

THE FLYERS

BY ROSS ANNABELL

EARLY BIRD DAVE BUCKLEY

Although Auckland got away to the fastest start as a club in New Zealand's short hang gliding history, Wellington builder Dave Buckley must have been one of the first New Zealanders to get a home-built Rogallo into the air in free flight.

He built and flew a home-made Rogallo just before Christmas, 1972—six months before hang gliding started seriously in Auckland.

His attempts were inspired by the feats of Jeff Jobe, 21, American skier-hang glider pilot who flew off Mount Cook in June 1972, and Bill Moyes who set the world height record on Lake Ellesmere in March the same year.

"I decided to write to Bill Moyes and obtain enough details to build my own kite," Dave says. "In October 1972 Moyes sent me a rough sketch with the basic measurements for a 14ft delta glider, together with some brochures.

"In November I proceeded to build my first hang glider. All spars were 14ft in length except the cross bar, which was 11ft 8 inches. I used two inch x 17 gauge aluminium tubing, reinforced at all bolt holes with kauri dowels. I used a welded aluminium A frame. Nuts were held in place with a split pin, and I used stainless steel rigging with rigging screws spliced in for tensioning.

"The harness was a very basic plywood swing seat with back strap. The sail was made by John Leydon, Wellington sail-maker, in 4.5oz dacron, with scalloped trailing edge and battens.

"In mid-December it was completed, and I took it with me on holiday to Auckland. I met up with an old friend, Lester Dredge, in Auckland, and he was very keen to help me fly the kite.

"Our first successful flights were at Parr's Park, Glen Eden, on December 23, 1972.

We both managed to get airborne by running off a bank and gliding for a short distance at low altitude.

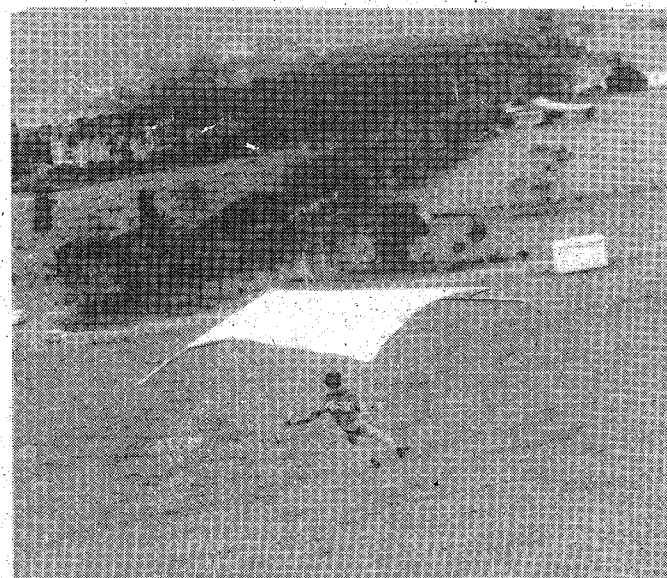
"During the next week, we tried many forms of attaining more altitude, including towing behind a motorcycle, car and jet boat. At Whitianga we made several glides from 150 ft after releasing from a boat tow.

"Back in Wellington in January 1973 I managed some short flights in the hills below the radio masts at Titahi Bay, assisted by Keri Down and his brother Toha. These flights were at a maximum height of about 25ft to 30ft.

"On June 11, 1973, I read in the Evening Post about a group of Australians who were planning to find some suitable hills in the Wairarapa to fly hang gliders. The next day I drove over to look for them. I finally found them on the coast, and met Ray Ryan (a friend of Australian gliding pioneer Steve Cohen) and Bob Lewis (an Australian living in Wellington). Ray had a 16ft hang glider which he had brought over with him from Australia.

"In the meantime Griff Bristed had flown his own plane over from Paraparaumu and landed in a paddock next to the beach.

"As conditions were unsuitable for flying hang gliders we decided to head for the West Coast at Paekakariki. Griff and Ray flew back to Paraparaumu, and Bob and I took the glider by road to Paraparaumu. We all stayed the night at Griff's place, but the next three days were southerlies, so Ray's plans to fly off Paekakariki hill were thwarted.



Dave Buckley flies his 14ft "Moyes" Rogallo at Clevedon in August 1973.

"However we found a suitable hill facing south about three miles south of Pukerua Bay. There was a very strong wind blowing and Ray made several good flights from a 300ft hill.

"Bob and I decided to modify my 14ft kite and get plans drawn for a new 16ft model each.

"After a visit to Clevedon, where Murray Sargisson and Rick Poynter were flying Flexi-fliers, I realised that my 14ft kite was definitely inferior to the bigger Flexi-fliers.

"On our return Bob and I took all relevant measurements and details off Ray's Australian kite which had been bought by Griff Bristed.

"On September 9 Bob and I, with our new gliders, and Griff Bristed with his ex-Australian 16ft glider, were in Clevedon for the first New Zealand hang-gliding meet.

"The Auckland boys were a bit ahead of us in ability as Clevedon was a perfect learner's hill. But it was good experience and we came back to Wellington feeling much more confident.

"In October Bob, Griff and I had our first taste of real gliding from the top of the hill above Plylite Marine in Paraparaumu.

"It was then that people became interested and it was decided to form a club called Paragliders, Wellington (later it became Wellington Hang Gliding Club). A steering committee was set up consisting of Griff Bristed, Dave Buckley, Bob Lewis, Tony Chayter and David Nicholson, on November 8, 1973.

"Early in November I made the first flight off Paekakariki Hill above the town, landing on the beach. On November 25 I flew from the look-out, followed by Bob. We both flew too far south, and had to land in the sea.

"Bob and I both soared for the first time near Baring Head on December 29, 1973. It was there that we met Ewan Clendon teaching himself to fly.

"We were soon soaring at Paekakariki, and enjoying the real thing. Dave Castle came on the scene at this stage, and was very keen—also Steve Ell. Then everyone started building



Dave Buckley comes in to land on his 16ft Australian-designed glider after a flight off a hillside at Paraparaumu in October, 1973.



Bob Lewis, Wellington club's first president, demonstrates ground handling of his new kite before a small crowd at Paraparaumu in October, 1973.

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