



The Old Fliers' Group

Attached to the Royal Aero Club of WA (Inc).

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October Meeting

Last meeting, Dennis Gorton told the story of how he, Hal Sutton and Tug's wife acted as the ground support team for the record breaking across-Australia flight in 1983.



The team: (Rear) Tug and Hal. (Kneeling) Dennis and Marlene, Tug's wife. Inset: Hal Sutton, founding member of the OFG.

"Tug" Willson was a Cathay Pacific 747 pilot who delighted in flying gliders and, most of all, breaking records. After conceiving the idea of a record bid by flying across Australia, he happened on a couple of willing helpers in Western Australia who understood the finer points of gliding – Hal Sutton and Dennis Gorton, and of course, Tug's wife went along too to lend support.

The team assembled in Camden, NSW, where Tug got away on 4 December 1983 (after a one day delay due to weather). When he was safely airborne the team set out by road in Hal's faithful Mercedes to travel to Leeton, the first overnight stop. They were in radio contact the whole way. According to the rules, Tug was allowed to climb his motorised glider to 1000 metres over the departure aerodrome before shutting the engine down. On board instruments recorded the time of engine operation, and the altitude of the glider, all on a similar time scale. The route, with distances, is set out below:

Camden	00
Leeton	430
Mildura	400
Pt Augusta	455
Yalata	595
Nundroo (backtrack)	
Mundrabilla	380
Kalgoorlie	650
Cunderdin	420
Mandurah	170
TOTAL	3500 miles

According to Dennis, the journey proceeded with relatively few problems. Some exceptions were: (a) long days on the road and short nights, (b) a technical glitch that caused Tug to backtrack 70 miles at Yalata to ensure the integrity of the attempt, and (c) problems with poor/no radio contact on the leg from Mundrabilla to Kalgoorlie.

After eight days on the road, all were very happy to arrive at Hal's aerodrome (Sutton Field) in Mandurah. Tug was much more pleased when his record-breaking flight was ratified by the International Gliding Federation.

Mini Speaker:

The Mini Speaker for October was Vern Benjiman who told us of an unusual ride in a Tiger Moth in his youth. The flight was from his hometown in South Africa to another nearby one where there was to be a weekend of flying and fun, and Vern was to assist where possible. It was a case of "if anything can go wrong, it will go wrong".

On the outward journey Vern suffered the "ill-effects" of air travel, not once but twice; each time over a different sides of the cockpit – that of course meant that the pilot in the rear cockpit copped it both times, even worse on the second occasion. Vern was asked to nurse a dog on his lap for the trip. A session of aerobatics on arrival at their destination caused Vern and dog some concern. After landing and coming to a stop, Vern released his grip on the dog which bounded out and onto the lower wing of the Moth. Naturally, its paws went through fabric covered wing. From there on things improved, but only slightly.

Members had many chuckles as Vern went through the details of that fateful weekend. Happily, all survived – but only just!

Next Meeting – Christmas Meeting

The November meeting will be our Christmas Meeting and apart from the normal fare we will have the traditional "Christmas Pudding" between speakers. There will be no meeting in December so the next meeting will be the last for the year.

The November Mini Speaker will be Bob Ashley who will relate a couple of incidents that occurred during his time in the RAF after WWII.

The Speaker of the Day will be John Wager who will tell us about the amazing life of Sir Lawrence Wackett.

A parking fee exemption has been arranged for the meeting time slot 10.30 to 2.30 on Friday 29 November. So hope to see you at the Royal Aero Club for lunch just before noon.

Brian Hernan