

Around the world in 14 days



PHOTO: SPIRIT OF FREEDOM

Balloon history: Steve Fossett successfully circumnavigates the globe solo on his sixth try.

THE SPACE-AGE gondola and envelope that flew American businessman Steve Fossett into the record books, is one of the most sophisticated wind-powered craft ever constructed.

Fossett became the first man to successfully circumnavigate the globe solo in a Roziere-design hot air balloon, built by Cameron Balloons in England. The balloon is 180ft tall and 60ft wide when fully inflated with 550,000 cubic feet of helium and 100,000 cubic feet of hot air.

The Spirit of Freedom's Kevlar-and-carbon gondola was flanked by 40 tanks of fuel,

containing a mixture of propane and ethane for the 14-day journey. A special Comstock Autopilot system was installed to maintain the balloon at a constant altitude by automatically controlling the burners and allowing Fossett to get a few hours of sleep at a time in the seven-by-five-by-five foot capsule.

Cruising at eight to 10 kilometres above sea level in an unpressurised capsule was a feat in itself. The 58-year-old entrepreneur was forced to breathe through an oxygen mask for much of the 34,000-kilometre flight.

A Global Positioning System and the Hybrid Single-Particle Lagrangian Integrated Trajectory computer model developed at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the US, helped meteorologists navigate Fossett through bad weather across the globe on his sixth attempt. He maintained constant contact with mission control in St Louis, using an Inmarsat C satellite communication system with a mini satellite phone also installed for back up.

The landing was a rough one, with 20kt winds dragging the balloon along the ground for almost five kilometres.

At the time of print the balloon was again airborne minus the basket, after locals tried unsuccessfully to attach the helium-filled-bladder given to them by Fossett to the back of a four wheel drive.

Inquiry into regional air services

THE MINISTER for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, announced on 4 July an inquiry into the adequacy of regional and rural air services in Australia.

The inquiry will be conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services under its chairman, Paul Neville MP.

Mr Neville said the inquiry will gather information to enable the development of

regional air services.

"The committee will examine the role of all three levels of government in supporting and assisting the development of regional air services", he said.

"This includes assisting regional hub services, small-scale owner-operator services and the deployment of the most suitable aircraft types."

The inquiry will also examine the role of major air transport carriers in providing regional services, and the

issue of interconnectivity between regional air transport systems, major national air services and international services including on-carriage, through ticketing, freight handling, timetabling and airport slotting.

Submissions are sought by Friday 30 August 2002. Following consideration of submissions, public hearings will be held to collect further evidence.

The committee is expected to report in 2003.

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Travolta's new role as aviation ambassador

ACTOR John Travolta has become a Qantas "ambassador-at-large" in a bid to spread goodwill and confidence in the airline industry after September's terrorist attacks.

Travolta will pilot his former Qantas-owned Boeing 707 on a special "Spirit of Friendship" tour with his family, which will see him visit 10 countries, including Australia and New Zealand to reassure people it is safe to travel by air again.

An aviator for most of his adult life, Travolta has amassed more than 5,000 flying hours since earning his pilot's licence in 1981.

He recently completed 747-400 first officer simulator training with Qantas.

"The past year has been awful for our sense of security and goodwill, and also for trust and friendship between different cultures and coun-

tries," Travolta said.

The star of cult movies such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Grease* will log around 80 flying hours and travel more than 65,000 kilometres over the next two months.

Travolta's aircraft has been painted with its original 1960s Qantas logo and lavishly outfitted with a double bed, shower, kitchen and couches.

A minor drama on the trip has already made headlines when the aircraft experienced trouble before take-off from Melbourne.

The Boeing 707 was immediately returned to the apron where mechanics assessed the incident as a simple engine surge.

In 1993 Travolta was forced to pilot his Gulfstream IIB to safety at Washington National Airport after the aircraft suffered complete electrical failure.

Spirit of friendship tour: John Travolta is sharing his passion for aviation by flying his specially equipped Boeing 707 around the world.



PHOTOS: DAVID KARONIDIS

Move to ban chrysotile asbestos

The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) has circulated a paper for public comment on the banning of imports of chrysotile asbestos.

While this material must be handled carefully, it is used as heat insulation in a

few locations in aircraft.

If you need to continue use of this material, you should provide a submission to NOHSC.

