

Cloudhopper News

Issue No. 169

August 2025

Hello and welcome to your Newsletter.

Pretty full one this month, as the season progresses and your editor manages three events within the month. Not all plain sailing as an incident at Northampton managed to curtail my fun. Somethings are meant to test us , luckily for me this occurred whilst still on the ground and not airborne. All thoughts on what happened, reporting it and my perception of the manufacturer's responsibilities on this will be discussed.

Then finally I will report on a small idyllic quintessential English festival in one of the nicest locations near Marlow/ Henley-on-Thames. It surprised me how nice the event was and how much I enjoyed it.

We also have two articles on different subjects. Firstly, Tony Brown has sold G-EROS his well-loved Cameron H-34 system. This is a unique balloon which has the accolade of being the only hopper to fly across the English Channel. If you liked a piece of history this would have been the kit for you.

Finally, Sebastian Bolling brings us a slice of the future with a project that he created an electric inflation fan. Whilst not saying so , if you are interested in one of these (to further your green credentials), perhaps give him a shout and see if he would build one for you.

On a more productive note, **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. 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 169 of the Newsletter:

- Ed Speak – Bristol, good or bad?
- Bristol Balloon Fiesta 2025.
- Northampton Balloon festival
- Henley Balloon Festival
- My incident at Northampton and thoughts on it.
- Strathaven Balloon festival- summary(report next month)
- Sebastian Bolling's electric solution
- OMM details
- Second hand balloons for sale. G-EROS H-34 sold quickly.



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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.

1,Ed Speak- Bristol Balloon Festival – Good or Bad?

This month I ventured to three balloon festivals including the Bristol International Balloon festival(I hasten to add purely as a spectator). I hadn't been in a couple of years and thought I would ponder if it is a good thing, or if the event has had its better days? Reason I say this ? The festival has been going for getting on for nearly 50 years, but seems a shadow of its former self. In the dizzy halcyon days, you wouldn't get a guaranteed starting place at the event with over 150 balloons attending and a waiting list of reserve participants. This year I think the most launching on any slot was around 80 balloons showing how its popularity has dropped away. You could say it's a due to economic influences, but I think not. To me the first thing that started to dilute the formula was when the local council stopped supporting the event(even though it bought masses of people into the area). Another thing which shows how the show has diminished was the associated entertainment which has thinned out and you had large periods of time where nothing was going on. The size of the marquee has also got smaller, as has the support teams enjoy.

I don't want to sound too negative about the event but it really is a shadow of its former self, predominantly made up of local balloons, and yet whilst it has a reduced format , the crowds were magnificent and heaving. They stated over 300,000 but I'd suggest higher.

Following on from Bristol, the following weekend saw us in Northampton which again had massive crowds, lovely weather but reoccurring winds which kept all grounded until Sunday morning when the briefing was brought forward to make the slot doable. With 35 balloons present most flew, me being an exception which I will write about elsewhere. A very friendly meet and having not been for a number of years , I enjoyed returning.

Finally, I took pot luck on a local event at Cawley Faw Estate near Henley on Thames and whilst there weren't masses of balloons, it worked really well . All in all, a full-on month with exceptional help from Easy Balloons when I needed it (thanks Chris).

With other festivals at Silverstone, Priory Farm Tibenham, and Strathaven the country was well served during August. Hope wherever you were, you managed to get some flying in during the lush weather window.

Regards Steve.



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2, Feature Section **Bristol Balloon Festival 2025**

Driving into Bristol on the Thursday before the event started, I firstly had to remind myself not to speed as the previous year had cost me three points and £100. I ventured via Cameron Balloons, where some business took place and the Lovely Jess Siggers managed to furnish both Jim and myself with passes so we could have access to all areas. Once completing my tasking, I then headed to my preferred camping spot which is an RV park near the Angel Pub in Long Ashton opposite the venue and within walking distance. Now I'm not adverse to paying for a pitch, but to me paying the same for a single man tent as an RV and paying with no onsite toilets is a bit of a joke at £20 a night. Dinner was cooked onsite and a few beers undertaken at the hostelry, with us pre-booking a table for the following evening which I had guessed (correctly) would be windy.

