



Maurie Stubbs, posing with Gerald Dick's trike, owns the property on which the airstrip is situated in Marble Bar.

Many thanks Maurie for permission to operate from the station and a **BIG** Thank You to Mrs Stubbs for the endless supply of morning cookies.

ê



New trike owner and club member, Ric Mepham takes on the task of removing this friendly little python from the toilet bowl. (Just like Steve Irwin.)

COONGAN RIVER: MARBLE BAR



The Coongan River (not much water now — flooded 2 months ago) flows NW through Marble Bar to join the De Grey River

OUTBACKS IN THE OUTBACK

by: *Brendan Watts*

When I first heard the name Marble Bar I, along with a few others, thought this was obviously a tavern, or maybe we just hoped it was a tavern. **J**

As it turns out, Marble Bar is a tiny little town way out in the middle of... well, nowhere I guess. It's definitely in the outback.

My trusty Garmin 12 tells me its 768 nautical miles NNE of Bunbury and 237 nautical miles SSW of Broome. It doesn't get much more outback than that.

I had been invited to travel to Marble Bar to teach Gerald Dick to fly his shiny new Airborne Outback. I would stay as a guest of Gerald and his lovely wife, Ingrid, at their caravan park and we would operate from the local airstrip.

I thought, "Mmmm... another adventure about to unfold."

I said to myself, "Self, it's a

tough job but someone has to do it. When do I leave?"

June was the chosen month for departure and that's when I had a call from Jim Polinelli, "Hey fella, want some company? I've got nothing on for the next 35 years or so".

So Jim and myself got together and a plan was made. We'd leave for the Bar on the same day and meet up at the chosen way-points (aviation term for pubs). First stop Payne's Find where we'd have to camp out. Then onto Newman the next day where we would stay the night with new club member Ric (another Jacks please) Mepham.

We had not met Ric but I was delivering his "new" second-hand Outback which he had purchased from me over the Internet. Ric now informed me that he had a twelve-day break coming up and would love to slide up to Marble

Bar and start his training.

"Not a problem," I said, "the more the merrier." **J**

"Great," says Ric, "I'll bring the Jacks!"

The South-West Microlight Club grapevine was obviously working well as the next phone call was from Jamie Bywaters from Kalannie. Jamie also owns a new Outback and was half-way through his training for licence.

"How you going Brendan," says Jamie. "Mind if I join you up there?"

"Feel free Jamie, the more the merrier." **J**

"Great... I'll see you in a couple of days."

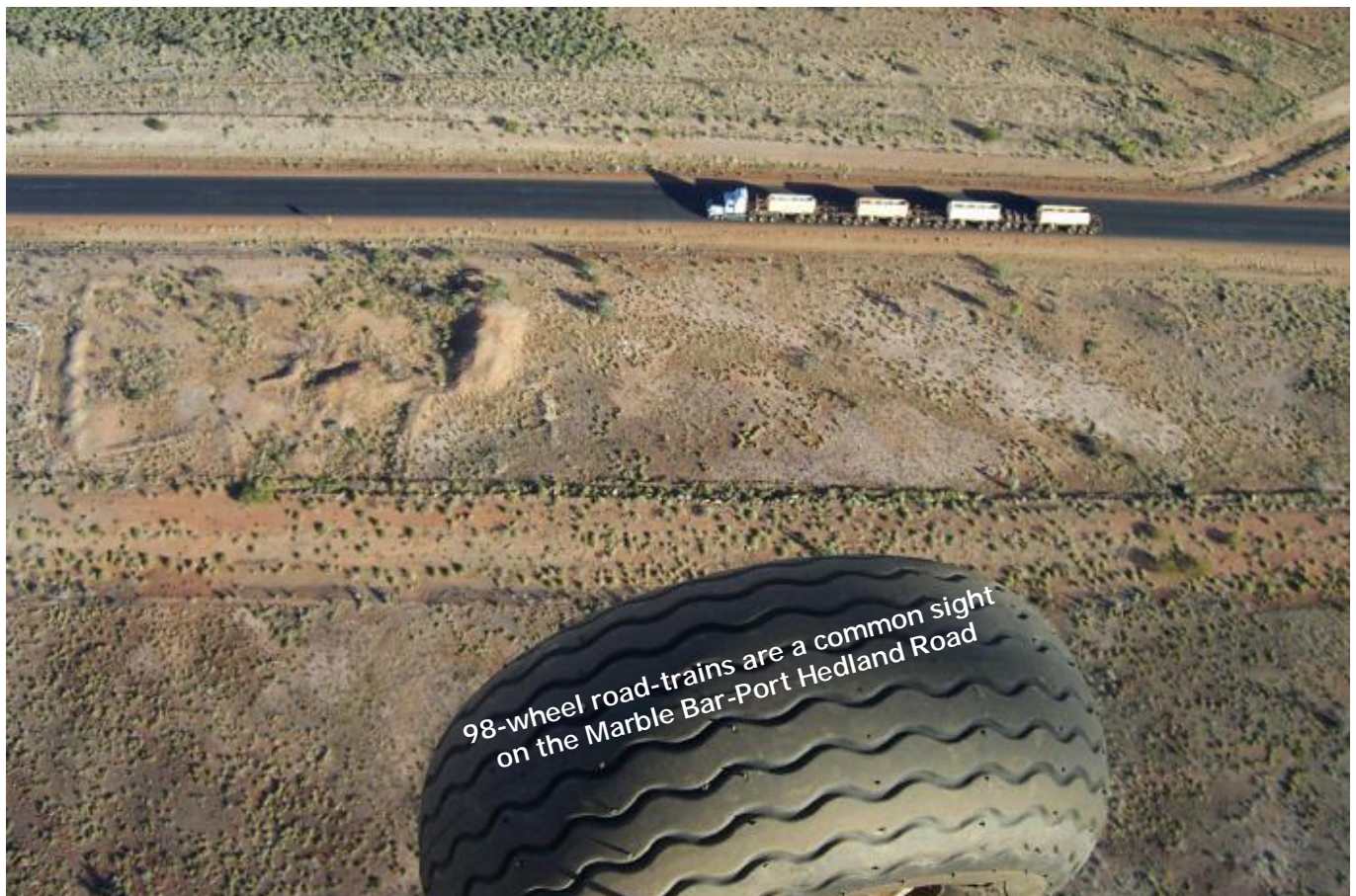
"Yep, see you then Jamie".

