

# THE DAY THE WHEAT BELT BOOMED



An account of the WA Open Distance and Declared Goal Records.

by Vic Hare

Photo: Mike Zupanc

I was busy working on my boat Friday afternoon and hadn't considered Saturday's forecast beyond the fact that it looked good for flying. During a chat with Richo to get organised for the next day, we both agreed it looked good. 'It sure does... it looks like a record day,' he prompted. I immediately gave RASP a closer look and agreed this might be the day we've been waiting for. Straight away I dropped tools and spent the next hour and a half on the computer considering different routes, to come up with a waypoint for a crack at the WA declared goal State record while avoiding any significant tiger country. Carter's to Lake Magenta was the call - 265km to beat Phil Wainwright's 14 year-old 261km record.

RASP was calling for a blue day with 30km/h boundary layer average winds from the NW and strong climbs to in excess of 10,000ft. Unusually, RASP called for this lift all the way to the south coast - not what we'd normally expect. On more than a few occasions (I've had WA State records on the brain for at least two years now), we've come up with a great plan the night before, either to wake up to a different forecast the next morning or to get airborne and find different conditions. I was up at 5am and in the car leaving at 6am when the 6am update came out. You beauty! Exactly the same forecast as I'd made the plan on!

Mike Cassells and I were in the paddock setting up at 8:15am. Mike wanted to get his first tows on his new U2, and I had my mind on a 10:30am launch for

the record. I'd figured that if I left on course by 11am and averaged about 50km/h I'd have a chance to get the declared goal record by 4:30pm. RASP called for weakening conditions by 5pm so there wouldn't be much flex in those timings.

Mike did two tows on the U2, then with only enough fuel in the tug for one more he graciously agreed to let me go next. I ended up taking off at 10:50am and Sid towed me straight into an absolute boomer of a thermal soon after take off - we were only at about 500ft and less than 1km upwind from launch on a strong wind day. Tempting as that thermal was, I elected to stay on tow and go to the standard 2,000ft and get several kilometres upwind of launch (where I had asked Sid to take me) where I released into a weakish climb that turned into a moderate one.

It was still early, so I stuck to my plan to dribble downwind in any climb I could find until 12pm or until I noticed definite signs that the day was turning on earlier. That first climb took me to 5,600ft, the second to 6,600ft, then the third was a boomer to 9,500ft, just before 12pm - the day now felt 'on'.

I was going well but kept reminding myself, 'It's a blue day..., you're by yourself and it's not a race.' More than a few times I repeated this to myself as a reminder to stick to best glide, never faster, and let the wind do the work. I've more often 'raced to the ground' than flown too conservatively.

The maths added up for the declared goal record at 50km/h average, so I continued to top out on climbs even after climb rates slowed - not necessarily good comp/race tactics, but it felt most appropriate for my declared goal record attempt within the timeframe I'd given myself by launching just before 11am.

Looking at the tracklog post flight, I count 10 different climbs to above 10,000ft. On several occasions I topped out above 12,000ft (breathing oxygen as required by CAO 95.8 - 2011). Best glide airspeed was still giving 95 to 100km/h ground speeds most every time I checked and that was going to help for sure!

So what worked? Well faced with a blue sky, the order of the day seemed to be sticking to course line and sniffing out the next climb, which is mostly what I did. I did waste some valuable time over Corrigin. Deviated about 45° to fly over town because 'towns always have thermals'. It didn't and I got down to 4,500ft before deviating 45° back the other way to eventually hit the climb that I would have run smack into on course line had I not taken the scenic sinky route.

I only really got low and concerned once. I recently read Phil Wainwright's account of his WA open distance flight 14 years ago on the HGAWA website (great read). He said, 'During every cross-country flight there are make-or-break decisions.' The one time I got low was mine. I was in sink for a long time and was down to about 5,500ft. I'd deviated in a few directions and found no relief. Then, on a totally blue day, I watched as a white

wisp formed and almost instantly dissipated a bit over two kilometres away and 90° to my right. The ground didn't look particularly thermally ahead on track, so I turned 90° and headed for where I'd seen the wisp. The sink got way worse and I sustained 1,100 to 1,200ft/min down for a good two minutes. I decided to throw all my eggs into the one basket and picked a landing paddock in the direction I was going. I got down to 2,300ft above ground before I hit a boomer and climbed to 11,500ft. While in the sustained sink, I had a laugh at myself thinking how nice it was to be low and warming up again - I hadn't felt my fingers for a little while!

Finally, I got to the declared goal for a new PB at 265km at 10,000ft! I punched Ravensthorpe into my GPS (I had mused at options beyond hitting my goal the previous night and knew of Ravensthorpe on the Great Southern Highway). My next thought was to try to break 300km. That done, Phil Wainwright's 14 year-old WA open distance record of 313km was the obvious target. Once that record was broken, and with final glide to Ravensthorpe in the bag, I had no idea if my arms had anything left for the final flare, and without a bump of lift felt on final glide the Ravensthorpe pub was calling me. I punched Carter's into the GPS and extended until it said 334km just to change the name of the old '333 week'. I could have gone a few more kilometres further to a dodgy looking paddock, but decided the nice one next to the road a few kilometres upwind looked a whole lot more inviting.

So we now have a WA declared goal record of 265km, a WA open distance record of 334km, and I'm going with a PB of 341km for the Carters-goal-Ravensthorpe course. Flight time six hours 22 minutes.



Landed  
Photo: Vic Hare

However, the real record breaker for the day would have to be Tom Marwick, champion driver. He spent the arvo driving to the next town, checking my spot tracker for an update, then driving some more and picked me up right on sunset with a big smile on his face. Possibly because he knew tasty beverages in Ravensthorpe were on the cards. Cheers Tom!



Route map



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