

downstairs, a killer continental breakfast that comes with the room, and a 24 hour accessible “business center” with internet access! We’d had the internet available in Buenos Aires, but we weren’t too sure about having it in little Comodoro Rivadavia. But we were fine, and the hotel was hands-down the best in the city! We were both grateful and humble about it. Things’re lookin’ up!

So after check-in, we’re off to eat dinner with the rest of the troops – some 15 other pilots who’d also come south with us for the Festival! And it really wasn’t too surprising to find that they were the same folks who’d hung with us, and flown with us, and partied with us in Buenos Aires either. And – as we were soon to discover – there was another similarity, too. We were all about to get a bit weary of the food. So what was for dinner? Melanasia!



Then John went out to fly first thing the next morning, before anyone else arrived. Now, from our hotel room on the seventh floor, the “landfill” we’d fly from looked clean and attractive, with a nice, fresh look to the

Atlantic Ocean too. But John came back in about half an hour, saying the winds are “rough” out there... And by “rough,” John meant he’d flown his vented Rev 1.5 in winds he’d estimated to be averaging about 45 MPH, with gusts to more than 55 MPH. And besides, what looks nice and clean from up here is really pretty rough and covered with shreds of concrete and gravel down there. WHEW!!! ...and we’re gonna do a Festival there? Well, maybe we aren’t going to be so “festive” after all...

Okay, we met the other pilots shortly, and they also determined that there was “too much wind,” so we’d maybe fly indoors today? “Yep, good idea,” said Polo Madueño, the Festival’s organizer, and off we went to the gym - which was a short walk from Polo’s office where we’d all gathered because we were all in separate hotels. Yes, they’d put their International guests in the best Hotel in town!



The “gym” is one of those buildings that was probably built at least 30-40 years ago as a basketball arena for a small town of around 100,000 residents. It had a stage built across one end, and the arena had a decent hardwood floor, but good wood is so expensive in the Patagonia that the arena floor was covered with squares of plywood to reduce any chance of scuffs and dents. And it turns out that this was also the arena where the Oil Party show would be held the following Tuesday evening, so it was nice for us to see where John and Gustavo Di Si would fly their indoor kite routines. But okay, we’d fly indoors with whatever space was available today.

John Barresi quickly stepped in and gave a short tutorial on Indoor Flying, and then it was “free fly” time for a little while. Everyone settled in and got indoor kites out, and after a while the whole thing turned into a round-robin “demo” time with everyone picking tunes off their CDs to fly to. That lasted a very short time and then it was time for lunch. So we hiked back to Polo’s office and downstairs to the basement for a lunch of Hoagie Rolls, filled with... Melanasia. (Yeah, we heard a few grumbles, here and there.)

Following lunch, we all tramped back to the gym and took up the Indoor demos where we’d left off, except by now, we were starting to see a few workmen hovering around, scoping the place out for their parts in of the construction necessary for the Oil Party extravaganza next week. Still, it WAS kite flying, and Indoors was definitely better than Outdoors - since it was still howling out there.

Well, John happened to be out on the floor, just sort of fooling around with his Indoor Rev, when someone put a Tango on by request, “Adios Nonino” started coming out of the CD player. John says he’d only ever heard about the first 30 seconds of the piece at the time, but he decided on the spot to “soul-fly” to this piece anyway. And, as he began to fly, he found that – whatever he did with his kite, the music just seemed to follow his actions



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The stage, one step at a time:



somehow. So he just continued on...



And all of a sudden, the whole arena got very quiet! The other pilots stopped talking and began paying attention, and even the workmen and the janitor quit moving and watched John fly too. And, about two or three minutes into this piece, Roberto

Cassanello called out "Bravo, John!" a couple of times, but John just kept right on flying - letting his kite move where it seemed right, and the music still followed along. It turns out, that this 8:04 version of "Adios Nonino" is akin to a National Anthem for these Argentineans, and John had just "soul-flown" the very heart out of the piece for them. Nope, there wasn't much applause when he knelt to the floor at the very end, but there also weren't very many dry eyes in the house, either! And, Yes - my eyes have a little mist in them as I write this, too!

He does that sometimes... Connects his flying with a piece of music that way... And, yes, it's always magic! And before we left for home, three people had given John three different CDs with that piece of music on them. He's taken that piece as a "preferred" indoor track and flown demos to it back in the USA with much the same response from American audiences here. There's really magic for John and an Indoor Rev in that music somewhere...

Well, the pilots finished out the Indoor Flying for the day at about 7:00 PM, and then it was back to Polo's basement for dinner. Fortunately, it was ravioli this time, but I think I saw one or two pilots peeling a pod apart just to make sure the filling wasn't Melanasia.

