take an eternity. The storm got closer and closer. The sky got blacker and more ominous. Meanwhile, back in the cockpit, Chad was having

a ball, oblivious to our concerns on the ground. We did not know what was happening but he could see what the weather was doing in the distance and was never concerned. He had plenty of time to explore and simply kept enjoying "playing with the weather". After almost 10 months out of the cockpit Chad wanted (and needed) to have as much practice as he could. Here was his chance and he took it. When he finally landed in the rain, I gave him an absolute earful. But his smile said it all. One happy chappy. My son was back into his groove again. Let's hope he has the same amount of fun during these championships.

Tuesday was the official practice day but the weather, although reasonably warm, was again not looking at all predictable. Difficult conditions aside, the bullshit that was going on behind the scenes was irritating everyone - namely who was going to end up in what class. You see everyone is eyeing the Worlds in 2016 and therefore there was lots of flip flopping from one class to another. There are three classes in this competition - standard, 15m and open class. Some gliders are able to move from standard to 15m (and get a healthy handicap in the process) while others, with adjustable wings, can move from open (18m wing span and over) back down to 15m. KYF is 15m so Chad could only wait to see who he would be flying against in this very competitive class. Strategic games were being played by many pilots. At first it appeared the best pilots would nominate for standard but when everyone realised the dearth of quality pilots in 15m class many changed their minds. Chad just shrugged his shoulders and sighed "whatever."

Just before take off a gentleman came over to KYF and gave it a loving cuddle. It took us all by surprise. The man asked if I was the owner of the glider and I duely pointed to Chad. KYF's first owner, David Jones, from SA, still

remembers the "old bird" with great fondness. There is a photo of him taking delivery of the new glider in the club rooms. Chad assured him that "MY graceful bird" was being looked after very lovingly and that she was NOT for sale. Lots of discussion about KYF and its time honoured flying characteristics followed. Wonderful to see.

The official practice day went off with all the usual hitches and glitches. I never ceases to amaze me that even after attending 6 nationals you would have thought that organisers of this event would have learned how to do things most efficiently have but no. Each time it is different and it takes everyone much time and effort to get it right. So many opinionated "experts" ensure that the rules for each and every national is different - some radically different. This year the chaos and bedlam at grid time was laughable. Its interesting to observe a number of high powered glider pilots who hold serious management positions just sitting there and shaking their heads in frustrated amusement. One of these pilots is the head of the Australian Air Force. When will organisers ever learn there is a better way of doing things that have already been proven beyond doubt. Every competition director asks for feed back but the information never seems to be applied. Even an outsider like myself has come to expect issues. People organising a national or state competition are volunteers and are not paid but that shouldn't mean that they are beyond criticism. The attitude of the majority of competitors continues to be - "grin and bear it."

All 45 competitors took off but not all of them were intent on completing the task. 3 decided to





fly in the opposite direction and “play in the convergence” around the Yorke Peninsula. Evidently they had a lot of fun. Chad left the starting gate late and tried desperately to chase down the gliders ahead of him only to see lightening between him and the leading pack. He sensibly turned around and flew back home as fast as he was able given the deteriorating weather. It turned out to be a very long day for 12 of the competitors who had to be retrieved from distant paddocks. They made it home in trailers. Chad could only smirk. At least he got home and it was only a practice day after all.

Wednesday the competition started proper. It was very hot and the task was a short 2hrs 15mins because of the expected storm brewing to the north west. Apart from a difficult second turn-point Chad had a marvellous flight and returned home quite elated. He senses when his flight is reasonable. He came 5th on the day in his class of 14 but his time and speed were not far behind the leaders. If he flies consistently like this and does not make too many wrong judgements he will be in there with a shout. We shall see.

Competition Day 2 was a wipe out - literally. The morning weather forecast was dire - an extreme monsoon rain event was moving down from the north. A huge deluge of rain was expected - enough to break a 30 year record. There would definitely not be any flying for the next 4 days and maybe longer. Chad decided to dismantle his glider after the morning briefing took place. Many pilots dismantled early to beat the

expected rain. Just as Chad was about to start he noticed a cloud wave was forming. We helped him rush to the tarmac and alert the nearest tug pilot. 20mins later Chad was in the air - the only pilot to fly. He experienced the wave for only a short time but when he landed his face was beaming. Waves (morning glories) are a common occurrence in NT during certain times of the year but not down this way. They are a unique phenomenon and glider pilots look for them. Chad told me the experience is just like surfing although he has never surfed

on a surfboard. The leading edge of the cloud wave acts just like a water wave. A pilot can use the wave edge to get lift all along it until it eventually dissipates. This was Chad’s first ever opportunity to “surf the wave”. Once on the ground we dismantled the glider and rolled it into its trailer which was then securely tied down. Gliders don’t like getting wet for long periods and certainly don’t cope well with hail either. Once gliders are inside their trailers pilots can then relax. And so for the next few days it will be twiddling our thumbs using technology - Deakin playing computer games, Chad researching and flying his drones while I return emails, write newsletters and work remotely on my community group activities. Pity we don’t have Foxtel because I could fill in my time watching the Asian Cup. Still, its nice not to be stressed.



