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Jill McCaw  
soaringnz@mccawmedia.co.nz

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Advertising, editorial and  
subscription enquiries  
McCaw Media Ltd  
430 Halswell Rd  
Christchurch 8025  
New Zealand  
soaringnz@mccawmedia.co.nz  
Tel +64 3 322 5222  
John - 0272 804 082  
Jill - 021 1261 520

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# from the editor

august–october 2015

## I HAVE TWO NEW HEROES

When I was trying to track down photographs to go with the article on the 13.5m Class World Championships I noticed that something special had happened at that competition, and it seems to have gone completely unremarked. I thought it was extraordinary.

The championships (see page 22) were held in Pociunai, Lithuania. It was a small field for a Worlds, only 12 gliders, and so the Lithuanian Club Class and Mixed Class competitions were hosted in parallel. While the Club Class seems to have contained mainly Lithuanian pilots, the Mixed Class was competed for by pilots from Italy, USA, Japan, Germany, Australia, and the only Lithuanian in the contest, Darius Liaugaudas, flying in a Duo Discus XLT with Polish pilot Adam Czeladzki. When I was looking for photos of the contest it was Darius and Adam who caught my eye. Both of these gentlemen are paraplegics and use wheelchairs to get around. In a glider, only minimal modifications are needed to put them on the exact same playing field as able bodied pilots. In fact, looking at their scores, it seems they may have an unfair advantage, although maybe it was two pilots in the cockpit that gave them an edge. Darius and Adam won 10 out of 12 competition days. The days they didn't win, they came 2nd. Over 12 days of competition they managed to be more than 1200 points ahead of 2nd placed Makoto Ichikawa from Japan and the rest of the field.

I want to point out that these guys aren't a disabled pilot flying with an able bodied safety pilot, these are two disabled pilots flying together. It is an inspiring idea. I decided to do a little Googling and find out a bit more about these men.

Polish pilot Adam Czeladzki was injured in a glider crash in 2009. However, due to his sheer love of soaring, Adam never gave up on the sport. Following rehabilitation and therapy he came back to gliding, going through the incredible bureaucracy needed to fly solo as a pilot in Poland, and buying a Discus 2cT with hand controls to allow him to compete. He is the first paraplegic pilot in Poland. A year after his accident he was flying his new glider and competing in the Polish Nationals.

Adam then went on to do something most of his fellow countrymen couldn't dream of. He joined a group of Polish pilots on a trip to Africa and in January 2012 became only the 8th Polish National to achieve a FAI 1000km flight. In 2013 he won a place



Darius Liaugaudas and Adam Czeladzki prepare for a competition flight.

in the Polish National team in a Duo Discus with hand controls and placed 8th in the European Champs that year. Using the Duo Discus, he has been working with disabled people and has trained at least one person to solo which he says gave his student "...regained confidence in himself and gave his father a new reason to be proud..." Adam works as a dealer for Rover and Landrover.

Like Adam, Lithuanian Darius Liaugaudas was also injured in a gliding accident, his in 2013, and he too became the first paraplegic in his country to get the certifications needed to fly gliders. Adam was a great help, support and inspiration for Darius as he recovered from his accident. All the difficulties he was having, Adam had been through them too. And Adam was flying in a hand controlled glider. Darius speaks of meeting Adam at the 2012 European Championships. "We talked. I saw him on the grass by his glider. When he was in it he looked as able bodied as anyone. He was inspirational. He was enjoying life; had not asked for a single moment of pity." Adam offered to help Darius to buy a hand controlled glider. Darius' friends came forward to help with the funds, creating a charity fund called "Give Wings." At the same time, friends helped him purchase a



Grant Shaw lands at Springfield after a winter flight.

Photo John McCaw

## next issue

Next issue: Prepare for summer

Central Plateau and South Island Regional contests

Grand Prix finals

## magazine deadlines

Deadline for Club News, articles and pictures is 1 November and 10 November for advertising.



# THE KIWIS TAKE ON the European Championships Rieti 2015

BY JOHN COUTTS  
PHOTOS BEN HUGHES  
unless noted otherwise



I guess this adventure started back in 2013 when Dane Dickinson generously offered me the use of the family LS 8 “ZN” for the 2013 Mediterranean Cup. That turned out to be a very memorable two weeks and was covered in a write up by Dane back in Issue 38 of *SoaringNZ*. We had so much fun then, that the possibility was hatched of competing Hors Concours in the European Championships this year. Hors Concours would mean that we could compete in the competition but as we were not Europeans, we could not be officially entered.

## EUROPEAN CHAMPS



Photo AeroClub Rich



So in late July this year, I arrived at Frankfurt Airport having taken the overnight flight from Johannesburg to pick up my car for the next 18 days. It was a new shape, VW beetle generously organised by my German friend, Benno Beeston. The loan came with strict instructions of a photo of the mileage on passing of 300,000 km! By 3pm that afternoon, I had already made my way to Grenoble in France to meet up with Dane and pick up the LS8 ZN. From there we travelled into France to make it almost to Rieti, before exhaustion got the better of us. An 11 hour flight followed by over 1500 km on the road had taken its toll. The next day was a little more leisurely, rolling into Rieti just after lunch, followed by registration and scrutineering ready for the competition. We were some of the last pilots to arrive and most had already a number of training flights completed.