Sunday morning broke bright and clear, and it was "decision time." The wind was still up around 25 MPH, so will our festival be indoors or out? We did not know, but thought we'd take a look at the gym first. Believe it or not, there was less wind in the gym than there was outside, so the powers-that-be elected to fly indoors for a while - but leave the door open as a wait-and-see measure, thinking perhaps the winds will drop this afternoon.

Well, they did not drop! And if you're a sailor, perhaps you know why they didn't! Because seafarers have known about the "Roaring Forties" for a couple of hundred years now. There is a band of air constantly moving at 20-30 MPH from west to east between 40 and 50 degrees south latitude, due to something called the "Coriolis effect." And guess what - Comodoro Rivadavia sits smack on 45 degrees south latitude. So that band of wind is normal for the area, and it is there today just as it was there for the First Annual Patagonia International Kite Festival back in mid-December 2006.



Yes, we finally flew the "Festival" outdoors.

The local residents were amazed - and, to a degree, so were we! It turns out Revolutions flew okay, especially the vented ones - just tilt the kite a bit more and keep on flying. But fly Judiciously, please! Older dual-line and quad-line parafoils flew well too, as long as they were sewn well enough that they didn't come apart in mid-air. They were awfully quick, but they flew. John pulled out the Jones Airfoils Mirages, and they were quicker than quick, but they were pretty fast to start with - and they flew! And - one by one - kites began coming out of bags, and if flown judiciously by a pilot who knew what he was doing, a decent kite could fly.

And so I tried to fly the other (unbroken) Commet! After all, I had help this time - even someone who could speak English. They'd given us an interpreter named Moro Finelli (pronounced Mao-Row), an exceptionally bright guy who is studying "tourism" in College - and far-and-away, Moro has the best American-English accent of any of our interpreters. Moro would help me fly the Commet this time.

We did well, too. We completed assembly



without any problems. It was time to set the bows again, but I made sure everything else was absolutely in order before we made the first move. Then, as we started to turn her on her side to set the bows, a BIG gust appeared from the side of the kite. Well, the kite was well tied, and all that was left to do was to drop it back to earth again and pin it there. We struggled a bit without breaking a spar or ripping anything, and then I grounded her and pinned her with my weight - right into that pile of gravel and broken concrete they call "landfill" down in Argentina. There must be two dozen small holes in the nose that weren't there before we started, courtesy of the rubble we flew on. Well, shucks, guys - help me roll her up and we'll call this a day. I'm the stupid one this time for even thinking we could handle this launching. Moro's comment after helping me roll the Commet up was, "Gosh... That is a BIG kite!!!"



Still, we flew on. I flew a couple of borrowed kites, and vowed to return next year with kites of my own that could fly in that wind. I know they exist. And we will find them...



Finally, it was time to bring them all down and get ready to go to dinner. Tonight would be our last night together in Comodoro Rivadavia, since the rest of the pilots from Buenos Aires would be returning the next day - and only John Barresi, Gustavo Di Si, and I would remain in Comodoro for the Oil Party show... Well, there are magic places and magic meals just as John generates occasional magic moments with a kite in his hands - and tonight we would experience one.

We'd been told that we were going "out" for BBQ tonight. Well, based on some previous experiences, John and I had already discussed Argentinean BBQ and decided on a couple of self-imposed "rules." One was "Do NOT eat any mystery-meat," meaning if you don't know what it is - don't eat it! Similarly, "Do NOT overindulge on mediocre Argentinean wine!" A not-so-hot experience is a good teacher in that regard, and I figured I'd already learned my lessons fairly well.

So we were picked up and driven out to one of the loveliest places in creation - to a whitewashed "Hall" of sorts somewhere near Comodoro Rivadavia, but out in the countryside. Indoors, the hall itself was absolutely gorgeous - a simple handmade place of wood, with an open beamed ceiling, cozy, well-lit, and warm to the eye. The tables were set in a long "T" with plates and silver and glasses already set and salads and bottles of wine already on the table. In one corner is an open barbeque kitchen, fronted by a wooden serving bar. And in the kitchen itself behind the serving bar, was a barrel of a man with the biggest, happiest, friendliest grin on his face that I've ever seen. And I do not know his name to this day, but he's more than welcome to cook "barbeque" for me anytime and anywhere he ever chooses to do so. And out front of the bar stood an older gentleman who was obviously our waiter for the evening, and he spoke a little English.



We were among the very first "guests" to arrive, and it would be maybe a half hour before the other pilots had all joined us. So we stood at the serving bar, and our host and our server smiled and honored us with a few preliminary snacks and tidbits from the BBQ stove, along with some samplings from a bottle of obviously "premier" stock that our host pulled from below the serving bar.

