

North meets South

GYROCOPTER FLY-IN AT STELLENBOSCH

Text and photography by Justin de Reuck

The current world record for the most number of Gyrocopters at a single fly-in is 52, which is currently held by the Italians. Up to now, the largest gathering in Africa was 28 of these magnificent flying machines.



MagniGyro



Von Ludwig JT Kriek Gyroplane

Johan Stemmet, host and producer of a local TV show, *Noot vir Noot*, had the brainstorm to try and break the world record here in South Africa. Johan has been flying gyrocopters since 1989 and as a matter of fact owned the fourth Magni gyrocopter in South Africa. He has more than 1600 hours on gyrocopters and currently owns one very smart Xenon 2. Johan, born in Springbok, now lives in Johannesburg and is a local at Tedderfield where he hangars his aircraft. After months of organising, his plan came into being on the weekend of 20 and 21 November 2010. Johan says that he wanted it to be more than a record attempt. He wanted the pilots from the north side of the country to meet up with the pilots from the south and to share a weekend together, to share in the joys of rotorcraft. All thoughts of 'which is the best' to be put aside. Whether one flies a Xenon, Magni, Sycamore, RAF or Ela, it does not matter. Just get the guys together and have a gathering of like minded pilots from all over the country.

Johan was one of many pilots who made the 11 hour flight from Tedderfield to Stellenbosch in his gyrocopter for this great event. The gyrocopters started arriving on the Friday afternoon. However, rain started falling and by Saturday morning the rain was accompanied by a 500ft cloud base. It appeared as though the event may not even take place.

I arrived there early Saturday morning and was greeted by Paul Roux, who went out of his way to make sure that I would have everything I needed for the day. I was introduced to the 'who's who' of the gyrocopter industry and was privileged to take all the pictures I needed for this article. The weather started to clear and a few more gyrocopters started arriving. Paul was kind enough to take me up in his gyrocopter for aerial pictures of the airfield and we also managed to obtain an air to air shoot with another gyrocopter, flown by Len Klopper. I thought that the open cockpit would make for a great platform to shoot from, but I was wrong. The vibrations from the machine do not help at all and the rain was making photography just that much more difficult. That aside, this was my first flight in a gyrocopter and I was not sure what to expect. I have flown fixed wing and also I have had my chance to fly the odd helicopter. Paul's words to me just before he started the pre-rotation of the main blade were, "everything you know about flying, is about to change"...and it sure did. I loved the experience and could easily see how addictive these little machines could become.

Apart from the Xenon, one of the gyrocopters which received the most attention, was the Calidus 09 made by Auto-Gyro GmbH. This very sexy looking aircraft weighs in at 240kg, has a maximum take-off weight of



500kg and can climb at 1200ft / min. With a Vne of 110knots and a cruise speed of 100 knots, she is really quick for a gyrocopter. The Rotax 912S only burns 14 litres per hour and the Calidus has been voted as the best closed gyrocopter.

Another interesting visitor that arrived later in the day was the Von Ludwig JT Kriek Gyroplane. My first thoughts were, "oh my word, this is ugly", and apparently I was not alone. The gyrocopter brought a lot of attention as she made her approach down runway 01 and then taxied to her parking bay with onlookers scratching their heads muttering words such as... "what is that?" The Kriek was the brainchild of Johan von Ludwig and Jan Loedolff. Johan, with more than 4 500 hours flying gyrocopters, hails from Sasolburg with his unique machine, of which he has now built three. The Kriek is powered by a Rotax 914 and has a Vne of 100mph. She cruises at 80-85mph and her 90 litre fuel tank can keep her airborne for four and a half hours. This particular experimental airframe already had 300 hours on it. She has a 36ft high inertia rotor fitted to its hydraulic pre-rotation system. The system designed by these two men is able to engage at any power setting and needs never be tied down as it is capable of locking itself in place. The hydraulic pre-rotator is designed more for the commercial type of gyrocopter. Johan flies his machine for the purposes of doing geo-surveys, which cover the gravimetric and emission spectrums. His main clients are the mines of South Africa.

All's well that ends well, so they say. The day was a huge success and all in all 43 Gyrocopters were eventually accounted for at Stellenbosch. The world record was not broken due to the poor weather. About 20 hopefuls turned back enroute to FASH. However, Stellenbosch now holds the official African record for the most number of gyrocopters at one event. My sincere gratitude goes to Paul Roux, Gerrit Roux – Vice Chairman of SAGPA, Eric Torr - Chairman of SAGPA, Rikus Erasmus of ASSA, Johan Stemmet, Len Klopper and many others for their hospitality and helpfulness. The whisper of the day was that next year the meeting would take place up north and hopefully a new world record will be set by the gyrocopter pilots. ✈



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