Ring, ring... ring, ring...

"Brendan speaking."

"Hey man, how are you? Greg Gomulski here"

"Hi Greg, what's happening?"



Marble Bar township with the Coongan River in the background



“I hear you’re off to Marble Bar. Would you mind if I came up there with my trike to finish my licence?”

“Not at all Greg. Come on up. The more the merrier!”

That week there were five Trikes in Marble Bar and the weather allowed the guys to fly on a daily basis — both morning and afternoon.



Gerald shows his culinary skills and keeps the snaggers coming

Soon after arriving, both Jamie and Greg completed their first solos. Then, while I concentrated on training Gerald and Ric, Greg, Jamie and Jim, who was already a licenced pilot, got some great flying around some of Australia’s most amazing countryside.

There are the historic mine sites to fly over and the Gorges are just amazing. If you are lucky enough to be flying when the Sun is in the right place the colours that bounce off the red rocks are truly unbelievable, I was flying one evening when this happened and I found myself just staring across the flat lands at the most blood red reflections as the Sun bounced its rays off the rock formations.

After gaining permission, we found the low-level flying on the stations was second-to-none with winding river beds going for miles. Altitude is only adjusted depending on the height the Roos are jumping. In all my travels I had never before been two feet above wild dingoes... and there

were plenty of them around.

Marble Bar is 135 nautical miles to the North of Newman or, if you are coming from Port Hedland, then it is 83 nautical miles to the South East or a two-hour drive through some breathtaking countryside.

The town relies on the Tourist trade and holds the record as the hottest town in Australia.

Gerald and Ingrid assure me they won’t be there at the hottest time of the year to find out how hot it can get as they plan to take their Outback and head South for some coastal flying.

Well done to all the guys who travelled that distance to gain their licences. If that’s not dedication, then show me what is.

The company was great, the flying was great and a big Thank You to Gerald and Ingrid for keeping us out of trouble and putting us up at the Park.

Safe flying guys and remember... keep the pointy end to the front.

ê

DEADSTICK OVER TEXAS

by: Dick Rutan

In the world of aviation Dick Rutan is one of those rare pilots who really has “been there, done that”.

From US Air Force fighter pilot in Vietnam to test pilot for the Rutan Aircraft Company (designer: Burt Rutan, Dick’s brother) flying Long-EZs and Vari-EZs to the first pilot to complete an around the world flight without refuelling (in Voyager) to ballooning around the world attempts to flying “around the world in eighty nights” in a modified Long-EZ to flying a rocket-powered aircraft, the EZ-rocket, as a chase aircraft for SpaceShip One, which was the first private craft to carry a passenger into space.

