

2004 DDD: HU Flight Report

Every year the weekend after Labor Day Rich Gillock runs the annual Dust Devil Dash out of Mountain Valley airport. It's always a great simple event tinged with a bit of sadness because it marks the beginning of the end of the soaring season. For OCSA pilots it generally means moving their personal ship closer to home at Hemet-Ryan. OCSA's new newsletter editor, Roger Worden, asked me for a description of this year's flight so how could I refuse...it was a "doozy"!

This was my fourth DDD so I guess I'm starting to get the hang of it. The challenge for the new straight-out soaring pilot is to get all the various pieces coordinated; crew, car, ship, terrain, strategy, and most of all, that thing called "pluck". Of course if all the other pieces aren't solidly covered, the "pluck" can disappear instantly. As most know I've been hiding from Hemet for a few years now away assembling the pieces. Flying out of Tonopah last year and this 4th of July connecting it with Bishop were the most recent terrain puzzle pieces added. Finally, this Labor Day weekend was spent wiping out any latent fear of Kelso Valley (buy me a beer at the OCSA Xmas Party and I'll tell you a good nail-biting story). Thus in small pieces I had covered the distance from Tehachapi to Austin and I now hoped to sew them together for the DDD.



Observing last year's eventual winner's launch early (while others were still putting their ships together) was a lesson #1 I learned which I applied aggressively this year. I made sure the night before I was ready to walk from the pilots meeting to the towline and have HU positioned to push out ahead of any crowd. Then I won the expected dare-the-first-pilot-to-launch Mexican eyeball standoff by launching *first*. For the rest of the day I tried to never look back. The Nimbus 4D was right behind me so I had good company. Pull the rope in 500 fpm lift, bang it up to 13k ft, and then push the nose over to rock n' roll to Kelso. No hesitation. The Nimbus had cut out at about 10k and I followed close behind and above him. We both topped up on the ridge to the west of Kelso airport, but this time he smoked me to Owens Peak and I never saw him again. I dreamt all day to try and catch him.

I was at Olancho before lunchtime but was having problems raising my loyal crew wife on the radio. I pulled out the cell phone and lost concentration (and lift) at about the same time. For the first time in my experience no lift was to be found on the rock face of Olancho. After a few tries, Swantje answered the cell phone and informed me she had accidentally pulled the antenna out of the transceiver and was trying to push it back in...hmmmm. I told her I was considering a line of clouds that took off from the backside south end of the Inyos towards Austin...and I would meet her there.

I gave up fumbling trying to find lift at Olancho and headed out low across the Owens Valley just north of Haiwee Reservoir. At the foothills I hit the 1000fpm jackpot and soon was on onramp to the "cloud freeway". But then I decided to hedge, rather than

jumping off the backside into area I had not ever considered or explored, and not wanting to get too off the beaten path from the 395 route my crew would travel, I changed my mind, stuck to the ridgeline and continued onto the Whites. By now I was starting to hear the hounds at my heels on the radio. I could hear them taking the direct path north that I had passed on. Push the nose down, cruising at 85 knots, slowing in lift to 60 and then relighting the afterburners to 85+. The lift was awesome, a true dauphin day. As I approached White Mountain another cloud street, signposted parallel to the first, urged me to turn right and leap off to the north. Yahoo!



One round of circling a bit north of Coaldale, and I'm again at cloud base blasting and shit-grinning my way into Hadley. Again with no luck trying to raise the crew on the cell phone, I get a little low over Hadley, but I eyeball a hawk and *bang* I'm up and away. The hounds are now with me. I hear pilots calling Hadley but they are on the eastside skirting the rain now developing between us. They had flown the hypotenuse of the White Mountain dogleg I flew. Back up on the ridge line I sight 3 hawks circling and join them for the hottest lift of the day, 1200 fpm. I'm enjoying observing their skill silhouetted above me when I refocus my eyes beyond on a 1-26 about 1000 feet higher than myself. I'm thrown into shock. How could this be? I could count no more than 30 minutes wasted since takeoff, the other glass ships were just catching up with me, there was no way a 1-26 could be there with me...this one I never figured out for sure. It had to be someone who launched out of Bishop...or was it Doug Levy? Blue invasion stripes on each wing.

Leaving the hawks and my puzzlement behind, I head towards Austin, arriving at 4:30pm with 14k in the bank and no idea where my crew was. As I fingered my trusty old hikers Garmin GPS 40 I saw I had no more northern waypoints programmed. Out came the never opened WAC chart for the airspace above Austin...let's see where is Battle Mountain? OK I realized regretfully this is the end of the road. The hounds were now past me, I would keep the lid on this race no more. To go farther would chance a late low light landing on a airstrip I had not seen or previously cogitated (hee...hee...next vacation to Ely?). So I joy-rode around Austin, looking here and there, while I burned off altitude. As I got lower I saw only one airstrip was open. Other pilots were approaching and calling out their intention of landing at Austin. Great, I'll have company! And so Peter Kavari and John Gonzales out of Crystal would become our new friends and dinner mates that night.

What can I say? With booming skies and that thing called "pluck", it was rather easy but more important fun! Obviously it's the planning and practice that made it seem that

way. I flew 309 miles. In raw score I tied for 5th place, averaging 56 mph, but that was good for only a middling tier ranking after handicap. Potentially if I had flown another 100 miles, that would have been good for only 5th place. The Nimbus flew 552 miles and got only 3rd place!!!! That pesky 1-26 pilot, Doug Levy, skunked everybody with a 293 mile flight that scored 1st (483 miles) after the handicap correction. This winter, I'll be inspecting the markings on his plane....



Swantje was only about 1 hour away when I landed. When she arrived I had the plane prepped for the box and HoUdini went quickly in to rest before the long drive home. That night the stars were awesome and the beer tasty cold. We both slept like rocks until morning, starting out at 7am for home. Swantje said her road trip out was “not bad” and so I might have crew again next year for the Dust Devil Dash. Hope to see more of OCSA there!

Larry “HoUdini” Tuohino
10/7/2004

PS- Later I learned that the 1-26 I saw was “2X4” piloted by Dan Dickson out of Bishop...my faith restored.