



## *Hobbs Diaries*

By Dave Leonard

The following are the unedited emails I sent back to the BFSS mail list as the Hobbs Region 9 Contest, 2004 played out with no benefit of time to reflect, enhance, expand tone down or otherwise color the story.

Day 1

First contest day at Hobbs, Region 9 East contest. Hazy and warm in the morning with lots of cirrus to the south and east with more to the distant west. The CD told us he didn't really know what the weather was going to do, but t-storms were forecast by mid afternoon someplace in the area.

The sniffer launched about 12:30 and by 1:15 he thought it was good enough to start the launch. The tasks were short 2 hr MAT tasks for Std and 15m classes and a 1 1/2 hr TAT for the sports.

By the time the 15 meter task opened, it was obvious there was some overdevelopment towards the second turnpoint at Brownfield. The first leg had cu for the first half with good lift up to around 11,000 ft. Then it went blue. There was some lift in the blue, but it

was hard to find the good stuff. I got low (about 1800 ft above ground) in the blue coming out of the first turn, trying to reach the line of clouds and overdevelopment 2/3 of the way down the second leg. After several short, weak climbs, I got back to the clouds and good strong lift.

By now the second turn was obscured by the high based t-storm which had set up in a 30 mile+ line, centered on the course line. Looking east from the sunny side, the storm looked like a black rain wall. After getting a little closer, into the shade, it was clear there were two rain shafts, one on each side of the course line, with very little if any nasty stuff on the straight line through. And there was sun on the ground to the south, so escaping to return home looked pretty likely.

About halfway through, the gentle lift and light rain turned to gentle sink and rain. I started under the storm at 11,000 ft, about 15 miles from the turn. I got to the turn in light rain about 10,000 ft and headed south towards the sun and the last turnpoint. The rain and sink continued for longer than I expected, but I finally got clear of it and spotted 2 gliders ahead climbing under the first nice cu in the sunshine. I got there at about 7,500 ft and found the best climb of the day, a solid 10 kt thermal, all the way to 11,500.

That was almost enough to glide all the way home. I found one more nice 5 kt climb just short of Seminole which made the glide back to Hobbs through another blue hole pretty uneventful.

The winner for the day in 15 meter was 7 mph faster than me since he handled the blue hole around the first turn better without a really low sticky spot. It was a day when it felt good to just get home. Lee Khulke and my brother Steve both landed out. Several others did, too. And still more came home without getting the second turn at Brownfield, significantly dropping their scores.

The forecast is calling for a good, hot week of soaring.

## Day 2

Another tricky day. Started out blue at first launch about 1:30. Good lift, but only markers were other gliders. The tasks were a TAT to Big Spring and Jal for 15m and Std and a MAT with the first turn at Andrews for the Sports Class.

I started through the top of the cylinder, climbing rapidly to 13,000 ft. Then the next 30 miles were glassy smooth to the next cu. The next 20 miles were under nice cu with bases around 15000, although the lift got weak and squirrely above 12000. Then there was a line of rather mature cu that looked like they were destined to be full grown thunder bumpers. Then cloud bases started dropping gradually and the lift got much weaker. By the time we got to the Big Spring area, most of the ratty cu didn't work at all, and the best had 3 kts to about 8500 ft.

The direct course towards the center of the Jal turn area looked pretty bad to me. Hazy, few scraggly cu with some towering cu a ways down course that were starting to blow off little anvils. I decided to back track along the first leg, north of course to try to contact the line dividing the wet and dry airmasses as quickly as possible. I found a couple more 3 kt thermals to get me back to the convergence line. At the last cu along the line towards Jal, there was a dust devil which sat in one field for probably 10 minutes as I worked my way over to it. The cu on top had a nice, flat dark bottom, and when I got there at around 8000 ft I found 7 kt lift that took me all the way to 15400 ft.

Should have been plenty to nick the Jal turn area and finish at Hobbs 15 minutes above the min time of 2:30 hrs. The sky went completely blue for the last 65 miles. I like most others returning along the same route found a bunch of sink, and no good lift along the way. About 12 miles out I was down to below 1500 agl and about to abort to Hobbs municipal airport, about 5 miles south of the Hobbs Industrial Airpark we are flying from. As I was looking at the airport to see if it looked right for a glide, I spotted another glider about 500 ft above and 1/2 mile away in a tight right turn. He had a nice little 2 kt thermal which got me just enough altitude to get a flying finish at Hobbs.

