

Events Round-up

INTERNATIONAL BALLOON GRAND PRIX, SAGRANTINO, ITALY



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As most balloon meets in the UK and much of Europe were cancelled due to the pandemic, we took a second look at attending one of the events still taking place, the Italian International Balloon Grand Prix in the Sagrantino area of Italy (26th July–9th August). We were originally not planning to go, having been there for the last three years, but we decided it was probably our only opportunity to enjoy some ballooning amongst friends this year.

Ralph Shaw, the organiser, was happy to accept us, but we left it to the last minute to plan our trip down in case changing circumstances in France and Italy would prevent us from attending. As we had specifically purchased a new van with air conditioning for the purpose of travelling in comfort across Europe this summer, we were also keen to try it out. The team consisted of me, my wife Karin,

son Dominic, and Abi Bridge. By the time we committed ourselves Eurotunnel was almost fully booked on the weekend we planned to travel, and the first available train was at 15:50 on the Saturday. The trains were running on time and we arrived at our planned destination south of Dijon that evening. We then had a full day's drive on the Sunday to arrive at our accommodation in Italy in time for a relaxed evening meal.

Ralph had twenty-one balloons entered rather than the usual fifty to sixty. Our team and Gary Madelin's were the only two travelling out from England. Robin Mercer, representing Northern Ireland, was again in attendance having travelled out from Ireland direct to France, a regular as he has a second home in the area. The other two Brits were Tony Jay, who now lives in Nürnberg, Germany and Martin Durham living in Rome. Tony

Above: David and Dominic arrive at the target with Todi in the background.

was there with his wife, two children and a cloudhopper. Peter Dowlen and Dave Tree, both regulars at the event, popped over during the last week. The rest of the teams were from Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and France.

We drove down to the launch site the morning after our arrival to pass through the Covid 'stewards' equipped with temperature monitors and submission of contact details to have coffee at the bar before joining the launchfield. Ralph greeted us, as usual, with cases of wine and the up-to-date programme. The weather the first week was perfect and we had some lovely morning flights over the Sagrantino area.

In the evenings we were entertained by local wineries, who provided food and



wine. The staff at these wineries are so welcoming and the most memorable was our visit to La Veneranda, a family-owned vineyard where we were offered generous amounts of cheese, salad and meat as well as wine, all produced on their estate. One evening we were invited to a buffet at the mountain-top restaurant close to where Robin has his house; wonderful views from 3,500ft over the Sagrantino area.

The second week saw the wind increase, with gusts picking up early, and though thunderstorms passed through

Above: An early morning lift-off from the Parco Acquarossa launch site.

the area they did not affect us. Balloons flew on every day except one during the second week, but the slightly marginal conditions on a couple of days saw some challenging landings, though no damage or injuries occurred. Our last landing in a sheltered field led to a retrieve that tested the off-road capabilities of our new van. There were several relaxed competition flights and as usual at this event one

Above: The Parco Acquarossa launch field, adjacent to the runway of the airfield.



Above: Tony Jay samples the warm Italian air in his cloudhopper.



Above: French pilot Jacques Bernadin packs up his hopper after a morning flight.

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© David Bareford

The Bristol Balloon Festival, 2018. © BUW Weather at Midlands Festival 2018.



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Above: The Team Bareford balloon, G-CLHS, ascends from Parco Acquarossa.

Above: Pilot Michael Haberler flying over the picturesque town of Todi. Below: Spectators arise early to see the balloons lift off from Parco Acquarossa.



© Karin Bareford

was not sure what one was competing for; there appeared to be two or three different trophies on offer. Two of the competition flights were planned with a flight over the town of Todi with the cross in a playing field on the far side; always problematic as the wind the far side is always light and variable and constantly changing. On the first achievable target

Matthias Schlegel made a very direct approach to the target, descending straight over it. Tom Witteveen, flying with him, threw the marker the other side of the target, but as he had three more, he kept throwing until one landed almost dead centre. This appeared within the relaxed rules of the event. Tony Jay, as usual, did very well with his cloudhopper.

With Dom and I flying we came second in that and first in the following two, and I've yet to find out which trophy we won. Because of the circumstances this year there was no wine on offer as first prize for the Prestige Winemaker's Trophy, but we were presented with a five litre bottle. We attended the Official Evening Gala Buffet, where food and wine appeared



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Above: Flying over the 'green heart of Italy', the beautiful Sagrantino wine-growing area.



© David Bareford

unlimited. We were supposed to have a 'fly-off' with the winner of last year's Grand Prix Trophy the following morning, but we think Guido had such a wonderful evening that he decided to miss the flight. It was quite fast, and we flew over Todi at about 15kt.

We then headed back to the UK with three days of the event left to go as some

of us had to work on the Monday. It was again a superb, well-sponsored and relaxed event, and with reduced numbers allowed one to get to know most of the other attendees. The air conditioning and cruise control in the van were godsends as temperatures reached 37 degrees across France on our return.

David Bareford



© Karin Bareford

Above: Matthias Shlegel and passenger in the lightweight Kubicek balloon, D-OTBJ.

Left: On a track toward Todi, the balloons pass over the River Tevere.

The next Italian International Balloon Grand Prix will take place on 30th July to 8th August 2021. Keep a look out for advertisements in forthcoming issues, and our Events listing, for full details.