

## One OF Those Days.

Dave Williams

It was one of those days, warm, sunny, cu's filling the sky and almost nil wind. I'm 10 minutes from my Warnbro home, alone in a clearing about the size of a football oval. The area is flat, surrounded by trees and is covered in deep ruts caused by trail bikes. I find a patch less scarred than most to serve as my runway and stand a wind sock to windward.

Wing set up, Explorer hooked in with me snug inside. Press the start button and the prop spins to life behind me. I run up the revs and hold back against the thrust that wants to propel me forward. All sounds good and I relax the mouth throttle back to idle.

Check the wind sock, limp! Pick up the wing, heavy! All level, bight the throttle. Step..., step..., step, stride, stride..., stride....., moonwalk, and I'm off the ground. Bar in a little to aid acceleration, I love this bit, 10 feet off the ground, going fast and not setting up a landing. Tuck my legs back into the harness, shift hands from uprights to base bar, relax the pressure a little and we're climbing nicely.

100ft, take throttle from mouth and clip to bar, retract landing gear.

200ft, zip up harness, commence a slow left turn to keep over the LZ and start to relax.

300ft, I feel the first familiar bubbles of warm air rising around me. Tighten left turn.

400ft, my vario says I'm climbing at 400ft per minute, that's better than engine alone so I know I have bubble assistance.

500ft, I feel a surge of lift under my left wing and back the throttle to half revs. Maintaining a left turn I tighten it up a little more and find a smooth 500ft pm.

Now at 1000ft I let the engine idle. Cloud base is low today and I can see the dark bottom cu my thermal is delivering me to as my climb keeps me directly over my take off point.

Continuing to circle, at 2000ft I hit the kill switch and fold the prop. All is quiet at last. This is the purpose of the buzz box, find me a thermal, then be silent!

At 3000ft I'm approaching cloud base admiring the panoramic view of calm blue ocean and turquoise shore line to the west, the distance enhanced dark blue of the escarpment to the east and flat green farm land in-between with new housing estates being developed north and south.

At this altitude the breeze is about 15 KPH from the south west as I leave my thermal and point toward the next cloud coming at me from the south.

I connect with lift at 2200ft and within a few turns climb easily back to cloud base. Looks like a good day to explore the cloud tops. Having drifted back now to the landing zone area I press the starter and engage warp drive....well as good as you get in a hangglider!

Heading south west and climbing I need to move to go around the approaching cloud. Then I need to go east to miss the next one and west again.....its like the old space invaders game in slow motion.

Half way up the side of a passing cloud I see my shadow against its white wall and my silhouette is circled by a rainbow, no, a double rainbow!! and I chuckle childishly as I recall the utube double rainbow clip. That dude was baked!

The clouds are about 1000ft vertically and I can soon see their tops. Now above I cant resist to fly low through the soft sided valleys and pull the bar in to have the misty white peaks towering around me.

I explore the tops of several clouds this way all the time with a southern heading and after a while, over a particularly wide cloud I begin to realise I hadn't seen the ground for a while. With a new intent I head off south to find the edge of my fluffy play ground expecting it to give way to a view of earth far below but it just keeps on and on. I started to climb to get a better angle and at 4800ft realised with certainty that the cloud had closed over to a solid cotton quilt cover and I was now stuck above it!

Descending through a thousand feet of cloud did not appeal so I decided to turn down wind and look for the leading edge or an opening back from whence I came.

Here's where it gets interesting! How easy is it to over speed the wing heading down wind, descending with full power? I didn't have air speed instruments so I was..... lets say "concerned".

Maybe 10 minutes further on, feeling trapped I could see the clouds were thinner in places,.... well lower than the average and I contemplated diving into one of the holes and hopefully bursting out into clear air below soon afterward, but figured if they are thinner here maybe they'll be thinner still further on. I should have kept my extra altitude to allow me to see further but at cloud top height it's impossible to know how far they extend.

5 minutes later I could at last see terra firma through wispy forming clouds and decided to go for it. To reduce the risk of hitting VNE I let the buzz box idle as I pulled in and dove into the hole.

It's hard work getting down quickly, my arms began to ache and it felt as though the sky was resisting my attempts to leave, pulling me back, back to the clear blue sky ceiling and soft white yet impenetrable floor, back to the land of Jack's giant where humans disappear forever. The door is closing as the cloud below starts filling in and I'm beginning to lose sight of the ground again. "White out"!! why?, why?, pulling in more and subconsciously holding my breath, then .....

..... I'm out!

As I zoomed out below the cloud with a sigh of relief I let the bar pressure off and found nice lift lives there. The cloud bank extended east west as far as I could see. With that episode over my mind shifted from "getting down" to "staying up" so in good lift I killed the vibrator re- entering stealth mode and mentally filed a new flight plan.

I had travelled past my landing zone which was now some k's upwind of me and decided to head west under the cloud bank which would take me over my house and on to the beach.

The lift was steady allowing me to keep the bar pulled in making good time to my place. A few turns there hoping someone would see me.....they didn't, and I was headed south again following the beach at about 2500ft in decreasing lift under 8/8 cloud cover.

As I reached Port Kennedy at about 900ft I turned east to follow a strip of undeveloped land laying east west that would lead me back to my landing zone. Sinking further I started the engine at 500 ft and let it idle till I was about 100 ft over the scrub before revving up to reassure myself it would, then backing off again and sinking through 50 ft, 40ft, 30ft, then at 20ft I brought up half revs and scooted along over the low tree tops. This was great, I felt like a barn stormer of old as I followed the dirt bike tracks through the scrub and rolled left and right to avoid the odd tall tree and making a steep banking 360 around a small cluster of trees to complete the display.

Soon enough I had to climb again to cross the main road, train tracks and associated power poles and climb further still to cross the low hills to the east of lake Wallyungup.

Back at 1500ft I can see my ute in the landing zone and can soon make out the streamer showing a south westerly flow.

Unzipping the harness and lowering the landing legs I kill the motor as I 360 my way earthward. At 200ft I pull the prop brake and it folds back neatly behind me as I make my final approach.

Touch down is followed by three quick steps as the wing drops to my shoulders and I re connect with the inescapable earth bound effects of gravity.

Three and a half hours flying, maybe \$2 of fuel and all within a stones throw of home, it doesn't get much better than that.

Did I mention my Explorer is for sale. Only 14hours run time, 25 hrs air time and like new. \$5k and you too can have such adventures. I've retired from the sport and it needs to go.