

Please, don't cry for me A

WRITE this as I look out on the massive Avenue Julio 9. It's 04:00 in Buenos Aires, a city that really never sleeps. From the hotel window I count 26 lanes between me and the buildings opposite and taxis race around, oblivious to any semblance of European road discipline. In a few hours I'll use one to start off home, meanwhile I reflect on what was, what might have been, and what may be yet to come.

Normally a mention of 04:00 in these pages is about early launching prior to a big flight – after all that's what I had in mind coming to Argentina just over two weeks ago. In fact I'm taking home a log book with just one new entry, a one-hour local ridge flight as P2 in a club two-seater...

Many would see that as a massive waste of time and money, somehow it doesn't feel that way and I try to work out why. A little book called *Mastery* by George Leonard comes to mind; I read it 15 years ago but what stuck in my mind was the bit about progress happening in fits and starts. We tend to think of progress as the breaking through to the next level in sport or in life, and often look on the long grinding stretches in between as times of frustrating, wasted stagnation.

Leonard's point was that the many plateaux are where the real progress happens; breakthroughs that seem to magically emerge later are no more than the inevitable result. So don't get hacked off by times of apparent stagnation, rather recognise them as the essence of future breakthroughs.

I guess it works for the circuit bashing that precede good landings, outlandings that precede Silver distances, scales and arpeggios that precede Plat's musical mastery. Maybe the chance to sniff around, inhale cultural differences, look at logistics and mentally



John Williams returns from a trip to Argentina with just one hour in his log book, but with a wealth of information to stand him in good stead for his next trip

rehearse what would be needed to come back with a glider is an essential prerequisite for completing big flights in a new country too?

I've been privileged to fly in Scotland at a time when pioneering flights have been possible and to explore up to (and sometimes a little beyond) its edges. There is unquestionably much more to be done (1,500km in GB may be doable), in addition to further enjoying the delights of what we already know is possible.

'Don't get hacked off by times of apparent stagnation, rather recognise them as the essence of future breakthroughs'

However at 56degN the scarcity of December daylight hours does tempt you to open the atlas – interestingly it shows that Portmoak is nearer to the North Pole than Cape Horn is to the South Pole and it confirms that Tierra del Fuego does seem to lie at one end of an awesome ridge run...

At last year's OLC (Online Competition) conference I'd heard Klaus Ohlman describing Patagonian wave, and read of his gargantuan exploits in S&G. So I phoned him

at Serres, he was charming and most generous with his time and vast font of information and experience.

He'd be pleased to fly with me in Argentina (www.quovadis-aero.com) but wouldn't have a two-seater available this year. He will only have a DG-400 at San Martin los Andes this year (watch out for tumbling 15m records), but suggested that maybe Jean-Marie Clément would again be running an operation from Bariloche and could help?

Perhaps less known to UK S&G readers, Jean-Marie is the third part of the record-breaking triumvirate which also included Terry Delore/Steve Fosset and Klaus Ohlmann. My call to JMC revealed that yes, he was shipping his Nimbus 4dm out this year (his 8th successive year in Patagonia – www.topfly.free.fr) and I could book an early November slot.

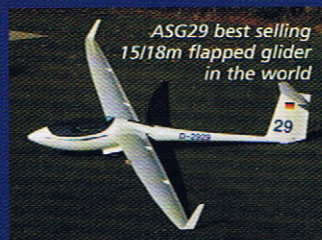
So on impulse I did just that.

A vast supply of excellent preparatory information followed by email and I started to enquire more about the man. I noted (in an unjustly brief summary) that he was a long-standing French team member, the first person to do 1,000km in wave in the Alps, the first in the world to complete a declared 2,000km out and return and that he had a sub five-hour personal best time around 1,000km.