Friday morning arrived with a lightish surface breeze and a prevailing direction of Keynsham. Being in a bowl the launch site was sheltered and a fine lift was had by 70 odd craft. It would turn out to be a weekend where all the morning slots were flyable. The briefing happened on time just after six am and the pilots emerged ready to fly. In no time the balloons lifted from Ashton Court arena lingering briefly before heading south easterly towards Keynsham. Whilst a few new balloons drew my attention, there was no hopper activity on the Friday morning.

During the afternoon it became apparent that it would be too windy for the evenings slot. Having pre-booked the pub table for dinner, we decided not to hang around and left enjoying a hearty fish and chip meal. Jim ventured back to the arena for the Nightglow but I gave it a miss deciding to get an early night in preparation for the Saturday morning lift. In No time at all I was in the land of Nod.

Saturday morning dawned with lowish cloud and again light winds on the surface. Following the pilots briefing the same coordinated inflations took place with once again balloons heading in the general direction of Keynsham. This morning there seemed slightly more balloons with less gaps on the launch field. I spotted Simon Watley inflating the Cameron Demo Hopper G-CJWY, which I knew so well. He was intent with flying the length of the arena and upholding Cameron's Marketing presence when others had departed. Put simply, by flying with a crew who would willingly reposition him, he maximised the opportunity to enjoy the freedom of roaming the arena when others had departed.



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Seen from the balloonist's marquee , Simon Whatley in G-CJWY.

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We adjourned to the Balloonists marquee for early breakfast refreshments and I framed the above photo of Simon playing. With the use of good forecasting and decent apps on our phones we quickly realised the evening would once again be non-flyable. Having spent time on the launch field I ventured to a display of ballooning crowd side, with Jess Siggers from Cameron Balloons and ended up doing a live broadcast on BBC Radio Bristol. Returning to our accommodation over the road, we took the opportunity to relax and rest up before heading back into the venue for some more socialising.

Whilst we did return to the arena for the afternoon, precious little occurred with the (low) Highlight being a guy hanging out of a range rover car displaying stunt kites. As the afternoon continued the winds increased and meant that free flying in the evening slot would not be possible. Without a booking we dashed around trying to find a place to eat and ended up back at the Angel inn which we lucked in on.

Once again Jim was keen to take in the Nightglow and so departed back to a heaving arena for the spectacle, I decided not to partake and missed out on seeing a new localised balloon (one for another day). Having reached my maximum beer intake level, I was happy to adjourn to my bed and shut eye.



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Sunday morning and another flyable slot. All the usual participants lined up in their allotted places and inflated and flew once again in the Keynsham direction. This morning's offerings were joined by Simon Church in G-CMOO his cow shaped hopper. Simon Whatley was once again on sentry duty in G-CJWY affording Jim a great photo opportunity in the early morning sunshine.

With work the following day and nothing particularly new still due to come out of the bag, I decided to pack up my things and return home. G-OBJB the ex-Barry Bower champagne liveried hopper was due to tether, but having seen it previously, I had no desire to hang around longer than necessary. In hindsight I should have stayed because a unique Red bull liveried Cameron Z-600 was tethered in the arena mid-afternoon, and the chances of seeing it again are minimal. So that was the Bristol Balloon Festival and to me, somewhat underwhelming.

Northampton Balloon Festival

Less than a week after Bristol, I found myself driving up the M1 to the Town of Northampton for its annual Balloon Festival. Not having been in a number of years, the event is run these days by Matt Rate and Chris Freeman and I had heard it is a relaxed affair. As I arrived on site and set my tent up I realised that the event has some following and when I heard they had 35 balloons booked in, I knew we were going to have a great time.

Friday's weather forecast had indicated that whilst sunny all day, winds would be a limiting factor and so it proved. At the evening briefing our fears were confirmed, it would be too windy to fly unfortunately. The evening Nightglow would take place but would be predominantly basket only. Crowds were large and receptive, so I joined the compere for a "speak to the pilot" session keeping the crowds abreast of the situation, with accurate informative updates no matter if the news wasn't what they wanted.