WOW!!! Now I know why my friend Mario DiLucca recommends Bif de Chorizo and Malbec wine! So, after a fairly trying day (and another broken kite) at the First Annual Patagonia International Kite Festival, we were now reaping our rewards! I'd not had very good success with Malbecs in the past, but whatever vineyard and winemaker had produced this wine deserves accolades, because that stuff slid down like the sweetest, purest nectar imaginable. Similarly, I'd had plenty of Mexican Chorizo before too, and always found it right on the edge of too harsh, too sharp, too spicy. But this Argentinean Chorizo was soft, and

warm, and absolutely delicious – almost beyond compare, except for the name “Chorizo.” And this fellow had honest-to-god Rolls (as in BREAD) too! So, yes please, and I’ll gladly take another one of those Chorizos on one of those Rolls – split like a bun. And I’ll be darned if he didn’t up and hand me a Chorizo sandwich, just like I wanted!

Well, the rest of the pilots finally showed up, and after being outside at “the Festival” for a while, they all fell to eating like starved men. But I noticed that our host and his waiter had taken note of my interest in the “good stuff” he’d served me earlier – and I’ll be darned if the bottle right in front of me didn’t look like the same one I’d been drinking from earlier. And I was starting to see a pattern in the amount of that lovely Chorizo making its way toward our table too. And the salad... Oh MAN, that salad was heavenly! Do you know, that nice fellow had tomatoes in that salad that still tasted like TOMATOES? Yes, I wanted to bring him home to the USA with me. I could eat a couple of meals like that one every week for the rest of my life if I had my choice.

Still, the meal was fairly filling and over much too quickly, but my tummy had that warm and happy feeling. Yeah, probably just the good Malbec, right? Anyway, the local folks - Polo and his boss - rose to make a few short speeches, and we all sat patiently and listened. Then other folks – kitefliers - got up and said their thanks too. I’m not sure if John or I had any decent “Thank You” words between us, but neither was moved to get up and add to the speech-making. In any case, we all got up at one time or another to either take or stand for pictures, and there were plenty of hugs all around too – which is an Argentinean custom that needs to be adopted widely here in the USA, but it also needs to be experienced rather than explained. In any case, the evening was too glorious to end so soon, but I suspect we were simply all too content to object when the evening decided to end itself all on its own. Yes, there was magic there that evening. And then the next morning, most of the kitefliers were all gone - back to Buenos Aires.

So Gustavo Di Si, John Barresi, and I hung around Comodoro Rivadavia for another few days. But I have to say, it was no picnic, no vacation. Gustavo and John had a 5 minute and 27 second Indoor routine to build, and very little time to practice it. They’d have to hurry – so they did!

The next morning found us all back at the gym bright and early – only to find the city’s machine shop busy constructing a platform right in the middle of the gym floor! Well, we’d heard that John and Gustavo would be flying their kites off of a “runway,” and here it was developing right before our eyes. It was indeed a long 6’ wide runway, attaching the stage to an octagonal platform in the center of the gym floor about 17 or 18 feet in diameter. And, looking at it, I had my doubts as to its sturdiness and safety. It turned out to be plenty sturdy, and we’d deal with the safety issues well before show-time!

But – there was another factor involved, too. With the gym floor now having an unpainted metal contraption in the middle of it, where were John and Gustavo to develop and practice their routine? Well, it turned out that Polo Madueño had some ideas, but first, John and Gustavo were due over in Alicia Kalambukas’ office to be fitted for costumes... Alicia was Polo’s counterpart in the National Oil Party, the real sponsor behind all this effort.

Well, okay. John and Gustavo go over to be measured, get introduced to Alicia, sit down for a short chit-chat, and then Alicia tells Polo to take us to lunch at some fancy restaurant, which we gladly accepted. We would run into Alicia again and again from that point on until the Oil Party show was completely over. She was truly the power behind it all, but she was also the only one with an understanding of how it all fit together too – so everywhere she went, people kept coming up and asking her questions about the details of the thing. Alicia was nearly exhausted by the time the show was over, but it WAS a heck of a show!



Anyway, by the time we were done with



lunch, Polo had located another gym with available practice space over in the next small town, so we drove over there where John and Gustavo set up shop and started in.

And by the end of the day, they were flying well together and had a basic routine figured out. Moreover, they decided to practice using the 15' circle in the middle of the indoor soccer arena they were using – figuring if they could successfully fly within that soccer circle, the 18 foot octagon should be a piece of cake. And so it turned out, too! Gustavo and John spent a good 4 to 5 hours there, developing a routine and then practicing.

So after the boys had a quick shower, Gustavo and Polo joined John and I for dinner at one of the better restaurants in town, and then we all indulged John and Polo's passion for Ice Cream. And after dinner together, we all stopped by the gym again and found the whole runway and octagonal structure decked with plywood and painted black, but the paint was still pretty wet!

