

Matsieng Botswana Air Show - A FABB Trip!

As I slowly rise from a restless night, I realise that the day has finally arrived. Two Alouette helicopters will be embarking on a journey to the Wesbank Matsieng International Air Show of 2017! What makes this amazing is that I will be part of the team after a generous invitation from Rob Osner and the Brakpan Alouette team.



Making my way into the airfield, Rob was already hustling to get all prepared for the trip to Botswana. He actually started preparation since Tuesday to get everything in order. The man knows how to plan ahead!



As Rob's Massey Ferguson spluttered into life, he pulled the Alo III from its slumber, ready for us to pack and get going. Not a moment later Charles Fuller came rushing in dropping a "fuel bombshell"! His bowser is empty. No problem of course. Rob reigned in the Massey again and pulled his bowser to refuel Henry Walton's Alo II. Problem solved!



Now we have ZU-REC and ZU-RAM ready for action! The coffee came out with some muffins while briefing the flight to Matsieng via Pilanesberg. Rob phoned through the flight plan and we ready to depart.



Rob Osner and Charles Fuller discussing the route



Rob phoning through the Flight Plan



Keith Ashkam on windshield duty, kicking tyres etc.!

Filled to the brim with PAX, fuel and sandwiches, Rob started up and pulled life into the Alo III and lifted with ease to carry us on our journey.



Heading South-West with Juba and Charles in the distance flying lead.

Using the southern corridor via Romeo Alpha, Juba and Charles took lead and we were off on our trip. Heading into JHB special rules South, then West avoiding FALA, heading for FAOI we then took a bee line to Pilanesberg. It was a beautiful morning, so taking in the scenes was blissful. Inhaling the crisp early winter air just makes you appreciate life again. Small talk with good friends washes away the stresses and cares of the day. It is Air Show weekend and there are no worries!!



Low level - 80kts



Rob forming on Juba and Charles



Rob Osner full of concentration



En-Route Pilanesberg. Beautiful landscape!



En-Route Pilanesberg. Beautiful landscape!

Arriving at Pilanesberg we did the customs dance; immigration, GenDec and form upon form, security, body and bag search etc. etc.



Arriving at Pilanesberg to clear customs

Eventually we made our way through the whole schlep just for me to not declare my camera equipment! There goes R500.00 of my hard earned cash towards a penalty. Not again soon will I forget that and let this be a warning....declare!



Ready to Depart from Pilanesberg

We picked up Apie and Frederik Kotzee en route in the Robinson R66 Turbine and they had Brakpan Aeroclub Chairman, Kevin Cloete as Pax. Kevin ended up flying the FAPN – FBMA leg as Co-pilot. Very soon we reached Botswana FIR and crossed for the final push to Matsieng (FBMA).



Apie and Frederik Kotzee with Kevin Cloete as Co-Pilot

Arriving at FBMA we did a flypast...sorry, runway inspection of the airfield and turned to land at the designated helicopter LZ. We were greeted by very friendly organisers and ground staff which had a crew bus ready to take us to customs and our accommodations.



Arriving at FBMA



Turning into Matsieng LZ

We uneventfully cleared customs, unpacked our stuff in the tents and so it all started. We headed back to the choppers and Juba and Rob started preparing for a validation flight Friday afternoon.

Willie and I decided to head back to the Spur next to our camp site for a brewed refreshment and good vantage point to take some pictures of Juba and Rob. They did not bring me along for nothing! During our wait, a Cessna 210 Centurion took off and did a very low flyby. Deciding that this is quite a spectacular flyby, I got the camera ready for his second pass. Well the surprise and result could not have been more spectacular!



Cessna 210 with a Wall of Fire!

By now we have not heard the Alouette's Artouste distinct start-up sound, so we decided to head back to the helipad and see what was going on. We were unfortunately met by a bleak site of a Jet-A1 drenched Rob Osner and unhappy Juba Joubert. It turned out that the fuel bowser contained water and now contaminated Rob's ALO III.



All in good spirits despite the fuel problem!

They were busy draining the fuel tank and fuel filter had to be cleaned properly. This was quite a job however the ground crew at Matsieng assisted with the operation to get everything sorted out again. After they cleaned the lot, Juba decided to fuel again to perform an engine run, and test the ALO III that same night.



Alouette III hover at dusk

Following successful testing and an extended masterful hover, they set the ALO III down for the night and we headed back to camp.

We were met with a busy venue, laughter, music and....MalJan! He was the lucky man to participate in the Hot Extraction from a moving vehicle by helicopter. This was arranged in collaboration with Group73 and the Alouette pilots based at Brakpan.



Live entertainment at Matsieng



Bon fires and chit chat

We bought some steak and wors from the Spur and stood around a bushveld fire talking about flying and all kinds of nothings. The band brought us some good tunes and we decided to turn in early to be ready for the big day! The hot shower was blissful and prepared one for a good nights' rest under all the bedding provided to us by the organisers.



Around the braai!

The following morning we headed out early for coffee, rusks and Rob and Keith's peanut butter sandwiches. Rob and Juba headed back to the choppers to strap in MalJan and prepare for their displays. I ended up in the Pilots tent and briefing which lent itself to interesting conversation and instruction from Chris Briers, the Airboss of the Matsieng Air Show.



Peanut butter Sandwiches, banana and Coffee - cornerstone of any nutritious breakfast!



Pilots briefing under the Airboss, Chris Briers

The show itself was excellent and definitely worth a return to Botswana. The participation of Rob Osner and Juba Joubert in the Alouette III and Alouette II based at Brakpan Airfield made this a special occasion.



















FABB Alouette Team!

Saturday evening we ended with the representatives of the Brakpan Aero Club around the table and Kevin was “op sy stukke”!



Kevin entertaining an audience!



Brakpan Aero Club was well represented.

Great time was enjoyed by all and we were treated by a live band and hot air balloon by night to end what was an unforgettable experience.



If the question ever comes up “is it worth going to Botswana Air Show”, the answer is a simple, YES!