

Cloudhopper News

Issue No. 174

January 2026

Welcome to your Latest Newsletter.

Well, well , well. Welcome to January 2026 and HNY to all of you who choose to frequent this place. You could say this month is the coming of the age for this periodical, because right now we celebrate 22 years of Cloudhoppers.org and boy how it has changed in that time. The demented ramblings of your editor still exist as large as ever, but in 21 years a lot has changed. Firstly, many thanks for continuing to read this utter diatribe I write, I do hope it brings you some cheer particularly in winter months when the vast majority of us don't fly.

Secondly let's hope 2026 is a great one since we are all older (none the wiser), but like spring we have the year to look forward to and to plan where and when we are going.

I'll be totally honest, for me, Christmas is /was and will be something I don't ever think I'll get my head around. I trust yours were fantastic, but for me this whole thing is overrated, a massive spending push by the retailers and just a few days off when the weather isn't particularly enticing with wet and windy winter conditions .

Going into the new year with fresh aspirations for myself, the Newsletter and The website I am glad to be able to release the first additions starting right now. Details later in the newsletter.

Thanks to those who have supported me through generous donations, but I would encourage all of you to support my efforts if you have enjoyed reading this over a prolonged period. **www.buymeacoffee.com/cloudhoppers** is where you have a chance to donate towards the running costs of the site. Thanks in advance and please don't go ballistic, I wouldn't expect anyone to donate more than £12 a year or theoretically a pound an edition. As I said this is voluntary but financial assistance would lead to more options for the growth of the brand, and I guess after nearly 21 years it is a brand. Therefore, I would ask you to feel generous if you can afford to be and support me, and for those who will, many thanks in advance.

So here is what we have for you in edition number 174 of the Newsletter:

- Ed Speak – 22 years and just a few changes.
- The 2026 Icicle Refrozen balloon meet.
- One correction from last month on Cameron O type hoppers.
- Changes to the Newsletter



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- Alpine flying season
- New Balloons-
- Second hand balloons
- Manufacturer News-
- Gallery

Articles for inclusion are always welcome Anything for future inclusion to the usual email address please: steve.roake33@gmail.com many thanks in advance. Now please enjoy this edition of the world's only Hopper periodical brought to you with pleasure and kindness with all the most up to date information on our unique form of flying and longing for your support. I'm not after your wealth, just a small indication that all of my collective efforts over the years are still appreciated and that you enjoy the regular insights .

1,Ed Speak- "22years"- that's a shed load of time.

22 years of this community and writing Newsletters. Who would have thought that all these years later I(we) would be still at it? So much has changed over the years and yet some of it remains the same. January 2004 seems to be in the dark ages now, but that was the day I fatefully started the Cloudhoppers Yahoo group to promote one man ballooning into Europe. John Ninomiya had a website in America but I felt we could expand a bit (and boy how we have grown). Some Luminaries have come and gone, without whom the hopper history wouldn't have been the same . I will (if you bear with me) , just mention two sadly departed friends who graced us with their presence. First was the original individual to ask me for permission to join the Cloudhoppers group . The Godfather of hopping himself Don Piccard . This trail blazer road side saddle on fuel tanks in the early days just because he could, and he asked me to come aboard the group. Well to say I was gob-smacked is an understatement and I was delighted to say yes.

The second sadly departed figure was the man who basically ran the One Man Meet in the earliest years. Always a pioneer of innovation when it came to Cloudhoppers, particularly for transporting them on airliners, Phil Dunnington's efforts will never be diminished. He simply had to fly one every month, in as many countries as he possibly could, a tradition that his wife Allie still tries to



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continue to this day. Can I also acknowledge folks who used to own hoppers and still remain members of our community. For me personally, Pat and Tony Bubb helped me in many ways, supporting my fledgling passion and nurturing it. Now winding down

to a quieter life away from Festivals, I'd publicly like to thank them for all the great times we shared, and Pat's generosity to the community was immense. If you needed something and she had one, in an instant she would loan it to you to get you out of a fix. The other one who retired gracefully a few years ago but occasionally threatens to make a comeback is Jan Fraser. Still an avid follower of hopper exploits she surveys from her "Up North" residence. She still tracks her old Lindstrand hopper and wonders should she have sold it?

