

Cloudhopper News

Issue No. 175

February 2026

Welcome to your February Newsletter

Hello my readers, I hope you are all doing good. Welcome to the February 2026 Newsletter and thanks for reading my demented waffling. February traditionally is a quieter month following the Alpine action in January, so please expect less in the way of content.

We still have some content, thanks to the generosity of a couple of pilots who have put pen to paper but getting content can at times be a challenge. There are some rich pickings out there when you are looking for a second-hand craft and today we feature one belonging to an old friend of mine Bruce Ross. Bruce asked me to mention his craft in the newsletter, but more importantly he donated to the buy me a coffee site (thanks very much Bruce). You wouldn't believe what a difference a small donation makes to the cause, and if the other 98% of you got onboard, god knows where this could go to.

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 22 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 175 of the Newsletter:

- Ed Speak – Dreaming of Alpine adventures and a beautiful invitation that sadly I have to turn down.
- The story of one iconic Turkish hopper and the dream to own it.
- Interesting winter flight by Bernard Fellingner
- Second hand balloons
- Manufacturer News-
- Gallery- More seasonal Photos

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



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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- Alpine Dreaming and a beautiful invitation(sadly I can't attend).

I don't know about you , but seeing those beautiful photos from last month featuring lovely colours with iconic snowy background scenes really got to me . I've been to the Alps (on three occasions) and never been disappointed but the last time I flew there was in, (yes, I had to look this up as it was so long ago), 2005 when I had sub forty hours P1. Hard to believe it was that long ago but I don't count Mondovi Italy (2016) as alpine flying. I have always thought of my hopper (G-CLKC) looking great against a snowy backdrop so having discussed it with Jim (my trusty crewmate and great friend), we are provisionally looking to join the fun next year at Kossen if they accept my application and I can get through a class two medical again. I would love to tick off this box and I think it's been way too long for me not to have attended such a winters festival. How much could that naïve low-hour pilot learn some 22 years later by being back amongst the beauty of a snowy resort with like-minded souls?

I might be older, wiser, more mature with vastly more experience but the passion still burns deeply. I have always said I would love an Alpine hopper meet somewhere really snowy where teams of two pilots rock up with a hopper and take turns to fly and retrieve each other. You Austrian / swiss residents probably take this for granted but people like Bernard Fellingner sent lovely reports on a regular basis with views to die for. If anyone shares this passion and would love to help achieve this event with me – please get in touch.

I have to also say thanks to Margaret Rose and Virginia the organisers of the Tuton Valley Balloon Rally for once again inviting me to participate in Hoppermania 2026. I would genuinely love to attend this one year and the beautiful committee offered a subsidy to get me there, but it clashes with another UK , which I have committed to and I have recently spent serious money buying another toy which wipes out my contingency funds for the year. Whilst I know this is off topic and I apologise for the deviation I just have to show you all my “new to me” 48 years old, Kawasaki Z1000A2 . This American import arrived here in the UK some 23 years ago and I have fancied one of these for a while having owned (and still do its smaller brother the Z650). After nine years of

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650 ownership, the itch was so strong and this appeared some 50 miles from home in immaculate condition- I just had to put the trigger.



My 1978 Kawasaki KZ1000A2 with a mere 34,000 miles on her.

Yes, I don't need three motorcycles, or two cars and a hopper but She spoke to me and I had to act on my impulses. If you said to me years ago I would end up with a Porsche 997 Carrera 4 and a Z1000 I would have laughed you all the way to the funny farm. I haven't indulged in a new bike for 9 years and so now I'm

Happy with the results . My "only" other obsession (please forgive me for I am a sinner) is watches so let's not go there.

Please America, (Margaret and Virginia in particular), tell me of your plans around Christmas time next year so that I have a chance to fit them into my ballooning calendar (which this year without trying has 12 separate ballooning weekends accounted for and we are only in February). I would love to attend on another occasion but it needs early planning and some logistical spinning of plates in order for it to work.

2.Feature Section

One Man's enduring Love of an old LBL35A and getting it eventually.

My Toy in the Sky...by Gaert Van Wolverlair

The year is 2006

Anatolian Balloons, the company I started working for in Cappadocia, decided to order some big passenger ride balloons. The boss, Halil Uluer, jumped on a plane to the UK and visited the two major players of those days, Cameron and Lindstrand . By accident, while walking through the LBL factory, he saw a strange-looking chair standing in a corner. "What's that? That, Mr Uluer, is a Cloudhopper. A balloon without a basket."

"I want that... Put it on the order form with the other four complete 425s as a present..." And so, the first-ever Cloudhopper was on its way to Turkey.

On the 7th of July, I had the pleasure of taking off in Göreme for a short flight with the LBL 35A, a factory demo hopper, in the well-known yellow, red, and blue colours — not knowing that I had probably just done the very first hopper flight in Turkey. After all, no one had ever seen a balloon without a basket. In my previous life ,pre-Turkey, I had a few chances to get my hands on some Cloudhoppers, and as every pilot knows, it's a totally different feeling without a basket. My first-ever experience was at a popular festival in the Netherlands: Joure. Famous for its big fields... and wind.