The Glow went pretty well considering the influencing factors, and the public went home happy. We adjourned to an early bed and the prospect of hopefully a flyable morning slot. Alas we would be dashed in our hopes. We woke to surface winds which weren't too bad but winds between 500 and 1000 feet were over 20 knots and unflyable.

This could have been very frustrating, but being in an area that we didn't know too well, Jim and I decided a decent breakfast was in order so we went to the local airport at Sywell and a fine aviators café. Time spent here watching fixed wing activities which nourishing oneself was time well spent. Also, with

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limited domesticated facilities on site, using dedicated lavatories on the airfield was another worthy distraction. We also just happened upon a team of parachutists who would be jumping into the arena later that day, spending time to understand life through their eyes and the issues affecting their jumping. Following on from a very interesting conversation, we returned to the arena and a chance to interact with the public by setting up the hopper bottom end around the edge of the launch field and answering questions and allowing kids to sit in the seat unit and dream.

Second evening on the trot, the weather would beat the chance to fly once again but we would return to inform the public whilst balloonists tethered in not the best conditions. Kudos to them for trying. We would once again attempt the Nightglow but once again with baskets only. Food had been appropriated thanks to vouchers supplied at the briefing. The organisers were keen that we would bring the morning briefing forward so that we could ensure the best chance of flying on Sunday morning with an arranged time of 05-30 to maximise the slot before the weather deteriorated.



Charlie Sanger Davis in Cameron N-31 G-BZYR

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The alarm clock would bellow at 04-30, and following a quick cup of tea and a wash, we emerged to a nice-looking sky and briefing. With outside temperature of plus 13 Celsius and a surface wind of 3knots it was flyable. The upper winds were predicted to be up to 15knots but the direction was good so we proceeded to the launch site and initiated the assembly and inflation of my hopper. Set up and cold inflation was all good and whilst we were one of the latter teams to inflate, everything appeared normal. Having done a burner test, I proceeded to hot inflate the craft which once again was normal and nothing strange. At the moment I was about to transition from the tank straddle to sitting in the seat I witnessed a main blast valve leak. To say it gushed was an understatement and as speedily as I could I turned off the fuel supply and the ignition and quit on the idea of flying . (More on this subject later in another article). Whilst deflated not to fly I was grateful that my incident had happened on the ground and not whilst in the air. Some 22 balloons had graced the skies and whilst these evaporated into the distance, Charlie Sanger Davis decided to inflate and free fly his ex-Benadryl Hopper in the arena. G-BZYR is a Cameron N-31 and whilst older, was still clearly in flying condition. The bottom end was more an acquired taste with it being an original "nut crunching seat" unit with the seat attached to a mark one frame.

I decided to start packing for home shortly afterwards and Telephoned Chris Dunkley at Easy Balloons arranging to drop off the burner on my way home in an attempt to get it fixed before Henley on Thames festival some seven days later. Whilst I may not have flown , I still had a great time and am prepared to return next year for another go at flying at the Northampton Balloon Festival.

Henley Balloon Festival

It's not often I rewrite the start of a review , but I had to on this one, to be able to describe to anyone who hasn't been to this idyllic part of England how beautiful the vista is alongside the River Thames which meanders serenely between Marlow and Henley on Thames, punctuated by seven figure value homes which are immaculately kept. This is prime real estate, obsessively clean and tidy and punctuated by far too many Porsche cars. It's a proper part of traditional blighty. Henley on Thames isn't the first place you would think of holding a balloon festival. For starters, it has a lot and I mean a lot, of no landing places on a busy map. There have been a number of smaller balloon events in the UK that have been "rinsed" in the press for not being good value for money and poor in the ballooning content, so I was slightly cynical going to the event and yet



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happy that it was relatively local for me. Taking the view that it would be what it would be, and having a relatively new relationship with Doug Hodinault (the event balloon director), I went having indicated my intention to attend and asking for accommodation as I didn't

fancy getting up at 4am and leaving the house at 5 for a 6 am briefing. He couldn't have been more accommodating, putting My crew (Jim) and I up in a very nice hotel in Marlow, right by the bridge over the River Thames, called the McDonald Complete Angler Hotel. This I saw cost the organisers £430 for the two nights, and absolutely free for me.