I landed about 5:10 in a flurry of finishers. It got pretty quiet at the airport after that. Except for the retrieve phone ringing. In Std class only 3 of 10 finished. Launching last and not being able to start until 3 pm really hurt them. In 15m class 10 of 16 finished. I heard at least 6 landed at Mabee ranch, part way down our second leg. About 6:40, brother Steve wafted in in the Zuni, the last finisher of the day. He had to climb 2300 ft at 80 fpm to make it in the last 20 miles.

So far my 73 mph is first for the day in 15m. The Std winner was 66 mph. My Brother Ron won the day in Sports class with a 74 mph (handicapped) flight in his HP-18. Lee Khulke got home, too, albeit slowly. He said he had two virtual landouts where he doubled back to a safe landing spot, but got a low save.

### Day 3

A hot, sticky, low day. We started a little late at about 1:30. All 3 classes flew a MAT with one turnpoint at Seminole, TX. Around Hobbs, it was blue and the lift was weak only going to about 4000 agl. To the east past Seminole there were cu based at about 12000 ft. You just had to trust the lift in the blue to reach the clouds. Then I found it fairly straight forward. The lift was somewhat disorganized and rough, but that could have been a personal problem.

I got out to Seminole, then flew around a handful of close in turnpoints in the cu field, then went home. About 175 miles in just a little over the 2 1/2 hour minimum time. Judging by the number of gliders I saw on course today, a lot of others did the same sort of thing. The 15-meter winner went 75 mph. I made 67, for 4th for the day. I'm still hanging on to the lead in 15 meter. I see scoresheets are being posted again now that the SSA staff is back in the office.

The local media is covering the contest pretty well. I heard about a 1 minute story during the local sports report on the radio yesterday. And the local paper had color pictures and a nice article. They seem to be treating it as a week long event, posting some daily scores, interviews etc. We're local celebrities, sort of.

When I got to the airport yesterday and opened the cockpit, I found a little green alien from Roswell sitting there, ready to go. He seems to be making the rounds this week. Not sure yet if its good luck or bad when he shows up. He's moved on now. I'm sure someone will post some pictures, but my net access is a bit limited here this week.

#### Day 4

Another challenging day at Hobbs. All blue, pretty low and hot, with a 15 kt breeze out of the south. The original tasks were scrapped after the first couple of relights and lots of gliders grinding around the airport below 2000 ft. The sniffer had climbed right out, but that must have been the only thermal in town for a while. What we ended up with for tasks were MAT's with one turnpoint. Sports launched last and went to Lovington for a 2 1/2 hr task. Std and 15m classes had Plains as the turnpoint and a 2 1/2 hr minimum time.

The Std and 15 m gates opened about 2:05, but the radio remained silent. Nobody wanted to start first and mark thermals for later starters. I was at 10000 ft, a good 1000 ft higher than any other glider I could see, but decided to wait for a few brave souls to head out first. I couldn't stay high and ended up starting at about 8000 ft, at the back of a large gaggle.

The first leg was downwind and downhill, so it went quickly. Turning at Plains, I noticed cirrus blowoff from a storm off to the west. By the time I slowly climbed enough at Plains to head off towards my next turnpoint, it was obvious the cirrus was coming our way, and fast. I decided to work back towards Hobbs to ensure a finish, even if I was very early and slow. The cirrus shadow was just a few miles west when I got to Denver City. I dumped most of my water ballast there, as I saw the day turning into a survival test rather than a race. I climbed high

enough to glide back to Hobbs into the 15 kt headwind in a nice 3-4 kt thermal. By the time I topped that thermal, Denver City was under the shadow, as was the course line back to Hobbs. I found one more little thermal in the shade that I took to the top for insurance and the possibility of adding a few more miles to the flight.