Talking to and eventually meeting him revealed why; a huge level of experience, a meticulous attention to detail, a deeply engrained safety ethic, a fundamental understanding of wave (including recognition of atmospheric "hydraulic jumps" from his past as a civil engineering professional) and last, but not least, the patience of a saint – essential to overcoming the endless bureaucratic challenges of importing a glider

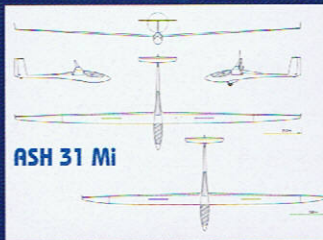
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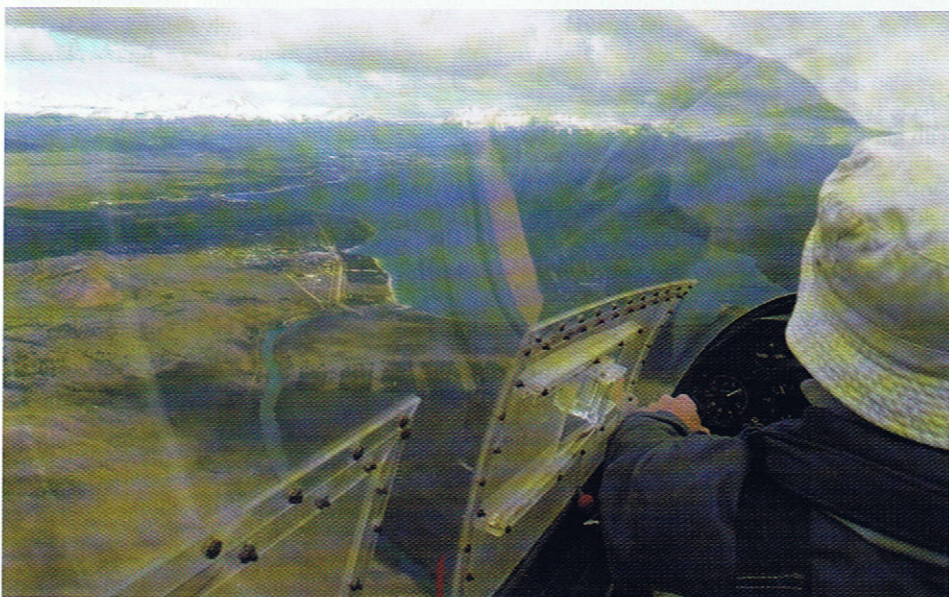
to South America. However none of those qualities could overcome the abject failure of the company shipping his Nimbus – 18 days late on a promised 18-day journey, meaning that I embark on my flight home on the very day that the glider first arrives at Bariloche. So I'm left with just a few thoughts about spending a wave season in Patagonia:

- Swallows (feathered ones) aren't daft – think glorious spring days in November and December
- Argentina is truly enormous – 35 times the area of Scotland
- Patagonia is exquisitely beautiful – think Lake District on steroids
- Visibility is just silly – at the start of a 1,000km o/r you can see as far as the TP
- Airspace is good by our standards – but need aviation Spanish for local ATC
- You undoubtedly need experienced help to start to fly there
- The people are delightful and will do anything they can to help you
- The wave I saw on arrival in Bariloche was stunning
- Not every day is good so don't chance a short trip
- Perfect wave days are not good sightseeing days (clag on peaks)
- Perfect tourism days aren't good gliding days (no wind for wave)
- The soaring potential is unparalleled
- The non-gliding options are huge too.

A trip to Patagonia is undoubtedly a serious commitment, a major adventure in its own right, and an extraordinary opportunity to do phenomenal things in gliders. I know a certain Antares that just has to get there in 2009 if it's to fulfil its destiny – now does anyone know a trustworthy shipping company?



Bariloche wave bars in the moonlight –the next big step to four or five thousand km flights? (Jean-Marie Clément)



Sitting behind Roberto Petri (no really – not Bob Petrie the Portmoak CFI but Roberto Petri the Club Planeadores Bariloche instructor!) admiring the view of Lake Nahuel Huapi and a tiny piece of the Andes from an IS28B. Bariloche town in the distant centre (John Williams)

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