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First inflation some fifteen years later

After the morning flight (with my special shape), we came back to the launch field for breakfast. A good friend, Johannes Kooistra (well known for his height), was about to take out the “Van Manen” hopper, an LBL 25A. Just to inflate, not to fly, it was getting too late anyway. “You want to have a short hop across the field? “Why not... it's only across the field.” And once free for a few feet, I would have another call sign in the book (a creepy collection only Andy Davey understands). No one would have guessed that a sudden strike of wind pushed me toward the VIP breakfast tent, and to avoid it I had to burn... and fly out. Totally unprepared, not knowing what to expect. I didn't even know if the tank was full or not. But still, impressed by the feeling. The freedom. The silence. People waving and shouting. “Whatever... plenty of place to land after crossing town.” And what a drag landing it was.

Once in a while we took out the hopper to fly in Cappadocia. Other pilots from the company wanted to have a go too, but no one was really “sold” on the concept. Growing passenger demand and the beginning of back-to-back flights every day pushed the hopper further and further into the basement depot. Eventually, everyone forgot about it. Insurance was stopped. The annual was given up. No need for extra costs. The toy had been put to sleep.

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When I left the company a year later, I too forgot about it, although I never really gave up on it in the back of my mind. Over the years the company was sold to new owners several times, and the hopper was forgotten completely. The bottom-end seat became “a display” in the office. The envelope lay “somewhere” on a shelf beneath winter tires and spare fabric. Forgotten. Once in a while we heard rumours that it was sold or for sale, but no one ever saw it come out. Years went by. Pilots and managers came and went. And the hopper stayed — where it had been left almost 15 years earlier.

Until 2023.

I got a call from the new manager of Anatolian, asking if I had tanks. Being a representative for a manufacturer, I did have some in stock. So, I went to the office to give them some info and prices. After parking my car, something struck my mind — my old little friend. Where would it be? Would it still be lying on that shelf where they left it so long ago? The seat was still there... as a display.



The Display bottom end.

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So, what about the envelope? I had to give it a try. After some negotiations about the price, I made my move and offered them a deal for the seat. "But is there a balloon above it?" they asked. "Of course, there is, it's on the second shelf, left side, next to the tyres... if it's still there," I said. And to my surprise, it was still there. The rest is history. I had stuff they needed, and they had stuff I wanted. Deal done. Let's bring her home!



TC-BUG LBL35A c/n 971



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Of course, after such a long time unused, it needed some maintenance — hoses, spare parts — but overall everything was in splendid shape. Even the envelope. To our big surprise (and my joy), there was no smell at all: no mildew, no discoloration. So now it's time to play! Getting the Certificate of Registration in my (private) name was another paper battle, as it was the first time the Turkish CAA issued one to a private person. Different rules applied than usual. It took a while, but nothing is impossible in Turkey if you have enough patience — and courage to go into the stream. By chance I found a 60-liter tank (I had none anymore), got it insured, checked, and inspected. And then the time finally came to take it out where it belonged.

On the 6th of December 2023, after 14 years in storage, it was finally back — back above the fairy chimneys of Cappadocia, where I made the first flight with it in 2006. Finally, we were reunited. Once in a while I take it out now, mostly on very calm days, usually in autumn or winter (I'm not the thinnest anymore at my age). I don't want to overheat it here. Late spring and summer are out of the question — at least I think so — as it might be too hot in the mornings, and with 22 years of age I don't want to push it too far. It's been tucked away long enough.

It deserves a second life — for many, many years to come.

Gaert Van Wolverliar

Fantastic News

I love it when things seamlessly come together in this world. In this month's Second-Hand Balloons section, is G-DVCI which is an Ultramagic H-31 owned (currently) by Bruce Ross. I've known Bruce for more years than I care to say, but was delighted when he advertised his fan for sale on the Cloudhoppers Facebook page. I even went as far to say it was a steal at the price he wanted for it, bargain of the century compared to a new one. Then I got a phone call from Peter Gunning Stevenson, saying he had first refusal on said fan. Well as an owner of the very same fan myself, I told him to bite Bruce's arm off and buy the thing. In virtually as new condition, with only 15 hours usage, what's not to like? I'm glad the two have come together and that the Facebook page worked. Well done both parties.



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An interesting Winter flight by Bernhard Fellingner

Here in Styria- the green heart of Austria- we usually don't have snow and rarely experience low temperatures.

When the weather forecast predicts double digit sub-zero temperatures, with blue skies, and snow, there is only one thing on your mind: its hot air ballooning!



Perfect for testing my new Cameron O-31 Superlight envelope and the millennium bottom end in this cold. My Cameron CB426 Stainless Steel tank completed the equipment (with its 55 litres usable capacity).



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Before take-off, I adjusted the cylinder pressure adding Nitrogen upping it to 7 bar pressure. There are proponents and opponents of this, but I haven't had any bad experiences with Nitrogen when used judiciously and on very cold days. This assumes a certain degree of care in handling the burner and regularly maintaining the seals.