There will be more on the exploits of Burt and Dick Rutan, aviation pioneers and innovators, in future editions of Triker News.

“Deadstick” may refer to events that took place 23 years ago but it is and will always remain one of the real classic aviation stories like the previously published story of “The Gimli Glider”.

This story is reprinted with permission from Dick Rutan.

It was the summer of 1981, and on this beautiful, Sunday morning in July, we were flying Ol’ Blue, the affectionate name we had given to the Long-EZ that we had just finished building. I had levelled off at 11,500 feet, heading south toward Brownsville, Texas.

Just 20 minutes earlier, I was straining to see through the dense fog as I lined Ol’ Blue up for take-off at Georgetown — a typical small-town airport about 40 miles north of Austin. We departed just after sunrise, and no-one was about.

I was certain that there wasn’t any other air traffic as the weather was “WXOF” — an aviation term meaning ceiling indefinitely ob-

scured, visibility zero in fog. Even the ducks were walking.

But our mission had a tight time schedule, so I’d opted for an ITO (instrument takeoff).

I knew the fog was only a few hundred feet thick, and if I could keep Ol’ Blue on the runway as I accelerated to flying speed, there would only be a few minutes of flight using the instruments to climb toward the sun and above the fog. There, the visibility was unlimited. The contrast between the sky’s deep azure blue and the blanket of white fog that covered the earth induced a surreal feeling of being in a different world.

Alas, there we were, cruising in glass-smooth air somewhere just



north of Austin and heading for the jungles of Venezuela. Our mission was to fly up Angel Falls — the world’s highest waterfalls — and do some filming for the “Guinness Book of World Records” television show.

I have always been a little uneasy flying a single-engine craft when I can’t see a place to land in case of trouble, such as an engine failure. This trip to Venezuela, however, meant we were going to be hours and hours over the Gulf — out of sight of land — then even more hours over the jungle, so I decided I had better get used to it.

I called Houston Centre air-traffic control to get the weather at Brownsville: it was clear — no problem. I tried to relax and to clear my mind of the “what ifs”: what if the engine quit? What if I couldn’t find a place to land? A deadstick forced landing in zero visibility was a nightmare that I didn’t care to think about. I decided to put my mind on something else — anything else. I checked the gauges: all in the green. The air-traffic controller has me on radar and is giving me

Long-EZ on the ground



Long-EZ in the air, retractable nose wheel



the locations of a couple of nearby airliners. For the moment, all is fine.

I try to concentrate on the movie shoot. We are going to meet David Frost, the narrator, and the movie star Jamie Lee Curtis. Some skydivers had been contracted to jump right next to the falls, free-fall and open their chutes just before hitting the jungle canopy. The producers want us to carry the "Human Fly." They plan to have him stand up on the fuselage holding onto a rope, as we fly straight up the falls. I think I'll try to talk them out of that "human fly" thing, but that's days away. Yes, sir; this trip will be quite an adventure. We'll face greater challenges on this trip than any Texas fog offers us this morning, so it's time to relax. We'll be in Brownsville in about two hours, and from there we'll worry about the 1,242 miles to Jamaica, and the 740 additional miles to Venezuela — all over water.

Then, out of the recesses of my psyche, I think I feel a very slight

vibration in the engine. No, I decide, it's only my anxiety of being over the fog bank. Pilots know of a plane's "automatic rough" as the sun goes down or when flying over water and farther than gliding distance from land. This "rough" is what it has to be — I hope.

But the vibration is still there and seems to be increasing. Is it my imagination, or is it real? I reduce the throttle a little and the roughness seems to go away. That's comforting. Very soon, however, the roughness creeps back into my awareness, so I reduce the power a bit more, and again it stops.

I look down at the endless fog and can't see the earth. Surviving a forced landing in these conditions would be unlikely. I pray that this roughness, or vibration, is just my imagination, and that I just feel the "phantom" night or over-water "auto roughness".

Once again, the vibration returns. This time it's stronger, but it subsides as I pull the throttle back. "OK, Dick," I tell myself, "This is

serious, and you'd better deal with it." I call Houston Centre, and say that I have a problem and may have to land. I inquire about the weather at Austin knowing it has the closest instrument landing system (ILS), but they report WXOF. The controller tells me that San Antonio is nearest ILS above minimums (200 feet altitude and half a mile visibility); but San Antonio is much too far away to help me now. There's no visibility, and no apparent solution to my predicament.