The next day was our one and only practice day and a flight around the cabbage patch was the order of the day. Rieti has a fairly standard task format with a track first to the south and higher mountains, then to the north which is normally flown on the highest mountains to the east, followed by a bit of a ridge bashing to the north and a final glide through the infamous Val Nerina. The Val Nerina is best described as a tight little valley with a reasonable west facing ridge. There is basically nowhere to land, although generally it works well if there is any west in the wind. On the right day you can go in low, abeam a small village perched halfway up the side of the mountain. Little by

little you claw onto final glide and save valuable minutes. Get it wrong and you end up trying to land in the bottom of the valley which is not really possible, hence it has claimed a number of gliders.

We had a nice flight and the Val Nerina was working well for the final glide. At the time we didn't realise that it was probably the best day of the two weeks. Standard Rieti weather is a 10,000 feet cloud base, a couple of convergences and the afternoon westerly to ridge soar home on and this was the only standard weather we would get. Late in the afternoon our crew, a British Junior by the name of Ben Hughes arrived, albeit late and without his luggage which was lost on route. A few beers followed in anticipation of the great racing lying ahead.

One thing that can make mountain flying a little tricky is an easterly wind. In the afternoon the sun shines from the west and in combination with a gentle west wind can make mountain flying very predictable and enjoyable. With an easterly wind the thermals still originate from the west sunward facing side of the mountains but then the face is in the lee side of the wind. This makes it a little tricky because generally you need to be where the thermals are, but now you are also flying in the down of the ridge. The entire contest period, except the last day, was uncharacteristic with easterly wind every day.

The first few days went very well for us. We enjoyed a day win each and were both in the running. Unfortunately the first to stumble was Dane on day four. The unusual conditions made



Photo: Ben Huggins



Dane Dickinson and John Coutts.



A bad day all round. Landed out, broke the beer.



it very difficult once you got below the mountain tops. Dane thought that he was being careful and going to a mountain range that was typically very reliable. Unfortunately this time it wasn't working and Dane landed in a nice field at one of the popular turn points, Roccaraso.

It's funny but over the years I have learned that local knowledge can be as much a handicap as it is an advantage. With local knowledge, invariably you learn how the site works in typical weather and where you can cut precious minutes by perhaps going a little lower because you know the ridges work in specific wind and sun conditions. However this year, the conditions were really so different to what we had experienced in previous years that I think any capable pilot flying the clouds just as they should, could have fared much better, even though they had never flown in Rieti before. Dane has flown something like seven competitions in Rieti and more than 400 hours there. This was my third competition and I have maybe 120 hours there. I think this regimented thinking may have been his downfall on day four and it was certainly mine later in the competition.

The air mass was slowly getting more unstable as the competition continued and by the fifth and sixth competition days we had isolated thunderstorms. The fifth day in particular was quite exciting, as possibly the only storm in central Italy decided to form right over the airfield, just before we were due to finish.

The organisation had adopted the three kilometre finish ring and although I am not a great fan of them, it definitely helps when there are storms around. I was one of the first gliders in the last turn point area and found a nice climb on the edge of the storm. Having first-hand experience back in South Africa with how ugly these storms can get, I took the climb well over final glide all the way to cloud base. It was pitch black towards Rieti but intermittent radio reports indicated that the storm may have been moving off to the west. I tracked carefully around to the eastern side of the storm and managed to stay in good air until very close to the field. It was then an easy dash to the extreme left hand edge of the finish ring to record a good finish, while the airfield was still getting nailed by the storm. I had a spare 3000 feet so was able to glide off to the east a little and wait for the storm to move further off to the north and then come in to land safely. After all the commotion the air was dead calm, although the airfield was very sodden after receiving many millimetres of rain.

During the last few days air had been converging over the spine of the Italian Peninsula. Air was flowing in from the Adriatic to the east and Mediterranean to the west. The humidity was increasing along with the possibility of storms. We eventually had to wait three days for storms to clear. After six competition days, I had a narrow lead and was looking to consolidate this in the last remaining three days of the competition. The Polish pilot, Lukasz Blaszczyk, was flying very



Photo AeroClub Rich

consistently and was only a few points behind. After Dane's disastrous day four, a top placing would be a remote possibility for him and he was rather looking forward to some more conventional Rieti Racing.

I find when you are flying every day you get into a rhythm and sometimes after you have bad weather for a few days this rhythm can be lost. Perhaps this happened to me because the last three days fell apart.