From there, I deviated from the direct course to Hobbs to pick up Abandoned Airport on the way. Added just a few miles. A few scraps of lift on the way to Hobbs got me there at about 3000 ft agl. But the ground was completely shadowed except for some streaks of hazy sunshine to the south a ways. I went to the sun, found nothing, and returned to land at Hobbs. At least I collected speed points that way.

Turned out a few guys played it a bit more aggressively, a few turning east away from the cirrus shelf and fighting their way home later with significantly better scoring flights. The preliminary scores show me in 2nd overall now, 27 points out of first. The first 4 or 5 are now very close, with 2 days left to go.

I hope the weakening trend of the last few days turns around. We're all ready for some classic Hobbs soaring weather.

## Day 5

Another blue day. 15 meter class launched first starting about 1:45 and we could only climb to 7500 ft in 2-3 kts. As we waited for the last launchers to climb, the 185 mile task A was changed to the 155 mile task B, then finally changed again to a 2 hour MAT with one turnpoint at Tatum. The start gate was opened, and nobody wanted to go. Thermals improved to topping at 8500 ft and a few brave souls headed out on course. I left in the middle of the 15 meter pack, heading slowly out on course. I saw a couple gliders circling high above me about 10 miles out on course and found a little lift under them. It started at 2 kts, then 3, then 5 up to over 9000 ft. I dumped water ballast for 2 minutes in the first part of that thermal, but when it went up to 5 kts, I decided to keep the rest.

After Tatum I flew back southwest to Lovington, then to Denver City, by way of Abandoned Airport. Near Lovington, I found another good climb to 10000 ft. From Denver City I could see a few cu way off to the east, maybe reachable in the 2 hour task time. But I decided that the leg from Lovington had been pretty good, so I turned around and retraced my path. Found the good thermals in almost the same place as they were on the eastbound leg.

I had a final glide from near Abandoned around Lovington back to Hobbs

with a little pad. I was expecting to find one more good thermal along the way which would probably make me too early getting back to Hobbs, so I went all the way to the west edge of the Lovigton turn. Didn't find anything to work, so had to dial the final glide back to a slow Mc 1. I made it with just a little to spare above the finish gate floor.

The flight was 65 mph, good for 2nd place for the day, and back into a small lead cumulatively. Steve Koerner was fastest for the third day in a row.

Standard class flew the same task, but started about 30 minutes later due to being last in the launch order today. Gary Odenahl was fastest at just below 60 mph. Garret Willat is leading overall.

Sports flew a shorter MAT with one turnpoint at Abandoned. There were a number of landouts and I only saw some very preliminary scores. The rest should be up on the SSA site.

It was a very hot day in the cockpit. Most of us got out, drained and dripping with sweat. We're all hoping for a more classic Hobbs day for the finale today.

## Day 6

Another hot blue, hazy day. The forecast this morning was hoping for extensive cu, based at 12000 ft. The sky dried up by noon and a late sounding flight by one of the towplanes indicated lift would likely stay capped below 10000 and stay blue. The wind was up a bit from yesterday, too, maybe 15 kts out of the SE.

The cockpit is a very hot place on a day like this, particularly down low. Getting up off tow was tedious, very warm, and with lots of company. The start gate opened very late today for the 15m class, since we launched last, and the launch was delayed considerably waiting for the day to cook off. The Standard and 15 meter classes had a 2 hour TAT with 20 mile turn areas around Tatum and Andrews.

Hobbs is famous for its civil service thermals that close up shop at 5 pm sharp. With the start gate not opening until 3:14 pm, the trick was to get out on course promptly, not wander too far downwind and not get low near the end of the day.

I got most of that right, but finished a few minutes under the 2 hour min time. Someone told me that there is an optimum finish time on one of these pilot selected tasks that is slightly below the minimum time. I was planning to be a few minutes over time, but hit a stronger than

expected thermal coming out of the Andrews turn area which got me home a little quicker than I had planned. My scored speed was about 52 mph, good for second for the day. Tom Kelly made 55 mph, which wasn't quite enough to re-pass me in the cummulative standings.

This years contest certainly had more difficult weather than the last few. Not up to the Hobbs reputation, but we still flew 6 cosecutive contest days and a practice day. And I've never flown here with lift as tall as we saw on the first two days. Very challenging and rewarding flying.

See y'all back at BKAP soon.