Comments close on 13 Sep 2002. A copy of the discussion paper can be obtained from www.nohsc.gov.au

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Going digital: A new web page is part of a set of more efficient guidance tools for AOC applicants.

Online option for AOCs

SERVICES FOR applicants for air operator's certificates (AOCs) are set to join the 21st century.

CASA is developing a suite of digital and hard copy tools that will guide applicants through the process with examples and advice on how to build their operations manual.

From September, applicants will be able to build their operations manual step-by-step using a CD, and then submit their application electronically.

Visit the AOC online development site for more information at <http://aoconline.ice.media.com.au>

Check out e-checklists

PAPER checklists for pilots could be a thing of the past if e-checklists from South Australia's Airocorp take off.

First developed in 1993 by Royal Flying Doctor Service pilot, Ross Joy, the system is designed to improve safety procedures in the cockpit.

Though similar to the electronic checklists found in many Global Positioning Systems, Airocorp's checklist is a stand alone unit with simplified controls that also you to design your own e-checklists.

Airocorp's checklist software is PC/IBM compatible.

Note: RPT operators require CASA approval to use company manufactured checklists.

Seat belts required for infants

THE CIVIL Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), recently wrote to all operators to clarify the rules on restraints for passengers less than three years old.

As with all passengers, infants must wear seat belts during take-off, landing, when the aircraft is less than 1,000ft above

the ground, during turbulence and instrument landing approaches, and whenever instructed by a crew member.

Children up to age three may be nursed for take off and landing, but a single seat belt must not be fastened around both the adult and the infant.

The child must be restrained

by its own belt: either a "belly-belt" that attaches to the adult's seat belt, or by the use of a car safety seat approved for use in an aircraft.

A "belly-belt" does not provide the equivalent protection as a single adult with lap belt. CASA recommends use of an approved car safety seat.

GLOBEWATCH

Nigeria: A BAC 1-11 crashed into a heavily populated district in Kano, Nigeria, on 4 May. Reports indicate the aircraft may have stalled shortly after take off from Kano Airport. Seventy-six of the 80 on board died, as did at least 72 on the ground. The Nigerian government has banned passenger aircraft over 22 years old, the age of the BAC 1-11 that crashed.

Sandstorm: Forty-nine passengers and crew survived the crash of Egyptair Flight 843 from Cairo on 7 May. Fifteen were killed. The Boeing 737-500 ploughed into a hill near Tunisia's Carthage International Airport during heavy fog, rain and a sandstorm.

Insurance cover: The International Civil Aviation Organization has approved in principle

the establishment of a global aviation war risk insurance scheme to cover the risks left open by the withdrawal of commercial insurance coverage following the events of 11 September 2001. The scheme aims to allow air transport to continue under reasonable financial conditions by providing medium-term insurance coverage while allowing private insurance markets to gradually re-enter the market.

China North: There were no survivors among the 112 on board China North Airlines Flight 6136, an MD-82 that crashed into Dalian Bay north east of Beijing on 7 May.

BA online: Next year British Airways will trial an in-flight internet service developed by Boeing called Connexion.

China Airlines: China Airlines flight 611 operating from Taipei to Hong Kong crashed into the Taiwan Strait on 25 May. All 225 people on board the Boeing 747-209 perished.

Stuck: The VC Bird International Airport on the Caribbean island of Antigua was temporarily closed on 30 May, after a British Airways 777 got stuck in a soft, recently laid section of tarmac.

Collision: A Bashkirian Airlines TU-154M and a DHL B757 cargo plane collided over southern Germany, near Lake Konstanz on 1 July, killing 71 people. The Russian aircraft was heading to Barcelona, while the DHL B757 was en-route to Brussels. All passengers and crew of both aircraft died in the accident.

Shortage of 100/130 AVGAS

AIR BP MELBOURNE has advised Australia's safety regulator that the company is experiencing a production problem with green 100/130 AVGAS.

As a result, aviators may experience a temporary supply shortage of 100/130 at most eastern Australian airports. However, Air BP advises that adequate supplies of blue 100LL AVGAS will be available.

Most piston engine aircraft are certificated and approved to operate on 100LL AVGAS.

100LL differs from 100/130 in colour and maximum lead content only. However, in reality, the lead content of 100/130 can often be less than 100LL.