

## First Microlite Trike Cross Country Solo Flight Adventure

### Route & Itinerary

Date	Leg	Depart	Refuel/Rest	Arrive	Note
Monday, 26/3/07	1	Benalla VIC	Deniliquin, NSW	Yarrawonga, VIC	1 Night stopover
Tuesday, 27/3/07	2	Yarrawonga, VIC	Deniliquin, NSW	Hay, NSW	2 Night stopover
Thursday, 29/3/07	3	Hay, NSW	Balranald, NSW	Swan Hill, VIC	1 Night stopover
Friday, 30/3/07	4	Swan Hill, VIC	Boort, VIC	Bridgewater VIC	1 Night stopover
Saturday, 31/3/07	5	Bridgewater VIC	-	-	Did not finish, trailered trike back to Benalla

March 2007, was my first taste of what cross country flying is all about. Getting away from my local area, into new territory where everything looks different, the colors, terrain, land marks, airfields, and weather conditions.

It was a real eye opener, I learnt a lot about flying and also myself. I had to push myself and get through situations that I would normally avoid, in particular flying in windy and rougher conditions. I generally flew when it was fairly calm, in particular, early morning and late in the afternoon. The problem with this was that I really never got to test my skills and see what I can achieve and what challenges I would face.

Being quadriplegic, having no finger function, limited arm function, and no ability to move any part of my body from my armpits down, I have developed adaptations that allow me to fly the trike independently.



Without finger function I had developed an adaptation that connects to the control bar, allowing me to be able to lock my hands in place to steer the wing in flight.

The speed of the engine, is controlled by using push buttons. The ground steering was achieved by using a lever, pushing it backwards and forwards to steer left and right. When taxiing I had to steer the aircraft with my left hand and hold the wing with my right, which worked fairly well in light wind conditions, but was impossible in windy conditions.

The first day was rather eventful, to say the least. The wind caught my wing on three occasions almost ended the flight each time. The first, I ended up in a shallow ditch at Yarrawonga, the second, I ended up parking the aircraft nicely at the side of the taxiway in Deniliquin requiring Shane Gleeson to wing walk me over to the hanger, and third, I ended up crashing the trike on an

embankment in Hay. With the trike on its side, engine still running and fuel pouring over the engine, I was sure I was going to be roasted. I'd had better days.



Once in the air I had no problems flying and could even handle the tough thermic and rough conditions but on the ground it was impossible with my current adaptations.

The conditions got worse over the coming days, as I looked outside the window to see what the weather Gods had install for me that day, I was very nervous. I had two choices. Either keep flying, or leave my aircraft and take the bus, recovering the aircraft another time. I was determined to keep flying and finish the flight!

The only way I could take off was by having the aircraft pointed directly into the wind with one person on either side holding the tip of the wing so the wind wouldn't catch it. I would power the engine up, and they would run alongside until they couldn't keep up, let go and hopefully I would keep going straight and take off into the air.



Thanks to Peter McClean, Shane Gleeson, Ian Willis and others for assisting me with a bit of wing walking to get me pointed into the wind during the rest of the flight.

On the following days we had very tough conditions, wind, rain and head winds. With such a slow aircraft, the head winds made the flight legs so much longer taking forever to get to the next stopover. Watching everyone else fly by was a little disheartening, and when it got really bumpy, I had to work damn hard just to keep it straight. At times my bum came off the seat, even wearing a four point harness. I must admit at times I was envying the fixed wings as they were speeding by underneath me.

I finally made it to Bridgewater VIC on day five. Exhausted, nerves teetering to breaking point, but I had made it. Only one more day to go, so close to home!



The next day as I sat outside looking at the clouds wiz by and the branches on the trees bend in the wind, I knew in my heart I couldn't go any further. Without much sleep the night before, feeling

exhausted and stressed, I just didn't feel I was up to it either physically or mentally. I was so disappointed. I had come so far, this was my first real cross country flight. I felt as though I had failed!

I left the aircraft and took the bus back to Yarrawonga our final destination for the flight. While on the bus it gave me time to think and reflect on the trip. What I had learnt and how far I had actually come, the friends that I had made. I had flown through very challenging conditions, conditions that I had never experienced before. I realized that I can handle much worse than I had previously thought, giving me a real boost in confidence. Just got to work out a better steering set up for the ground!

The next day, from Yarrawonga, I drove to Bridgewater with my carer to collect the trike, put it on a trailer, then back to my final destination, Benalla, VIC.