My wife Caryn arrived with our youngest son on day seven, the third to last day, and an unlucky run of land-outs ensued. The day featured the strongest easterly of the competition with a bit of easterly wave around. After three days of rain I thought that as the ground dried out, the weak conditions of the day may get a little bit better. I was very wrong, and should have employed an early start tactic. Instead I started quite late into a sky that was already deteriorating. I got drilled by the wave after the start and this set the tone for the rest of the flight. Then indecision when I was on the lee side of the ridge looking for a thermal, resulted in me getting spat out of the mountains and I ended up low, close to Rieti, trying to claw back up in the valley thermals. The day was falling apart and I made a conscious decision to climb as high as possible in wave before the last turn point which was in a notoriously difficult area. The wave didn't work properly and I probably wasted too long trying to make it work. In the end I just had to glide it out without getting as high as anticipated. I was left ridge soaring about 25 km from home at perhaps 700 feet above the valley floor. My beats took me right past a castle perched up high on the ridge. A very pretty sight but as the sun receded to the horizon my fate was sealed and the local airfield, Terni, had my name on it.

I was a good 400 points down now but the 2nd to last day was going my way. A perfectly timed start resulted in catching up some earlier starters and a little luck at the bottom turn

put me up with the leaders. With the sky overdeveloping and turning a little stormy ahead, I felt confident to go big and left the lead gaggle to head for the sweet spot (or so I thought) way in the distance. I found the visibility to be considerably worse than previous years and this made routing decisions very difficult. Only after fully committing to going in one direction would you see further down track, that the other direction was in fact much better. The mountains and radio problems also prevented Dane and me from sharing important information with each other. A poor choice of routing sealed the nail in the coffin on this day with gentle outflow from a previous storm eventually wiping out the whole sky. Dane was already struck down with some 12 other gliders at the well-known airfield of Foligno. The airfield was some 50 km on the final glide from Rieti but soon after this, you needed to go through the dreaded Val Nerina and today, after the storm and high cloud, the ridge would not be working at all. So if you didn't have height for final glide you would have to land in the valley. I worked the gentle storm outflow and tried every aspect but didn't find the height needed for a safe final glide so eventually opted for the safety of landing at Foligno airfield. Two more standard class gliders were damaged on this day, adding to one damaged earlier in the comp. From 23 standard class gliders we were now reduced to 20.

The final day dawned with the prospects of a proper Rieti day. For the first time during the whole competition, the winds were finally out of the west, so the ridges and high mountains to the east should be working. Again the forecast was for storms on the high mountains so an early start would be the order of the day. The start gate opened and I started perhaps only 30 seconds later. The task was a short two hour Assigned Area Task and as always, was first down to the south then up to the north for the final glide. I was having a brilliant run, the sky



was starting to overdevelop, but I was still early enough to easily navigate the small showers and managed to make great progress and with only two thermals. On entering the final sector and perhaps because I was having such a super run, I overcooked things a little bit by turning a little late for home. I was expecting to get some good energy on the final glide in the Val Nerina. Unfortunately, I had a terrible glide to the entrance of the valley and entered much lower than anticipated. I passed a few clouds that had the promise of a top up but I decided to commit to the valley, after all, the sun and wind were in the right direction.

Perhaps I was just too low but it didn't hold as expected. I was only perhaps 500 feet below glide and thought that I just needed a few good pull ups to be back on final glide but the further I went, the weaker it became. Also the lower I got, the further it was to go around the spurs. Eventually I just managed to flop into the Rieti basin, just 10 kms from the finish but at least I had reasonable out landing options now. A feeble attempt at a decaying cloud and I had to make a hurried landing in a less than ideal field over trees and wires and was really very lucky as it could have easily resulted in a broken glider.

And so I was left to consider what happened, as it really did seem like a competition of two halves. The first half went really well and the second half just went to worms. Perhaps work pressures and then having the family arriving, really meant I was over worked and I didn't have my mind fully engaged in the flying. It's difficult to get your mind into that space, but if you can get there it's just bliss. The only thing on your mind is the days gliding ahead of you and how much you are going to love every minute. When you're thinking like that, you don't even have to try hard to do well. Furthermore the late Davie Speight said something to me many years ago at my first nationals. He said 'you can't force gliding, you just have to go with the flow'.

*... what happened, as it really did seem like a competition of two halves.* The first half went really well and the second half just went to worms.

And he's right, you can't make that next climb 10 knots just because you need 10 knots. You can only do the best with what you have and no more. I think that advice was clearly lost on me in the last few days!

However, overall it was still very enjoyable with great flying and great company. It would not have been at all possible without the generous loan of the LS8 from Dane and his Dad Warren and the mighty blue VW beetle organised by my friend Benno Beesten. Thanks also to Ben Hughes who really worked very hard, especially later in the comp getting Dane and myself retrieved.

#### Results

##### 15M CLASS

1	Didier Haus	FRA	Ventus 2	7188
2	Peter Hartmann	AUT	ASG 29	7112
3	Christophe Ruch	FRA	Ventus 2	7086

##### CLUB CLASS

1	Ondrej Dvorak	CZE	Std. Cirrus	7341
2	Jan Louda	CZE	Std. Cirrus	7302
3	Josef Kozar	SVK	LS 1 f	7256

##### STANDARD CLASS

1	Lukasz Blaszczyk	POL	Discus 2	7408
2	Sjaak Selen	NED	Discus 2	7293
3	Dmitriy Timoshenko	RUS	Discus 2	7071