This was the first of many free things that we were given. I arrived at the Location on Friday afternoon before everyone else, and waited for Doug and his merry team to arrive in order to assist with erection of their marquee. The actual first flying slot would be Saturday am, so there was no hurry to rush to our hotel and we enjoyed helping out. When we did leave, the hotel was only 6.5 miles away in Marlow. This was very agreeable and we quickly settled in and went into town for some beers and food. This was very nice because the ladies in Marlow were excessively pretty, and out in volume as we sat outside the pub of choice. Early to bed and up bright and early for Saturday morning. This was a cereal situation because the show didn't open until midday so the morning flights were at your own discretion and when briefing took place, I realised I was one of only three partaking. The event had been opened up to the local club, (the 3/4/40), but apparently, they don't do mornings. Well I do. With a very nice surface wind of 3knots I decided to play across the vast acreage of land available to me. Flittering across the field at 5 feet high was both rewarding and challenging in both regards as the wind which was clearly affected by the proximity of the river was fickle and yet having missed out at Northampton the previous weekend and with great thanks to Chris Dunkley for a great turn around on my burner, I was keen to maximise my opportunities to get current. Without leaving the site and not climbing above 300 feet at any one point I managed to fly for 1 hour and 50 mins. There was an inversion evident because Craig Thompson flew out of the arena and then appeared to be boxing back into the site until the river had other intentions. This left Tom Hilditch in G-CJVH his LindTech 31A, and myself to roam to our hearts content. Following our exploits , Jim and I returned to our lush hotel to sample the breakfast which was outrageously bad value at £26 per person when you only get one rasher of Bacon and one sausage. Then we adjourned to our room for a mid-morning siesta prior returning to the venue around one pm where we refuelled before engaging with the public whilst various old envelopes were tethered. I was very

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keen to see two balloons which had been at other shows by the organisers. One was a Brazilian G-CLOH which belonged to Jonathan Greatrix (and typically wasn't present), and the second one being Doug's Uk registered Kubicek BB9EF Hopper G-CLAF. I wouldn't have to wait too long as this also got tethered over a basket during the afternoon. (I have to say I'm not a fan of tethering hoppers over big balloon burners), but would enjoy 30 mins of tethering myself later that evening in the Nightglow with it(thanks Douglas).

As you would imagine with a new balloon, it was vibrant, silky smooth to the touch (polyester fabric) and my only real observation was that the Nomex mouth was incredibly heavy(probably double skinned I guess). We spent hours chatting to the crowds who astonished me with the distance some of them had come to attend the event. It is always pleasurable discussing the merits of balloons to complete novices and I always ask the parents to photograph a balloon and get the young kids to draw a picture of it the following day and display it on their fridge for a week.

By six pm when we had the evening briefing, the numbers had swollen to seven balloons who would free fly and whilst the lower winds on the surface had hardly changed, 1000ft winds were up to 19 knots with Kevin Tanner flying home towards Thame. I decided I really didn't want any land owner issues so proceeded to bob around the arena again, this time for 45 mins.

Trouble was the winds were due to pick up so the Nightglow might be spirited, so we waited to see what gives.

In the end, it was Ok and I tethered G-CLAF for 30mins, deciding ultimately that being pushed by the other hopper and watching the Nomex get ever closer to the burner , that I was no hero and there was no way I would damage Doug's pristine new toy, so I ripped out before damage could occur. Once squared away, a dash to the Hotel for beers besides the river was the theme. Obviously with a six am briefing we weren't too late to bed and all too soon it was rise and shine time.

The morning view was beautiful . The sun rising over the river which was flat calm was a sight to behold and once again I played at piloting around the deserted arena, stopping at one stage to form a queue in front of the one open food concession.

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Only chance I got to take a photo of G-CLAF.

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Nice air to air photo- by Kevin Tanner.

By the end of this third flight I had flown 3 hours in three flights and witnessed an amazing sunrise, (the beginning of which Jim captured below).

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Once we had flown and refueled we joined Doug's team of merry men at a local farm shop for a better breakfast which he generously paid for. Returning to the Hotel to check out, I mused over the weekend, concluding if it happens again next year I will return. Thanks to all who put it on, we had some fun.

