

200th balloon flown (N30060)!



Today is a very special day because the man who introduced me ballooning, taught me to fly, and encouraged me to chase my dreams turns 84 years old! That man is my grandfather. It seems appropriate that on his birthday, I should add an interesting side note to my ballooning career. The earliest balloons that I logged time in were his. Today, nearly four decades later, I logged PIC time in my 200th balloon.

When I was a young kid, I loved collecting cloisonné balloon pins. My collection is fairly extensive, and every pin is valuable to me, because each one represents a story. The stories are as varied as the designs; an event I attended, a pilot I traded with, or a balloon I got a ride in, etc. During balloon events, my grandparents would give me handfuls of their balloon pins for trading and I would return in short order with many newly acquired treasures. Pin trading was exciting! It allowed me to introduce myself and converse with many ballooning legends like Sid Cutter and Ben Abruzzo. Collecting pins was as exciting for me then as it is for my kids now.

At age 16, as a newly certificated pilot, I couldn't have imagined that I would be able to collect a large number of registration numbers in my logbook the same way I collected pins; one story at a time. My logbooks serve as my memories, and each of those registration numbers transport me back to a flight

shared with friends. Although many of the 200 balloons were owned by my wife and me: the vast majority of them were owned by others. To those friends that entrusted me with their equipment I will be forever grateful.

I have been fortunate to be able to fly an incredible number of balloons over many years of piloting. The 200 balloons have been a wide assortment of types and sizes: Hot Air Balloons (21,000 ft³ to 500,000 ft³), Gas Balloons (Ammonia, Helium, and Hydrogen), Rozier Balloons (from less than 9,000 ft³ to Transatlantic), Experimental Homebuilts, Personal, Corporate, Shapes, Ride Balloons, Sport Balloons, and Record Setting Balloons. The gondolas have been as varied as well, including; wicker, aluminum and fiberglass, Kevlar carbon fiber composites, trash cans, chairs, harnesses, and a house.

When I posted my 199th balloon flown on Facebook, it was out of my own amazement that I had achieved such a high number of balloons. I wasn't advertising for a 200th balloon to fly, and figured it would come in due time. Surprisingly, I was swamped with offers for number 200! I am so thankful that such a large number of balloon owners wanted me to pilot their balloon. Mike Wilson said, "I am sending you my Lindstrand 35A Cloudhopper for your 200th balloon." No strings attached, just have fun. The ballooning community is such an amazing group of people!

Thanks to Mike's offer, I had a wonderful flight this morning in his single place balloon, N30060. The ideal conditions allowed for a Splash and Dash in the Rio Grande (only my toes tickled the water), an hour aloft, and a stand up landing with my family there to catch me. It doesn't get any better than that!

Coincidentally, the 100th balloon I flew was a Lindstrand Cloudhopper 21 G-BVFC. That balloon was owned by Scott Adams, a student of mine from Wisconsin. I sense a trend developing, so I guess another Cloudhopper should be in my future plans for #300. That'll be quite a few years and many new ballooning friends from now. I am looking forward to all of the new stories to be created.



