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Gliding: A short flight with Terry Delore

Contributed by Jill McCaw

DURING THE recent South Island contest at Omarama I was preparing for my daily role of time keeper when I was kidnapped off the grid by Terry Delore. Terry wanted company for: "A brief half hour flight ... have you back before the launch." Yeah. Right.

Terry Delore is a legend in soaring circles around the world. He was adventurer Steve Fossett's pilot (Fossett was relegated to a co-pilot role) for all of the duo's world record flights and also holds several world records in his own right. Terry doesn't "do" competitions anymore, preferring instead to share his knowledge with others in the gliding fraternity by taking them for rides and giving hands on examples of how he does what he does.

Following Steve Fossett's death in an air accident two years ago Terry bought the glider the two had used for their flights. Named 'Athena' the ASH 25 Mi is a super ship for long distance flying. She is self launching with a Wankel engine with retractable prop. She has an enormous 25.6 m wingspan and looking out along the wing it seems to go on forever. The little Grob Single Astir that I usually fly has a wing span of 15m. You could nearly park it under Athena's wing.

Terry Delore loves gliding. He doesn't have to prove anything to anyone. He has flown further than any other person but one in the whole world. He soars for the sheer joy of it and on Friday 19 November he took me along for a ride. Terry doesn't do short flights.

We took off under our own noisy steam and climbed to around 2000' AGL before shutting down the engine. Then started one of the best flights of my life. We climbed into wave and headed south. A week earlier Terry had taken my husband John on a similar expedition, they had ended up turning north again over Patterson Inlet on Stewart Island, a turn point exactly 300km from their take off point at Omarama. They were prepared for a long wave flight. I wasn't. I was wearing shorts and tee shirt, short socks and trainers. I did have a hat and I was sun-screened. I had none of my usual gliding paraphernalia, not even

a drink bottle or a muslei bar. Didn't matter.

Fortunately it was a warm day and for most of the trip we had a clear sky. On oxygen we flew alongside lenticular clouds marking the wave at around 12,000 feet. We kept the airspeed to around 100 kts and at one stage the computer was showing a ground speed of 216 kph. With the sun out it wasn't cold. Terry is a fantastic

the mid '90s but there is still not much that beats them. With a lift/drag (L/D) ratio of 57 at 51 kts it goes for miles without losing any noticeable height. We ran at what Terry reckons is best L/D of 120 kts for distance covering and were back over the Clyde Dam in no time at all. By then the high overcast had shut the sky down and the front was chasing us. Individual clouds

were still marking the Dunstan Wave but it was nothing like the long smooth lenticulars we'd come down on. At around 10,000 feet we needed it to get us home.

It was not a problem (few things with Terry ever are). Terry showed me how to point the aircraft at a cloud and pull up and away as we came into the lift, gaining a thousand feet in height as we did so. It was glorious fun. In fact the whole trip was glorious fun and the lines from John Gillespie Magee's poem High Flight were



Jill McCaw having some "glorious fun" on a "short" flight that lasted 3.5 hours.

teacher, explaining tactics and intricacies of wave flying as well as letting me fly the aircraft. The long wingspan makes her very heavy on controls and she needs a lot more rudder than I am used to. She's heavy on rudder too needing all my strength to "boot her in". Terry ribbed me on the "windscreen wiper" effect the yaw string made across the canopy.

We travelled south down a wave system formed by the Dunstan Mountains and crossed the Nevis valley through gaps in the cloud. Overhead Kingston at the south of Lake Wakatipu we could see that a front was moving up the country, the winds were changing direction and we wouldn't be able to travel too much further south. I was fine with that, among other things I didn't have my usual equipment to deal with in flight "relief". I was fine, but I didn't want to be up there all day. Terry was sharing his water and some huckery muslei bars and lollies he found in the side pocket. We did manage to sneak down across the Mavora lakes and tip toed out across Southland in an area of zero sink as far as Mossburn. The south coast and Lake Te Anau were in sight and we'd gone far enough. High overcast was starting to cut off the sun and we turned north to run for home.

When you put Athena's nose down she just goes. The ASH 25 might be old technology, they have been around since

running through my mind.

*Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, - and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of - wheeled and soared
and swung
High in the sunlit silence.*

We were back on the ground at Omarama ahead of the front after three and a half hours of wonderful flying. I was cold and desperate for a bathroom visit and wonderfully happy. I couldn't stop smiling. This flight reminded me of something I often forget in the seriousness of editing SoaringNZ. Gliding is fun. Gliding is like nothing else I know for making me feel happy and joyous and that is why I do it. This flight with a good mate who just happens to be the world's best soaring pilot was one of the most fun things I've done in ages. If you'd like to give the fun sport of gliding a try, look up your local club on the Gliding New Zealand website www.gliding.co.nz

I'd like to thank Terry for taking me for a "short flight." One day I'd love to go with him on a long one.

For subscriptions to SoaringNZ email soaringnz@mccawmedia.co.nz

Have a wonderful flying summer.

Happy Christmas.

Jill McCaw

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