Now the vibration is much worse and is shaking the instrument panel. I have the throttle at idle and the shaking is severe. For some reason, I look hard over right shoulder to see whether I can see the engine behind me (the Long-EZ is a pusher) and to see where all the violent shaking is coming from. Just as I look back, I see the wooden propeller and blue metallic/prop spinner depart the airplane and free-fall end over end into the fog. The propeller is gone!

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

I know I saw it leave the airplane, but my mind dives into a pool of denial. I can't bring myself to accept the reality that we are absolutely powerless. This situation is so horrific that my mind clings to hope. I glance ahead and know that Brownsville is way beyond the fog.

We were to clear U.S. customs and then continue out over the Gulf to Jamaica. Then I realize that the violent shaking has stopped completely, and the ride is now as smooth as silk. My problem has been solved! Now, in deeper denial and unable to accept the gravity of my situation, I look ahead and advance the throttle to continue on to Brownsville, as if no disaster has taken place.

But the propeller-less engine just screams into high rpm and provides zero thrust. With that, my mind is yanked back to reality. I shut off the mag switches, turn off the fuel and start to deal with this — the most terrifying situation a pilot can find himself in: engine out over endless fog with zero visibility.

I set up a glide, and tell the radar controller, "Our situation is now much worse." The aircraft is descending at about 500 feet a minute, and at our altitude — 10,000 feet or so — it will be

close to 20 minutes before we're in the white, milky world of fog and at a speed close to 70 mph. We were at the point at which, whatever we might hit, we would see it only an instant prior to impact — a power line, a tree, a house, a barn, a hill — who knows? From here, it would be the luck of the draw. Twenty minutes is an eternity to contemplate all these possibilities. I hate these long, drawn-out emergencies.

In Vietnam, when my fighter was hit and caught fire, I was quickly ejected; and another time, in England, while flying an F-100 on a test hop in bad weather, on final approach, just breaking out of the weather at 600 feet, my engine exploded. It was quick: pull the nose up, grab the ejection handles, and 20 seconds later, I was talking to an understandably shaken English bloke who was trimming the Queen's forest.

Those emergencies had been quick — no time to agonize over the outcome. One moment all is fine, and the next moment, "BAM!" - It's over. I could handle those, but this I hate; please let's just get it over with.

We all know this is grim. The controller, the airline pilots on frequency and I were all fully aware of the outcome and how miniscule our chance of survival was.

I continue the glide southward, and out in front, I see an almost imperceptible line or kind of a "step" in the fog.

Gliding along and crossing this step, the fog seems thinner, and; I can just barely see faint outlines of roads and fields and maybe a house or two. But I can only see them if I look straight down. At an angle, everything is obscured.

Flying, or rather gliding onward, I see it: a solid black strip in contrast with the white fog. Is this the runway I so desperately need? Could this be a runway I see? I call the controller, and instantly he came back with, "Yes, it's one of a series of runways the state built." He transmits its elevation and length and mentions another one about 15 miles west. I bank over to the west but see nothing but fog.

Realizing just how limited the visibility is, I kick the Long-EZ back to re-acquire the strip I had found by chance, but I can't see it. In panic, I berate myself, "Dick, stupid! You had a runway in sight, but you lost it! What's in your mind? You just blew it!" Then "banking up steeply and looking straight down, I pick it up again. I don't want to blink. "Dick," I tell myself, "don't take your eyes off that black patch. It's your only hope."



A selection of Rutan Aircraft Company designs



Houston Centre has more information for me. It seems the runway is not a normal airport with hangars, a taxiway a ramp and fellow aviators; rather, it is an unattended strip in a field. He cautions that there is no fence and that I should look out for cows on the runway. "Oh, goody;" I think, "but this is better than nothing."

We descend and are about to lose radio contact with Houston, so the controller contacts Continental 442, a passing airliner, to act as a relay so that we can stay in contact.

I think of the task ahead. I know that when I descend into the fog, the forward visibility will drop to less than one-sixteenth of a mile — if that. I could miss the strip by a few feet left or right and never see it.

I could be short or long, there could be power lines or something else — a cow! I can just barely make out the black strip through the fog but little else.

I ask Houston to contact the local sheriff and have him come out in case we end up bleeding in a ditch. "Already done 'that.'" Wow! This guy is really on the ball. If our landing is successful, he will have played a major hand in it, and I tell him so.

