



Perlan Newsletter October 2015

A High-Flung Voyage of Discovery Takes Flight

October 2015
By Dean Sigler

The Perlan 2 glider made its first test flight Wednesday, September 23 at Redmond, Oregon. Towed to 5,000 feet above Roberts Field Redmond Municipal Airport, it stayed aloft for about a half-hour, and alighted perfectly under the expert guidance of James ("Jim") Payne, Chief Pilot for the Airbus-sponsored project. Morgan Sandercock, Co-pilot and Project Manager, rode the back seat and took his turn flying the big craft.



Perlan being prepared for historic flight.



Already a world record holder, Jim Payne is a good match for high-altitude soaring

According to post-flight chat, Jim and Morgan found things to their liking, with controls, including the huge dive brakes, working as designed and as simulations predicted. A video crew, on hand to capture the event, used a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter to follow the Perlan 2 on tow and through the flight. On-board cameras captured the release from the tow plane and the precise touchdown. At all times, the varied beauty of central Oregon formed a backdrop to the event.



Morgan Sandercock installing rudder cap complete with wide-angle camera

The N901EE on the tail boom indicates the flight level Perlan is striving to reach (901 = 90,100 feet) and EE honors Einar Enevoldson the founder of project.



Silvio Ricardi, tow plane pilot, helping weigh the tail



Eric Schmidlin of RDD assists while Morgan positions main wheel on scales



Stewart Tattersall of Soaring NV taping the seams on the Perlan 2 tail



Allan McArtor, Chairman of Airbus Americas, Inc., Chairman & CEO of Airbus Group, Inc. envisions Perlan technology as a precursor to possible Mars missions

Airbus sees the overlap between the planned terrestrial lofting of Perlan and Airbus's anticipated forays into space and perhaps to Mars. As Allan McArtor, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at Airbus Group, Inc., pointed out at a press conference following the flight, Perlan will surmount all but three percent of the earth's atmosphere, flying in air density approximating that of the red planet.

Media attention has been intense. Ethan Levi started that ball rolling last year by inviting Matt Wald of the New York Times to visit the sailplane, still under construction. Ed Warnock, Morgan and Einar Enevoldson, founder and Chairman of the Board for the project, gave Matt a full day with the glider, and the resulting article helped establish a media presence for the project.

Airbus provided the extensive media exposure of the first flight by sending James Darcy, Director of Communications, to coordinate the effort and by providing crews and equipment to document the event. James and Kristina Messner of Focused Image and retained by Airbus coordinated the publicity surrounding the flight. Their efforts brought a mother lode of coverage, ranging from Al Jazeera to Wired, with worldwide interest and great enthusiasm.



Panel stresses simplicity, high level of information for pilot



Perlan being towed to takeoff point, Doug Perrenod riding on the big bird



James Darcy, Director of Group Communications for Airbus, enjoys a bird's-eye view of first flight



Martin Helti, the Perlan Project's photographer, captures the moment



Piper Pawnee from Soaring NV ready to roll

Laurie Harden Ricardi, owner of Soaring NV brought her Piper Pawnee tow plane. It was piloted by her husband Silvio, who gave the Perlan 2 a smooth pull to the release attitude of 5,000 feet.

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Silvio Ricardi in the Soaring NV Piper Pawnee tows the Perlan 2 with Jim Payne and Morgan Sandercock into the morning sky

It was this writer's privilege to be in the guest viewing section when the Pawnee performed an effortless tow of the Perlan 2 to altitude. The excitement in the crowd was palpable, with cheers ringing out over the field when the Perlan 2 left the runway, a few minutes later when it released from the tow plane, and a half-hour later, when its wheel touched the centerline of the runway.



Perlan returns to field, circling gracefully over crowd



Large spoilers help slow Perlan 2 for perfect landing

A press conference following the flight fielded questions from a global Internet audience while aerial videos taken just minutes before from a Bell Jet Ranger played on video screens flanking the speakers. The good cheer and enthusiasm were unabated as the crowd sat down for a buffet brunch. It was the finale to a historic flight and the culmination of a 23-year quest for Einar Enevoldson and over seven years of managing the project affairs for Ed

Warnock, CEO of the Perlan Project.



Press conference following flight has Allan McArtor with the microphone, Einar Enevoldson, Ed Warnock, Jim Payne, Morgan Sandercock, and Stephane Fymat. James Darcy, stands at floor microphone.

With the successful first flight behind them, the team now focuses on upcoming flights in Minden, Nevada and attempts to latch into the Polar Vortex over Argentina in 2016.

The nearly silent ascent will be man's first opportunity to measure the atmosphere at such an altitude, natural elements mixed with man-made pollutants. The Perlan 2, being unpowered by any fossil fuels, will allow the purest possible readings.

Beyond that, the pilots will establish altitude records, test the limits of control in near space, and provide us all with a reflection of the noblest and best part of ourselves – the desire to know and to explore new frontiers.



Einar Enevoldson and granddaughter share happy moment following flight

A 23-Year Quest

The journey started 23 years ago when Einar Enevoldson, in Germany to fly a twin-engine piston aircraft to an unofficial record altitude, saw a photograph in the offices of the DLR (Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Luft-Und Raumfahrt – the German Aerospace Research Establishment) of a pearlescent cloud in the upper atmosphere. This cloud fascinated him and set him to thinking of ways to reach the edge of space and fly into the shimmering whiteness.

Einar, who has spent a considerable amount of of his life in pressure suits, is an expert on high-altitude flight, having piloted U-2s, the YF-12A, a single-seat fighter version of the SR-71 Blackbird reconnaissance aircraft, and the Grob research aircraft that brought him to Germany and his discovery of the cloud called Perlan – Icelandic for pearl.

This quest to reach the upper atmosphere had a scientific cause, since we were becoming aware of a disappearing ozone layer in the upper atmosphere, a layer that protects us from ultraviolet rays. Beyond that, it was pure exploration.



Dennis Tito (right) and Patrick McLaughlin of Mountain High Oxygen discuss future plans

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Allan McArtor and Jackie Payne share a happy moment following her husband's successful flight

In 2014, Airbus joined the Perlan Project as a major sponsor. Airbus saw the aerodynamic and scientific potential of Perlan, and agrees with the project's emphasis on promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curricula for students at all grade levels. Perlan will carry science experiments created by students as part of that commitment.



Admirers crowd the star of the hour following test flight



Perlan team toasts a successful mission

The Airbus Perlan Mission II team is a group of volunteers dedicated to seeing the project to fruition. The Perlan 2 will explore a high horizon, and carry with it the vision and hopes of the designers, funders, and supporters.

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