

I stopped in Mojave about 11:00 to get gas. When I got out of my toasty warm truck in a t-shirt I was pelted by ice crystals blowing off the mountain. It was cold on the ground!

When I pulled into Cal City I wasn't motivated to fly. Bitter cold, no lennies, lots of cumulus form clouds. It didn't look promising for wave. Billy landed soon and as we put away his glider, he worked on me... I finally relented. I would fly.



I launched in the Libelle about 1pm convinced that this was just an exercise. The rotor started just off the end of the runway and continued all the way past the railroad tracks. I released at 6900ft in 3-4kt wave lift. I marked the spot on the gps and opened the spoilers. Working down to 6500ft I decided it was time to climb. 8-11kts up to 17000ft, WOW!

I tuned the radio to Joshua Approach and listened for awhile. The operator was busy. I found a gap and called in my request for clearance in the wave window up to FL250. He approved me but asked me to squawk ####. I informed him I was not transponder equipped but would stay in the wave window and report altitude. He cleared me... WOOOOO HOOOOOO!

The climb from 17000ft up was not as fast. When I pulled out of the wave to slow my climb I inadvertently backed myself up all the way to Mojave! I then had to penetrate back into the wind to get to the wave lift. I had to maintain at least 80knots to make forward progress (10kts ground speed). I never found the strong lift again. I climbed the rest of the way at 0.5-2kts. Slow and bitter cold. I had calculated that I needed at least 23,000 ft with no margin so I set my goal at 23,500ft. I made it to 23,300ft before the climb slowed to nothing (and the canopy started really icing up). I decided that was enough and pulled the spoilers as I turned back towards Cal City.

The decent was normal (8kts down) and the winds on landing were not bad. I was glad to get back on the ground and get my feet in front of a heater...

I'm glad it's done. I'm really glad that Billy talked me into trying.

Things I would have done differently if there is a remote possibility I will exceed FL180: Put on the insulated pants (don't leave them in the car). Two pairs of socks, one of them electric. Wear shoes more substantial than Vans deck shoes. Although I barely fit in the glider as it was...

Pat Russette