My Hopper Issue from Northampton

If you have read my review on Northampton balloon festival , you will see that upon inflation I suffered a major leak on my main blast valve just at the point I was going to sit into the seat unit. Luckily for me this happened whilst still on terra firma and not in the air. Upon leaving the event I went to my maintenance organization Easy Balloons, and got Chris Dunkley to change the seals on both

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the main blast valve and on the whisper unit too. However, I was shocked and surprised what a casual approach to this failure came as a response from the manufacturer. Some people suggested I fill in an incident report form, and having discussed it at length on Facebook I contacted Richard Allen at the Civil aviation authority and did that including the video we had of the incident. I come from a background of formula one engineering where every component is monitored for its use, mileage put on the part and how many laps on a track it does. I was therefore concerned when I found out that there is no proprietary advice on the seals of the unit. This is on a hopper, i.e. single burner, where should you have a fire whilst in the air, your options limited in terms of avoiding the flames. With my background I had expected a directive from the manufacturer to either disassemble and re-grease the seals annually at your c of a renewal, or a mandatory change of seals every 30 flying hours or three years (whichever comes first). Neither of these options are recommended let alone made a necessity. My contact at the manufacturers, suggested I could change my seals every year or two if it bothered me!

I take the point raised by Andy Davey via Facebook that most hoppers are flown irregularly and so a rule of thumb cannot be applied, but I would say mine was eight years old with 55 hours usage, and if I had known they tend to leak, would have had them changed before now. I think the CAA has a remit to make sure aviation is as safe as possible and therefore should further look into this failure. We have directives to change fuel lines every ten years mandatorily, I would have thought that blast valves are as important. I would welcome your feedback on this subject.

Strathaven Balloon festival

Strathaven Balloon festival took place over the same weekend as the Henley festival I attended. It was a minor hopper festival with no less than six in attendance. Andy Marshall, Stuart Skinner, Neil Ivison, David Head, Gareth Gray and Innes Ireland all managed to fly during the six slots they achieved. I am hopeful of a full report for next month's newsletter.

Chatsworth Country fair and Balloon Festival

Confirmed sightings by our roving reporter Mel Kirby from the event, that five hoppers graced the skies of Chatsworth this last weekend of August. Amongst Tim Ward(G-BOYO), Kevin Tanner(G-HOPR), Colin Butter(G-CIET), and Derek



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Maltby(G-CJRK), Gary Madelin flew his new Cameron O-26 G-CMYG twice. These must have been some of its first ever flights flying Friday pm and Saturday Morning.

3, New Balloons.

Apart from the stock offering available at Cameron Balloons , nothing else is known to be available as new or due to be in production.

4, Second Hand Balloons

An interesting one here -Tony Brown was selling G-EROS Cameron H-34 which was listed on the Zebedee List. The balloon is unique in that back in the day it was involved in crossing the English Channel with two Worthington cylinders. To my knowledge, it made it just to the beach at Calais. Posted for sale on the Zebedee list prior to this newsletter coming out , it has already sold to a new UK owner for a price I was surprised it reached. Hope the new owner enjoys her.

Speaking to Neil Ivison at Northampton he revealed in February he had purchased G-NEIL Thunder Ax3-17.

5, Manufacturer / Event News.

One Man Meet news and Sebastian Bolling's new fan project

The 42nd Annual One Man Meet finally has a venue. Please note the dates . October 3-5th and the event will be held at a new venue, Popham Airfield near Winchester Hampshire has been chosen. Invitations will go out to all regular entrants soon but if you are not on the mailing list please contact the organisers . John Tyrrell writes:-

This years' One Man Meet will be held on Friday 3rd to Sunday 5th October at Popham Airfield, Coxford Down, Winchester.

We will be joining with 3-4-40 BBAC region to bring ballooning to the airfield, with the chance to meet other aviators!

There will be the usual flying slots of Friday PM, Saturday AM and PM, Sunday AM, with prize giving returning to Sunday late morning.

Popham is an active airfield, so flying will need to within controlled times, so that we do not cause problems for the other aircraft.