The passing of time happens in an instance and before you know it a decade has passed. In 22 years, Hoppers have matured at great pace. When I think back to the craft we flew back then with average weights of envelopes being mid 50 kilos plus and now everything new is sub 34 kilos you realise the pace of change and the continuous efforts of all the manufacturers to push the boundaries further.

Where next eh? We have fluttered with composite fuel tanks but price kept them at bay, David Head recently proved a good 31 can achieve 260 plus hours comfortably, perhaps burner technology could be the next factor to receive attention. I remember a few years ago Ultramagic were exploring ignitors which didn't require a pilot light supply.

I continue to gather information towards a project I have been mulling over for years now, maybe 2026 will see all of the accumulated knowledge get deposited in one place.

Greetings to all and HNY Steve

General Announcement

Before we get into the meat of the Newsletter I'd just like to say that Cloudhoppers Newsletter is now accepting advertising. In conjunction with this announcement, I would like to thank the first two supporters of the site. The first is nice because it represents an understanding that this is a worthy medium which gets traction. My thanks to Cameron Balloons for coming onboard as the Sponsor of the Newsletter. Yes, it is a partnership which I had previously



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successfully with them and so I'm delighted that they feel it is good to be involved again with me. Cameron's will advertise and you will see their acknowledgement at the footer of each and every page of the Newsletter. I am also delighted to announce a tie up with Laura of Altitude Insurance. Laura has gracefully agreed to advertise right here and it is a pleasure for me to collaborate with the most supportive Insurance company in the UK who just happen to have my business as well. I look forward to a long and successful alliance with Altitude. My thoughts on advertising are that Cloudhoppers will accept one brand only in each field of business so if you wish to advertise here please get in contact for the rates. There are room for others. Once again thanks to both companies for their support.

2.Feature Section

The Icicle Refrozen Balloon festival 2026

The Icicle Refrozen Balloon Festival is a continuation of the Icicle Balloon festival held at the Donnington Grove Hotel in Newbury. This unique venue is set in a golf course environment featuring 39 ensuite rooms and is an amazing sight architecturally. Newbury itself is a small town some 60 odd miles west of London Heathrow airport midway towards Bath and probably the type of place you would rest when taking a stage coach to the west country. The whole area is devoted to equestrian activities with the local racecourse featuring prominently. The event which is always the first weekend of the year features a trade show and a chance to catch up with friends and discuss ideas for the season ahead. This year the weather would feature quite heavily with freezing cold snaps overnight and hard compacted grounds ideal for balloons.

However , travelling the 40 miles to the venue on Saturday morning for the ballooning activity , with temperature of minus 5 degrees and a met forecast of

High wind speeds(30plus knots at 1000ft), I knew there would be no flying this particular morning. The venue is surrounded by plenty of trees and the actual surface conditions were good for tethering. Some brave souls decided to play and with one of the themes being Cloudhoppers I had mixed feelings of what might emerge. In the end of the four balloons that did tether, just one, G-BRCO



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or Baby Helix as it is known was tethered. More people were here than expected including Graham Luckett who was a long way from Home.

Moving indoors to the trade show area it was generally smaller than previous years with just two rooms being utilised. In terms of manufacturers, all three of the main players were present. Ultramagic balloons were there with new UK representatives Matt and Chris. They had a nice stand with some "freebie" give a ways including the legendary Ultramagic Calendar. Taking over from Richard Penny, they have established themselves and are keen to secure



Cameron H-20 G-BRCO tethered on Saturday morning.

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sales in the UK having taken delivery of their own special shaped which was en-route to the Philippines having flown in Qatar over the festive period. Douglas Hoddinolt was on the Kubicek UK stand having tethered his brand-new envelope on the Launch field. Reflecting on 2025 he eluded how tough times are currently for dealers but he maintained the quota he was asked to achieve in 2025 and already had one more balloon coming shortly.