About 20 minutes have passed, and the moment of truth is close. Once I descend into the fog, my only visibility will be straight down to each side and nothing over the nose. In a descending orbit, I memorize a few features around the strip. There is a narrow, paved country road about a quarter of a mile east and roughly parallel to the strip; a dirt road comes off the paved road that passes just north of the strip; a pump house and a small power line that runs from the paved road to the pump house. I try to memorize features that I might recognize again when I'm in the fog. If I could follow the road to the power line, find the pump house and then

cross the dirt road and turn left 25 degrees to line up with the strip, I just might make it. But how high is the fog bank? Will I even see anything in the fog? Big questions. This has to be done just right; there would be no second chance. The final descending orbit, the line-up and landing must be perfect.

I relay through the airliner that we are about to go into the fog. There are good-luck wishes and a request to call once we are on the ground and then radio silence. Everyone knows it will all be over in 60 seconds.

One more deep breath, one more orbit in the clear air, then I sink into the fog — directly over the runway, I hope. Once in the fog, I am enveloped in the white murk. The instant change from cool, dry air to warm, moist, pungent humidity is stifling. Water streams across the canopy, and as expected, I lose all forward visibil-

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

ity. I start the left turn to make one last 360 degree spiral and hope there's a runway at the end of the circle.

I look left and then right and see nothing. I bank more steeply, but just as I thought, I can only see straight down. All I see is pasture, and sure enough, cows. After what seems like forever, the paved country road comes into view. Now on downwind, I roll out a bit, follow the paved road and find the power lines. OK, there they are. Now I increase the bank and follow the lines to the pump house. I am now on base leg with about 90 degrees more to turn to final.

What is my altitude? Am I too high? Too low? I try to recall the field elevation (475 feet) and subtract that from my unwinding altimeter to see whether I can make it. Just as I'm ready to take my eyes off the pump house and look inside at the altimeter, I think, "There is nothing I can do about it, I have no power. If it's there, it's there, if it isn't, it isn't. So be it."

The pump house is now behind me, and I ease out of the turn on to final approach. Without the bank,

I can barely see a thing and then there's a brief flash of the dirt road as I descend over it. Good. Now estimate the 25 degrees that the runway is misaligned with the road. Good. I turn and roll wings level, bleed off a little more air-speed and wait. I am much lower now, 100 feet or less, but still have no forward visibility. The wings are level, and visibility is zero. The moisture from the fog continues to collect and stream back along the canopy. I sit and wait, wondering what the next 10 seconds of my life will bring.

Then, suddenly, there it is: the most beautiful sight! Perfectly lined up at just the right altitude, the runway comes into view just in time for me to ease back on the stick and touch down — on a runway. Then, I remember the cows. To hit a cow at 70 mph is just as bad as hitting a house. My speed is over-running my visibility. Please, I pray silently, let there be no cows. I hit the brakes hard and just miss something on the runway (fresh cow pies, I believe). As we roll to a stop, I swerve to miss even more of them. I can't believe we made it. I take a deep breath

and let it out slowly. I push the PTT button on the radio and say, "Continental 442, this is Long-EZ 169SH. Please relay to Houston Centre that we have landed safely with no damage. Thanks for all your help, and you can cancel the sheriff and emergency vehicles."

I hear, "Roger, Long-EZ. Glad to hear you're down. Good job."

Later, I was sorry that I had cancelled the sheriff, for we had to walk about five miles to the small town of Lockhart. Seems we were in the heart of the Bible belt and my flying companion was in short shorts, and there was no way anyone would stop on a foggy Sunday morning for the likes of us.

The next day, my brother Burt shipped me a propeller that he had taken off his Defiant, and we continued without incident with Ol' Blue on over the Gulf of Mexico to Angel Falls deep in the Venezuelan jungle. And suddenly, the "human fly" stunt didn't seem so dangerous. And I had learned one heck of a hard lesson about the importance of frequently checking the torque of the bolts that secure a wooden propeller to its shaft.

<



NEW CLUB MEMBER

Peter Yeo, #151 owns a farm about 30 Km west of Three Springs at Arrowsmith.

He is pictured left with the brand-new Outback Wizard 3 which he recently purchased. (If he ever needs a spare tyre for the Outback he can always borrow one from either one of the tractors behind the trike.)

Brendan recently travelled to the farm to assemble the trike and to begin Peter's training. As soon as the weather moderates a bit, he will return to continue Peter's training and bring him to licence standard as soon as possible.

Welcome to the club, Peter.

(The number after the name indicates the Club Membership Number.)