

# *NZ Autogyro News.*

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## My Dannevirke 2009

Jim McEwen's version...

Last year I worked frantically on the gyro to get it ready for the annual trip to Dannevirke. Though I made it, the first test flights had to wait till I got there and I didn't have time to modify the trailer. Considering the gyro's extensive re-build had come about when I tipped the trailer over on a corner (with gyro attached) this was a major issue! My eyes were on the mirrors making sure both wheels were on the ground round every bend for the entire trip.

This year I couldn't risk another disaster and worked on the trailer almost till the last minute . . . why is it these things always take a lot longer than expected? It got a new axle that spaced the new wheels and tyres further apart, an extended drawbar and numerous other tweaks. I didn't have time for the sand-blast and re-paint but the results of all my work were a stable towing machine and a much more relaxed trip.

Anne and I arrived at Dannevirke aerodrome mid-afternoon just in time to see Sid Lane and Tony Unwin practising a routine in their Eagle MT03's. We were surprised to find so many gyros already there. I've always tried to be the first to fly, though too much talking tend has of left the door open for someone else. This year I would have had to arrive days earlier! By Friday night there were 12 machines already on the field, as many as we've had altogether some years. By the end of the fly-in there had been a fly-in record-equalling 18 machines in attendance and only a few of those didn't get off the ground.

One of the early arrivals was Gary Skudder. His immaculate green RAF had already been out and about. When I ribbed Gary about a fly spot on the paint he should polish off he laughed and said polish was a myth because he never polishes it - all he uses is a damp chamois cloth. Now you know his secret! Gary's always been an early riser and I gather his primus-brewed tea was popular with other fly-in attendees who arrived at Don Franklin's hangar wiping the sleep from their eyes first thing every morning.

Dominator's were well represented. My Subaru-powered single seater joined Ken Middleton's Suzuki-powered machine and Sybe Haakma's Rotax 582-powered version, the only one fitted with the engine it was designed for. There was a bevy of tandem Dominators. Michael Norton was there with his and Hank Merkeek's was there for sale and not operating. Brett Oswald's brand new Subaru EJ20 powered example had it's maiden flight during the weekend and almost completed the compulsory 10 hours of solo flying in the hands of Grant Simpson, Garry Belton and Michael Norton before the end of the fly-in. Another brand-new tandem Dominator belonging to Jay from the Chatham Islands featured Neil Hintz's new Subaru EA82-based engine. Unfortunately it wasn't quite ready for flying.

Magni was represented by Stephen Chubb's well-known machine, while Dudley Welcome flew his tall-tailed KB2 regularly. Two Geoff's were there. Geoff McColl's machine was there on a trailer, while Geoff Woodward took a major step forward and finally soloed his Rotorhawk during the weekend. Well done Geoff!

Oskar Stielau's Gyrobee was frequently (and competently) being thrown around the sky - Oskar probably did more hours than anyone else this year and deserved the "Man and Machine" trophy for the second year in a row.

There was an early Air Command for sale in the hangar and Russell Kappely flew in from Waipukarau in Buzzo, accompanied as usual by son Hayden in the Jodel. This time Buzzo was sporting an armadillo on the engine – or was it Russell's latest exhaust system? John Rochfort's fully-enclosed Xenon lives on the airfield and it was good to see John flying it confidently throughout the weekend.

The Xenon was unknowingly involved in the only incident I heard of when Garry Belton and Michael Norton flew alongside for a pre-arranged air-to-air photo shoot. They'd just finished when the Dominator's gearbox packed up and Garry was forced to carry out an instant forced landing on hilly farmland. Suffice to say he did an excellent job and both they and the gyro were unscathed. I've written another article about my involvement and I'm sure the story will have been covered by others as well.

