

**Interview with Klaus Ohlmann:**

Lothar Schwank interviewed the record pilot regarding his impressions of the past wave season in Argentina.

**Lothar Schwank:** How did the preparations for the 2009/2010 wave season go?

**Klaus Ohlmann:** I found the ideal plane in Argentina to be the Nimbus-4DM from Christoph Ritter because the existing records in the open class are pretty difficult to beat already. Christoph spared neither cost nor effort to optimally equip this plane for the upcoming tasks. This ship is in a great condition and was specially retrofitted for high speeds at high altitudes. The risk of aileron flutter at high speed at high altitude was significantly reduced by this means.

**LS:** Isn't it dangerous to fly at the limit like that?

**KO:** I fly close to the red line! But I strictly avoid exceeding this limit even by the tiniest bit. During high-speed flights at high altitudes I always use both hands on the stick. Flutter happens most of the time through a stimulus. Unintentional hitting the stick with the water bottle by the co-pilot can induce flutter. That's why I fly the plane all by myself during record flights. I have to be tightly connected to the plane. That's the only way for me to feel the air mass and to react to it in a sensitive manner. That holds true for high speeds as well. I don't just race, but have a watchful eye on my future flight path. Small cloud pieces, changes in noise levels... there are many indications for possible turbulences. Each and every pilot reacts more or less automatically to these signals. During 25,000 h in flight a distinct sensitization for these seemingly minor issues develops. Your hand on the stick is not the only but nevertheless an important interface for picking up the numerous information transmitted by

the wings acting as extended "senses". All senses are wide open during flying and success is tightly bound to that connection between pilot and plane and of course weather conditions.

**LS:** Are the instruments important to you?

**KO:** The instrument can be what they are; important is that you know how they work and what they display. Every variometer is acting different; however each vario is nothing but a sensor which just confirms information already felt by your senses. Again for me the fine-tuning between the pilot and his instruments is more important than the technically perfect vario that I don't know. The same holds true for the plane. Although I haven't flown the Nimbus 4DM since 2 years I felt completely comfortable again after 5 min flying.

**LS:** What was the 2008/2009 wave season like regarding the meteorological side?

**KO:** All this year's flying in Argentina I have never experienced such an accumulation of wave conditions and these conditions varied significantly. They ranged from days with extreme strong winds and 7/8 clouds to "blue" wave days with updrafts just strong enough to score a record. Mild winds or sandstorms we had it all. From the 11/21/2009 to the 01/28/2010 I was able to fly a weekly average of 30 to 40 hours. Using the internet we had a wealth of information for weather-forecasts with the MWP-wavemodel being the last instance for decision making, telling us where we should go. Comparing the actual weather to the detailed forecasts gives you a tremendous learning experience. I would be happy if every meteorologist could experience high and low pressure areas with its accompanying weather conditions from our perspective. Wave conditions can be recognized long before they

happen. That's why we recognized the record flight conditions (free distance on the 01/12/2010) already days before it happened. According to the forecast the polar and subtropical jet were supposed to converge generate the necessary wide wind field needed for the flight. On the evening before the flight it was obvious the wind in the border zone of these air stream is weakening. Without this knowledge I would probably have given up in the difficult transition region. To succeed reaching the free distance and attempt to win the Joachim-Kuettner prize over 2,500 km a good wave day was needed to get to El Calafat 1,100 km away. This excursion alone was worth the whole trip. Again and again I have this striking experience seeing this primordial landscape around the "Tiera del Fuego" giving me the impression that down there you can still find dinosaurs.

**LS:** How can one successfully accomplish such extreme flights?

**KO:** Talent alone is not enough! It is only possibly through hard work in oneself. The standards are pretty high meaning that new records can only be accomplished through hard training. To stay fit until the landing on flights of up to 16 h you need as much steadiness as mental strength.

**LS:** Coming to the airspace situation over the Andes...

**KO:** In contrast to previous years we had no all inclusive clearances. To get a clearance from the smaller air traffic controls a good command of the Spanish language is mandatory. Since we (gliders) are uncommon you need to strike the right note and get a reliable connection to the air controllers. Trust and being trusted is the motto and sometimes reporting your position in 10 min intervals is required. English only helps



when talking to the bigger airports. During this year we had a general clearance to enter Chilean airspace and I experienced the air controllers to be friendly and cooperative.

**LS:** What are your future plans on wave flights?

**KO:** Argentina is still very addictive for me. During this season I realized the things that still can be achieved. Limits only exist in your own imagination! During the day flying my 2,831 km distance (attempted record 11/30/2009) I probably could have achieved 3,200 km following the OLC rules and using 5 turnpoints. Inside the first rotor at Chaelco S. Marting at 6 am local time the Nimbus-4DM was pushed up with 9 m/s at 10:20 am the first 1000 km were flown. That was unbelievable.

**LS:** Over 40 world records, four flights explicitly over 2000 km, 13 flights between 1000 and 1974 km, average speeds of up to 213 km/h – what future aims are there?

**KO:** My number one aim is to win the Joachim-Kuettner OSTIV-Prize for 2,500 km free distance. Receiving this great award from the, by now 100 years old wave flying pioneer and fulfilling his vision is my big dream.

**LS:** A word on the “Mountain-Wave-Project”.

**KO:** Rene Heise is the driving force behind the MWP and the interface between science and media. All the things he gets done besides his work is really amazing. Prof. Joerg Hacker is an integral member of the team since the Mendoza project and is fully committed to the team. As an international recognized expert on atmospheric science as well as being an expert in metrology he is real gain for the science side of the MWP. I see myself as the creative element or as the one kindling ideas and of course as the figurehead for the athletic side. Having this team and the exciting combination



of sport, adventure, and science we succeeded in getting media attention for soaring. This approach was always important to me. Compared to other sports we are far off of the public attention. The Tibetan-Project offers a lot of potential in that direction. I am sure that this will be a highlight in my not to put a fine point on exciting live as a glider pilot.

**LS:** What is a Klaus Ohlmann doing in Serres and in his free time?

**KO:** I am already looking forward to the season in the sea Alps and to the excitement of my visitors flying with us. Our season extends into the middle of October and we still have some wave tracks to check out. I am excited to see if we will again succeed to get the first place in

this year's OLC's terrain ranking. However there is no reason to get bored in our area - going skiing with the kids; or hiking with my wife and since a couple of years we also have to paragliders as steady companions. Gliding down into the valley after a good climb and a hearty snack making use of some lift what can pilots' wish more for in their free time? To do acrobatics in a power plane I confide myself fully to my wife. That's a real alternative for her since she normally commands a Boeing for Air France. Last but not least I sometimes play my guitar. I am living my dream – we all can do that somewhat.

**LS:** Klaus, thank you very much for the interview.

T.N.(Robert Kirmse): this is a free and by no means professional translation of the article published in the German soaring magazine "segelfliegen", Klaus Ohlmann und Rene Heise: Grenzen bestehen nur in den Köpfen" by Lothar Schwark



*Klaus Ohlmann (right) and Rene Heise*