Over in Cameron Corner, Nick Purvis, Dave Groombridge and Amanda Buckland were on duty. Whilst nothing of note was new, its always good to speak with them and see in hindsight how last year panned out for Cameron's. Nick told me that whilst they probably made as many balloons as in 2024, they were generally of smaller sizes in 2025. So, with not a lot of new things to talk about at the Icicle, what better way to enjoy yourself than having lunch with good friends. This is exactly what I did and very pleasurable it was too. Driving home from the venue I had convinced myself that there was little to get up for on the Sunday morning and whilst the weather might be a tad better, flying seemed a remote idea. Upper winds were still forecast to be around 20knots and if you were at home you know you wouldn't get out of bed. However, the lure of any launch is something that is appealing and whilst not setting my alarm clock I did wake around 6am and re evaluated my thoughts. The surface wind had been enough to be able to tether on the previous morning and it appeared to be lighter winds predicted. Therefore, having had a decent breakfast, I decided to return in the faint hope of some activity and I was glad that I took that decision. The forecast winds were accurate but there was a small amount of hopper activity which was enough to warrant my attention. Firstly, Cameron Balloons decided to do a small bit of publicity with G-CJWY their O-31 demonstrator (which at one time was my baby). Don Cameron was persuaded to get into the seat unit for his first ever hopper experience. Naturally he didn't stay for long and so Nick Purvis and Dave Groombridge both had a play. I was offered the chance to do some tether time but politely declined the offer(thanks guys). Further along the launch field Ron Griffin had his Bard 31 out for a tether having flown it just before Christmas and feeling that it needed drying out. Once again, I was offered a chance to tether his beast (again thanks for the offer), again declining the opportunity, however John Hilditch did have a go in the lovely homebuilt craft.



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G-CJWY Cameron O-31 (now nine years young and about 80 hours tt). I did suggest to Cameron's It is about time its replacement is built and apparently there is some interest in CJWY being bought so watch this space.

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INTRODUCING THE NEW SUPERLIGHT **O-38 HOPPER**

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Ron Griffin's Bard 31 G-CMKB.

Four balloons did actually fly out of the arena but naturally all stayed low and I only know of one that did any distance. This being Richard Penny who ended up in Sussex. So that was Icicle 2026 done and dusted.

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Feature on Ron Griffins Bard 31

One point that did attract interest was the scoop on Ron Griffins Bard 31 . Nicely maintaining its shape and tightly formed I noticed it has two additional guy wires which make sure the scoop doesn't move and loose its shape. If you look in my terrible photograph you can see the additional guy lines attaching the scoop to the burner frame.



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Correction to last Months Cameron O-31 Listings

With many thanks to Bernhard Feller for pointing out my error last month, O-31 OE-SEX is no longer that registration. It was purchased by a balloon club in Austria and re-registered OE-SEP. What a lovely way for club members to enjoy their time, and what a great club asset. Thanks for the photo Bernhard.



Cameron O-31 OE-SEP c/n 11897 built in 2015 has about 90 hours total time.



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Alpine Flying Season

As you would imagine, January marks the start of the Alpine winter flying season with events taking place in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Whilst hopper participation appears to be lower than some previous years, some hoppers have been reported. With great thanks to Bernhard Fellingner we can put some order to the events and who participated where. The first reported event was Filzmoos in Austria, which is a narrow valley where traditionally people go high and fly away from the surrounding area. Hopper exponent Peter Kelder from Holland attended with his Cameron O-31 PH-LFO. Photographed by Linda Crossland Mead who was attending with Hubby Brian and Allie Dunnington, here he is Low level over the Town.



Imagine floating at low speed over the housing – photo by Linda Crossland Mead



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Another view supplied by Bernhard Fellingner shows they had decent amounts of snow.



Over in the next valley there was another festival. Mauterndorf is a mere 60km's away from Filzmoos and roughly an hour by car. However, the difference between the two locations is quite dramatic. Mauterndorf is a more open valley which has a smaller mountain next to the airfield which should you choose to fly over it and descend into the next valley, then has a unique component that the winds can take you either direction back towards your take off point in the shape of a love heart. The roving team of Cameron Balloons attended the meet and Nick Purvis enjoyed himself in the well utilised G-CJWY their O-31 demonstrator. A beautiful artistic photograph of him flying was taken by Elizabeth Kindermann. She particularly captured the light with this well framed shot.