And now the moment had arrived. The weather forecast was spot on, and the temperature at the launch site was a frosty -16 degrees Celsius.

The first rays of sunshine peeked through the light mist. As the sun rose, I slowly ascended towards my home town of Sinabelkirchen. After crossing the town, I climbed to an altitude of about 1200 meters (3937 feet) and stayed there for a

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while. A Northeast wind carried me along at a good 40Km/hour towards the beautiful Reigersburg Castle.

The entire scenery below me, with the Snow and the mist- shrouded Valleys , is almost indescribable. As already mentioned, such weather conditions are extremely rare here in South eastern Austria.



After about one hour and fifteen minutes, I was back near the ground and I let myself drift over the landscape. I thought to myself, I'll ride until I almost run out of gas. How often do you get such wonderful weather conditions?

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I carried on and eventually landed after a flight of two hours and eighteen minutes in a large valley near Furstenfield. Even at this stage, the fuel tank still wasn't empty, but the wind was shifting more and more towards a wooded area.



You don't have to overdo it, and the tank was already starting to knock, (A sign that its slowly coming to an end) . Landing was on a road covered in powder snow. You don't see that every day. Temperature was now -8 degrees Celsius when I landed and the snow glittered on the trees.

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I let the balloon stand for another twenty minutes and I spoke with some passing interested people. They had never seen a Cloudhopper here before, and obviously I had a lot of questions to answer. One of them was whether I had lost my basket. In the end when I checked my fuel gauge it showed exactly 15% at the end.



Considering the pre-flight preparation, added to the 2 hours 18 minutes of flight airtime and 20 mins of standing still on the ground, I was very happy with the gas consumption.

It is so much fun to fly with this beautiful balloon, and I'm looking forward to the next beautiful flights. All photos credit Bernhard Fellingner- Ed.

Bernhard Fellingner.



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3, New Balloons.

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

4, Second Hand Balloons

You wait a month and then not one but two amazing Ultramagic Balloons come up for sale at roughly the same price.

The first belongs to Glen Everett, the Kent based commercial pilot who commissioned Ultramagic to build his ultimate hopper . Based on a B type, G-CLOX is a 2020 built UM B-26 (a one of a kind), which has a 330kg MTOM whilst the envelope only weighs 34kgs. It has done a mere 2 hours total time and comes complete with a Cameron Millennium bottom end. So effectively people you are buying a new balloon for £13,900 ready to go except for a tank. The design has a unique shape and looks superb (I got to see it at an event in Kent when it was new)and is a credit to Glenn that clearly it is still in the same order. He bought a bigger sister ship to the hopper at the same time and hasn't got the time to fly both whilst out on his travels. His contact details are below

Mobile 07801- 639489

Email: homefarm@chilston.co.uk

homefarm@chilston.co.uk to discuss further. Tell him where you saw the advert please. Photo below .

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G-CLOX Um B-26 – photo by Steve Roake

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G-DVCI UM H-31 (from 2016) is for sale



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The second one is just as fascinating as it is a Ultramagic H-31 G-DVCI owned by Bruce Ross. Clearly a fan of the great man, Bruce got his H-31 commissioned with script from Davinci on one side of the craft. This 2016 built craft has only done 17.3 hours total time and was described in its latest c of a as "as new" by inspector Crispin Williams. The envelope has a secondary Black Nomex at the mouth and the stats are as follows. Envelope weight 44kgs, Solo seat 14kgs, UM mark 21 burner 8kgs and an M30 tank when full 50kgs.

Bruce notes the quotation is only on one side of the balloon so the other side has banner space available. He is asking £14,500 or offers for the craft .

Contact details as follows

Mobile : 07866-318809

Email brucejross@gmail.com

And he is teasing you with some additional Davinci Rugby shirts for crew and pilot and a limited number of balloon pins .

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

We start this month with a request to track down Britain's rarest Cloudhopper and for me a real bogey. We know who the registered owner is , we also know that he spends a lot of time abroad , but we would love to find this envelope and get it to the BBML inflation day in April for an outing. This particular envelope was registered in 2003 but if you see how many hours it had on it by December 2022 (a mere 19 total hours), you will understand why I call it rocking horse poo rare. G-CCHP is a Cameron Z-31 which had its ARC expire in 2008 and so we know its been stored somewhere , in the West Country. Surely an airing would do it good since all that time in the bag isn't healthy for a balloon. If you live that way and you know the owner, or the owner's family please ask for us. It just has



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to come out at some stage for an airing.



For me personally, the UK's rarest hopper, Cameron Z-31 G-CCHP.



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Another classic winter photo which typifies to me the joy of winter flying



G-CJOI when owned by Cameron Balloons UK in Austria. This was subsequently sold to the Austrian Dealer and reregistered as OE-SLC.

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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 March 2026 with the number of people subscribing still increasing weekly. we find the subscriptions to the Facebook page reaching over 4670 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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