There is a café onsite open 10:00 to 16:00 with great coffee, breakfasts and lunches, plus the toilets are available 24hrs!



So why not join us in early October for some solo flying. Contact
– onemanmeet@btinternet.com

Sebastian Bolling's fan project

Sebastian Bolling has been in touch with me for a short while about a project he is doing with regard to inflation fans . he wanted to manufacture something more in keeping with green issues and so here it is in his own words.

A Fresh Breeze for Balloonists
An Electric Fan that Keeps the Car Smelling Sweet

On a frosty winter's morning in Kössen, the valley lay smothered in fog. Pilots waited patiently for the skies to clear. Among them was Gerhard Eggenreich with his OE-RAT, a 31,000 cu.ft. hopper. The scene was calm, but a casual chat on that misty launch field was about to spark something new. Gerhard mentioned a frustration familiar to many hopper pilots: the chase crew's complaints about petrol fans. Transport one in the car, and before long the whole vehicle smells of fuel – hardly pleasant on long journeys, and downright miserable in winter when the windows stay shut.

A Spark of an Idea

As a model balloon builder with a background in electronics and fan design, I was intrigued. Why not build a fan that runs on electricity instead of petrol – no fumes, no noise, no hassle?

The wish list was straightforward: light, compact, powerful enough to handle more than just hoppers, and easy to transport in a car without the smell of fuel or the worry of carrying petrol cans.

From Sketch to Sky-Ready

What followed was months of trial and error – different motors, countless propellers, endless testing. The result: the first compact electric fan designed specifically for manned ballooning.

It features a robust e-motor, carefully tuned propeller blades, a stainless-steel encased battery, and a strong yet lightweight frame. In short: exactly what hopper pilots had been waiting for.

Why Pilots Will Love It

No fuel smell in the car. No risk of leaks or spills. No petrol cans to lug around. Just switch on and go. It's ideal for hopper and ultralight pilots who rely on small vehicles for transport – but it has the muscle for larger envelopes too.

The Numbers That Count

Capacity: Balloons up to 56,000 cu.ft.*

Battery life: 30 minutes on full power

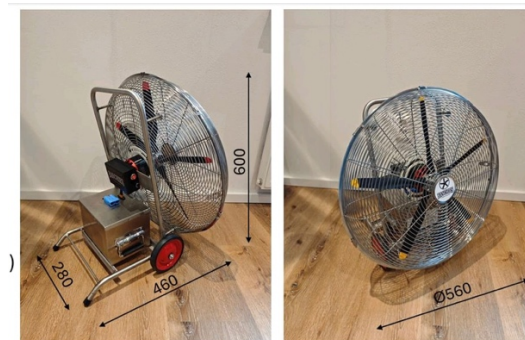
Weight: 16 kg

Size: 46 × 56 × 60 cm – no bigger than a model balloon fan

In real-world testing, Gerhard's 31,000 cu.ft. hopper (ultralight fabric) was fully inflated in just four minutes. A 77,000 cu.ft. racer reached hot-fill readiness in eight minutes – proof that the fan delivers. For bigger balloons, a pair of fans does the job while still keeping kit manageable.

Small Innovation, Big Comfort

What began as a foggy fieldside conversation has become a tangible improvement for our sport. It's a reminder that ballooning innovations don't always come from labs or factories – sometimes they start with a pilot, a problem, and a bit of determination to try something new. For me, this fan is more than a gadget. It's a small but meaningful step towards making ballooning cleaner, easier, and just a little more comfortable.



And here she is

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For video of the fan in action :

https://youtube.com/shorts/S_BrswVDGFw?si=Rp5s0pu_qL1a6S2l

And for any further information or to contact Sebastian to see if he would make you one

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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.



Flying recently in Strathaven was Neil Ivison in LBL25A G-RIME .

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Owner of G-RIME, Neil Ivison recently bought G-NEIL Thunder Ax3-17.

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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. 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.

Here we are at the end of August 2025 with the number of people subscribing still increasing in recent weeks, we find subscription to the Facebook page reaching over 4487 and still growing monthly. This is a great achievement with sustained growth as we navigate our 21st 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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