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Reports coming back from attendees stated that daily flying took place from the Sunday right through to the Friday. I'm told that Gary Madelin was in attendance with his new Cameron O-26 G-CMYG but it is not known if he flew it. Also, at some stage, after Filzmoos Allie Dunnington, Linda Crossland Mead and Brian Mead took the opportunity to play with Allie's venerable G-HEXE the Colt 17A which dates from 1994. All three got to sample the lightly utilised hopper in Seeg Germany.

Once Mauterndorf completed, some UK teams returned to blighty, but Nick Purvis and his crew drove the 178 km's to Kossen, (also in Austria, some 73kms west of Salzburg). Here he was supporting the local Austrian dealer who

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also has a Cameron O-31 demonstrator. The two were seen flying by photographer Harold Dunst who also captured OE-SIW yet another Cameron O-31. This one was being utilised by Christian Wagner and Stefanie Lillier.



Cameron Twins in Kossen- photo by Harold Dunst.

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OE-SIW Cameron O-31- photo by Harold Dunst.

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After the Austrian Alpine meets concluded, the action transferred to the legendary Chateau D'oex Balloon Festival which ran from January 24th through until February 3rd. Whilst over the years this event has been a hot bed for iconic Cloudhopper photographs, it appears from Information gleaned by Gary Davis a pilot who is flying there, that on this occasion the only hopper to have emerged is a regular one , that being Charlie Rawson's G-CLPW Cameron O-31. The Rawson family are regulars to the event and tend to bring the hopper to supplement their O-105, However the pilot is listed as Joe Rodoni. Gary did state he also thought a Sky Chariot might be present but so far it hasn't emerged and wasn't on the web page as a participant. A duo bottom end was spotted but not recognised which envelope was using it

3, New Balloons.

At the end of January , there are no known hoppers in production currently so as far as I know there are no new balloons.

4, Second Hand Balloons

Interestingly one envelope which was being touted for sale this month was G-BYYJ, an older Lindstrand 25A with approximately 90 hours total time on it. No price was mentioned but with its age and its size I would suggest to move this one on would be a hard gig. Swift trawl through the Zebedee list has the same three envelopes for sale but Per Lesser's Z-42 G-CLFF with only one flight of one hour ten mins strikes me as great value at only £7000.

Surprisingly Zebedee List has G-BYRK Viva 42 back on there for sale . Full kit £5000 – surely a bargain.

6, Gallery

This section is your editors' chance to find interesting photographs either from his own collection or from stuff submitted for the newsletter, or alternatively something that featured on the Cloudhoppers Facebook page during the month



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With credit to Flashballonvarten ,PH-DUO (LTL series 1-70, and ex G-CJIG) was flying in Inzell recently (late January).

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And an oldie from me but a favourite , G-BUJS Colt 17A, seen at Chateau D'oex many years ago . Photo possibly by Sandy Mitchell? I just love the colour combination.



Deregistered in 1995 – where are you now?

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And Finally

Just another plug about **buymeacoffee.com/Cloudhoppers**. Your support will go a long way to supporting ambitions I have for the site and the Newsletter. If in the past I have assisted you with either a valuation or with finding your new envelope, please remember the value I added to your quest to find your forever gem. Any contribution will be gratefully received and trust me, everything received will go back into the site, so please be generous within limits (no more than £12 for a year), or potentially a pound a copy. So, few of you have contributed so far and yet loads of you state how much you enjoy the read.

Here we are at the start of February 2026 with the number of people subscribing still increasing weekly. we find the subscriptions to the Facebook page reaching over 4667 and still growing monthly. This is a great achievement with sustained growth as we navigate our 22nd year of publicity for Cloudhoppers across the worldwide community. All are welcome but, **I would emphasize that content is strictly on hoppers and Duo-chariots and not “general ballooning” and those pesky adverts for constant Tee-Shirts are banned and anyone who “veer’s away” from the few rules we have, will be banned and their account will be deleted .**

Please send all submissions for future editions to Steve.roake33@gmail.com

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