

MOSEL BALLOON FIESTA 2010

The story goes that 20 years ago Theo Schroeder became so frustrated with his attempt to buy a balloon from a British manufacturer that he decided to set up his own Balloon company. The factory is now a thriving business situated on Mosel near Trier. Once a year their technical director, Werner Waschenbach organises the Mosel Balloon Fiesta. Any “auslander” who approaches Werner is likely to receive a warm welcome and every assistance in attending this delightful meet. The organisation is impeccable; the scenery stunning and this year the flying conditions were brilliant.

69 balloons registered for the 2 day event at Fohren airfield. For those who enjoy the lengthy registration queues at Metz, I should tell you that disappointingly, 5 minutes after leaving my car, I returned fully registered clutching my Schroeder T-shirt and free local maps. The comprehensive general briefing was in German, but for those of us linguistically challenged Werner obligingly covered the salient points in English. Likewise with the pre-flight Met brief on Friday evening when the gentle 5 to 10 knot SW wind was considered an ideal direction. Subsequently all the balloon trailers parade slowly across the airfield towards the spectator area generating a

heightened level of expectation. As the long line approaches the take off zone, Werner allocates each balloon its launch spot in an orderly manner.

Friday evening flight was a hare and hounds event with the new Schroeder “cat” balloon acting as the hare. 67 balloons took off and enjoyed a 7 knot flight in NE direction with plenty of steerage. Being late August there was a wide choice of cut fields to land in though the presence of large wooded areas gave the flight sufficient challenge not to be boring. We were soon heading back for refuelling. – No doubt there are those who thrive on the camaraderie of long refuelling queues, swapping stories of hairy landings and chatting with old friends. If you know of any such aficionados warn them to avoid the MBF. My first tank was returned fully refuelled to the basket before I had finished undoing the straps of the third tank that needed topping up. Alas no opportunity for me to bore the pants off a queueing neighbour with the excruciating details of my expert flying in a thunderous 7 knot wind. (Hence I suppose my need to write this article and bore the pants of you readers !!).

Refuelling having been completed far quicker than anticipated I risked suggesting to the worn out crew that perhaps we could have JUST ONE beer before heading back to the apartment for some food. Grudgingly they agreed

to humour me and we headed over to the airfield party. Beer in hand, the smell of bratwurst and pommes was irresistible. Now that the food was taken care of, a couple more beers were needed to wash it down and enjoy the amazing “Roxybusters” – a sort of Queen tribute band. Suffice to say that the beer and band were far too good to leave prematurely. The big hand was on 6 and the small hand on 12 as we pushed open our apartment door.

Yes you have guessed it, we had trouble rousing ourselves 4 hours later for the 5:45 morning briefing but we made it just. With the wind similar to the previous evening, a fly-in task was declared and the balloons set off for the banks of the Mosel. A delightful dawn mist cleared as we climbed high over the river and headed back in a northerly direction for the airfield. Speed was less than 10 knots and when we dropped to 300 ft our direction changed by almost 180 degrees and reduced to 3 knots. With this fabulous amount of steerage it was no wonder most of the balloons “made” the airfield and the target was peppered with markers. The winner was inches from the centre of the cross.

Saturday afternoon was spent sightseeing on the Mosel and Trier. The evening flight was delayed because of slightly gusty conditions but by 7pm the Montgolfieres were in the air again, committed to another hare and

hounds. The wind direction was more problematic but at 5,000 ft everybody found enough left to keep away from the steep cultivated slopes of the Mosel valley. For us, after an hours flight there was a soft landing and a dash back to the airfield arena to take part in the musically choreographed glow. This successfully completed we left the punk group pounding away and headed for the balloonists buffet and reception. This was another lovely surprise with warm hospitability, great food and the German beer and wine flowing freely. I eventually dragged Pete, Jude and Des away to hit the sack at 2;30am. There really are no prizes for guessing that I didn't even contemplate rattling their cages at 4;30 in the hope of another morning flight. Instead I let them sleep on and enjoy a sumptuous breakfast courtesy of our charming hosts Hiltrude and Matthias Loewen.

Prize-giving was at 11am and we were all sent happily on our way with gifts of chocolates and bottles of Mosel wine. Obviously the weather helped, not to mention the beer, but this was one of the most pleasurable balloon meets I have attended. Many thanks to Werner Waschenbach and hopefully more "auslanders" will be able to wrangle themselves an invitation in future. Perhaps after all it was a good thing that Theo Schroeder was given such poor service in England or we might never have had these MBF's.