As is so often the case the Dannevirke weather was scorchingly hot and I must have left three layers of nose skin behind despite the sunscreen and hat. In flying terms I didn't do a lot but thoroughly enjoyed what I did. I'd hardly flown since altering the fibreglass pod and I went through a patch of not being able to land properly on Saturday afternoon. I kept coming in too high and gave a good demonstration of the value of sprung landing gear on one occasion in particular! It seemed the harder I tried the worse I got so I stopped while I was ahead. Later in the day I did some practice and realised the new pod position was affecting my judgement of where the ground was. I went on to do a series of perfect landings and was able to go to sleep happy that night after all.

I guess I don't care if I fly a lot as I enjoy catching up with all the good friends I've made over the years. There were plenty who've been into gyros for decades. Gordon and Jane Gibson arrived just after me and I also saw Alf Crowe and Denis Moore. Rob Sanders led a small contingent down from Tauranga on their motorbikes, while others from my home town included Barry and Dee Winslade, and Chris Wade of Kahu fame. Phil Hooker flew down for a look too. The Belton family was missing Craig this year, but the entire Middleton family turned up. Youngest son Phillip scored a few rides with different people and I reckon he'll be moving Dad out of the Dominator seat sometime soon! It was also great to see Craig Fullerton piloting Michael Norton's Dominator.

Anne and I continued on to Wellington after the fly-in but by pure chance were able to enjoy a little post-script. I'd left my gyro on the trailer in Don Franklin's hangar on the airfield. I called Don when we arrived back to pick it up and he answered from the cafeteria at the Palmerston North hospital. We were delighted to find he and Carolyn were the very proud parents of a brand-new baby daughter, Olivia. Congratulations on a fitting end to another great fly-in!



Don't prang it! Graig Fullerton and Michael Norton

Craig Fullerton heads out for a few circuits

Brett Oswald Gordon Gibson (hidden), Neil Hintz, Sybe Haakma, Michael Norton



Club rooms at day's end



"Cuppa anyone?" - Gary Skudder



Soon-to-be-Dad, Don Franklin



Gaye Belton

Loading 1 Gyro + Event Equipment.





**What I learned from.**

# **The Great Recovery Mission.**

The story of the Great Dannevirke Recovery Mission has been covered elsewhere in the newsletter. What follows covers only my involvement and some thoughts that arose from it.

On Sunday afternoon I took off from Dannevirke aerodrome with enough fuel for a 30-minute flight. I was enjoying a leisurely aerial exploration of the countryside south of Dannevirke when I heard a call on the radio that went something like “Romeo Alpha Quebec - if there are any gyro pilots in the Dannevirke area receiving this could they please respond.” What was Michael Norton after, I wondered?

No-one else pushed their transmitter button so I called “Romeo Alpha Quebec, Romeo Alpha India.”

“Hi Jim, can you change frequency to 133.75 please?”

“Wilco, 133.75”.

Once on a private frequency Michael told me he and Garry Belton had carried out a forced landing on a ridge. They were both okay but needed some help. Out of the blue my leisurely doddle had turned into a search and rescue mission! The next step was to find them.

We exchanged chat about where we were in relation to each other and I headed off in what I considered should be the general direction. I thought I was onto them once but as I got closer it turned out to be a pump shed. Even though I only needed to look at ridges they were everywhere and EVERYTHING looked like a downed gyro – every tree, power post and fence structure – even animals! After a while Michael asked if I could climb higher because they couldn't see me at all so I went up to 1500'. It turned out they were looking in the wrong direction at the time. Garry then worked out they must be in a direct line between the TV transmitter on the Ruahine ranges and the dairy factory. “Where the hell's the dairy factory?” I asked, thoroughly confused. No reply.

I kept looking till I eventually heard “We can see you Jim. We're about at your 9 o'clock.” It was then I realised the “dairy factory” was actually the Oringi freezing works site and things started to make sense. Even so I responded by passing right overhead without seeing them!

I initiated an orbit and saw Michael and Garry standing in the paddock before I saw the gyro on the top of a ridge – gee those things are hard to spot! I knew they'd taken off with Garry in the front seat so Michael could photograph John Mountfort in the Xenon and I admired Garry's piloting skills for getting the Dominator down next to a fence and without allowing it to roll down the slope into one of the gullies surrounding it.