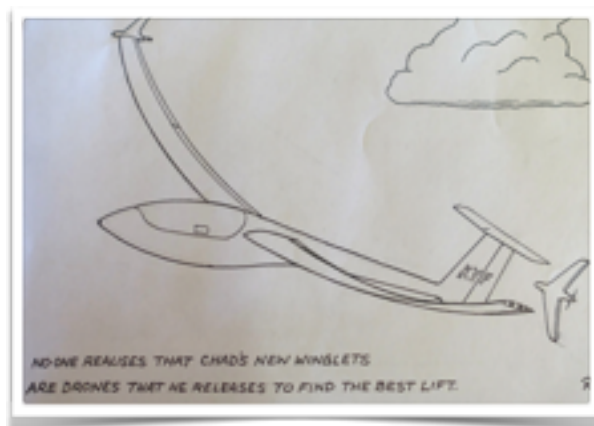
### Chad's Report

The second practice day saw the usual hold ups in weighing and gridding as well as the challenges the comp committee was facing since a good portion of them were busy fighting the fires at Adelaide. Mandy Temple's house was only narrowly saved by Peter Temple and Matthew Scutter's father. All that joined with the likelihood of storms in the afternoon meant that by the time we started the task there seemed little hope of completing it. The fact that my class was right at the back of the grid made things worse. To give you an idea of the task, it was an AAT and you needed to reach 130km/h just to make minimum time. Although I was doing that kind of speed at the third turnpoint I decided to abandon the task looking at what I still had to fly through since the thought of outlanding on a practice day seemed silly even though all the "serious" pilots soldered on. Even after deciding to go home I still had to do a 90 deg deviation to get home flying around rain and had some lightening come uncomfortably close to me. I believe there were 12 outlandings that day. Of course that day Allan, Matthew and Ben went the other way and played on the convergence instead and came back with smiles on their faces.



Comp day 1 was another AAT for 2:15 time with wedges as the forecast was for possibly large storms and only a short flying window. The trough line however decided to actually be in another location and the day ended up being much better so most pilots in 15m class hung

around after the start gate opened for about an hour to use the best part of the day. I had a good flight doing 138km/h but got low at the second turnpoint and needed to take a few weaker climbs to stay airborne although shortly afterwards I jagged an 8.4knot bottom to top climb from 3000-9500ft and had the averager peaking at 12knots which got me back into the game. Of course Matt the "machine" blew everyone away with 156km/h.



Comp day 2 was cancelled due to poor weather but while relaxing in my room Allan came bursting in asking how quickly I could get my glider flyable because a glory cloud was coming (unfortunately Allan had already de-rigged his). The answer was "very quickly" and shortly after I was in the cockpit awaiting the tug that was also being scrambled. The glory cloud was very similar to the one that went over DDSC a few years back and was really well formed but started falling apart as it went over Waikerie. There was even four separate wave bars that were forming, falling apart and re-forming. It was a pity the tug didn't get to launch me earlier but I still managed to find lift on it and stay airborne for 20 minutes or so riding it until I had to return to the airfield. Those kind of moments stay with you and I've learned from the last time that thinking about it for too long makes you miss the opportunity so you just need to act and go for it.

Here is what I was watching as I waited in the cockpit for the tug to arrive. The pictures show the full glory cloud from left to right with some of the others visible behind. It was interesting because a second cloud formed above the primary and secondary wave clouds.



Unfortunately this is where the flying stories have stopped. Most pilots (including me and Allan) have de-rigged into our trailers as the last two days have been declared no-fly days and it is looking to stay that way until about Tuesday with reports of between 80-200mm of rain heading our way with very high winds. Some weather stations are calling this a 1 in 30 year rain event. Everyone tells me this never happens here. I said it's only cause we decided to have a Nationals in Waikerie. So far at the place that is widely known as the blue flying capital of Australia I have flown around massive rain and 90km/h wind gusts with an oncoming frontal system whilst people frantically fight fires 2 hours away, I've had 12-15knot climbs to 13,000ft, classic QLD cu's and dodged over development and rain showers and sat watching the 8/8ths high cloud cover from horizon to horizon in the week or so that I've been here but only seen one blue day. Ahh nationals flying. It's certainly different.