The next morning a quick check found the paint nearly dry, at least dry enough to use. There were a couple of rough spots in the plywood flooring for this contraption, but it'd do overall, so we did what we could to repair a couple of rough spots, and then we put a 2" strip of scotch-guard reflective tape all the way around the perimeter of the octagon! Then John and Gustavo got up there and practiced some more! Indeed, they had the thing to themselves pretty much all day long, so they practiced most of it away. And while they flew, the sound people and the lighting folks re-did everything, and the TV Crew came in, set up, and did all of their checks too. There was going to be a show here tonight, including a couple of fairly innovative kite-fliers, and everyone was getting ready!



Of course, it all came together beautifully. We took a break about 6:00 PM, and grabbed some munchies. The boys donned their custom-made all-black costumes and then waited until it got dark enough for the show to begin – because John and Gustavo would fly indoor kites together off a 17'-18' platform over the heads of the spectators IN THE DARK, under black-light, to show ONLY THE KITES!

And as I remember it now, this live telecast contained the following components:

- A short history (pre-recorded) of Oil exploration in Argentina
- A pair of black-lit modern dancers with light stripes on their costumes
- John and Gustavo flying Indoor Revs over the crowd under black-light
- More modern dancers, also black-lit
- A marvelous band playing live music, mostly Argentinean folk
- A gorgeous singer, accompanied by the band, singing good Pop music
- A beauty pageant to elect the new Argentinean Oil Queen for 2006

All was televised live throughout Argentina. There was NO dress-rehearsal, everything was done "on the fly." It must have been done this way in the USA long ago, but I'll bet you'd have to have to go back to the days of Ed Sullivan to see productions done like that in the USA. Massive Kudos are due the entire technical crew – Television folks especially included!



By the way, Gustavo and John did extremely well. They flew with style, grace and beauty in nearly impossible conditions. They didn't hit anyone and remained on the platform throughout the performance. (So my two biggest fears went unrealized, thank God!) And if there's a "downer" in this whole thing, it's that my cam-corder position for filming this whole event ended up being directly opposite two of the black-light lights, so the video is WAY underexposed and there's massive lens-flare over the whole sequence. And if you want an "upper," it's that John DID manage to film the entire swimsuit competition portion of the 2006 Argentinean Oil Queen pageant, but you should NOT expect that video-clip to become

available on Kitelife any time soon – NO, not even if you’re a subscriber... However, Kitelife subscribers can see the entire indoor kite performance in the [subscriber area](#), under "demonstrations".

Then, finally, it was all over but the wrap-up. We beat feet for a local pizzeria and actually wolfed down some food, and then headed back to the gym to help tear down banners and other decorations.

WHEW – it was finally OVER!

And as usual, the people who do the most critical efforts often go unmentioned when the awards, rewards, and Thank yous are passed out, but they will certainly be mentioned here. Our VERY special “THANKS” to both Polo Madueño of Comodoro Rivadavia and Alicia Kalambukas of the National Oil Party for their efforts and their vision in helping this marvelous opportunity come to blossom!

So the next morning John and I checked out of the Lucania Palazzo Hotel, headed on a plane back to Buenos Aires! And before we knew it, we were back in Vicente Lopez at our old hotel’s sister, the “Hotel Bosch.” Yep – still within walking distance of the kite field, and we had half day of sunlight left, too. Well shucks – let’s go flying! So we did...

And who should we end up flying with but our old friend LALO Loescher. I’m frankly not too sure what night it was that LALO brought his own magic with him, but I’ll put it right here anyway... LALO had watched me fly my Commets before we left for Comodoro Rivadavia, and he saw that I enjoy flying good single-line kites. So on one of the last few nights we were in Argentina, LALO brought a kite he’d made himself to the field for me to fly. It was a reproduction of an early Hargraves Box kite – the one with just a single pair of longerons down the center of the kite. LALO’s reproduction is an excellent flier and absolutely lovely in the evening sky. It stands a full two meters tall, and sits up there as steady as the proverbial rock! The kite has a good steady pull to it too, and could easily carry some additional weight. And then we ended up going out to dinner with him at one of LALO’s favorite restaurants, and we all enjoyed that too! Thank you for all of it, LALO! You’re a very special man, and we enjoy your company and friendship very much!

And the next day, we had a mission to fulfill. Both Jose Luis Baldesari and Guillermo Fernández of Alto Vuelo had asked us to visit them before we returned to the USA, so John made the appointment and we went. Our Argentinean amigo, Rodgigo Posada, picked us up and we visited both of them – First Jose Luis at the Alto Vuelo business/sales office, followed by an extraordinary lunch, and then followed by a visit to Guillermo at the Alto Vuelo kite factory.

Jose Luis’s office would seem laughable to me, as would Guillermo’s factory for that matter, if I had not visited Prism’s old factory in Seattle long ago - but I had! Kite manufacturers are NOT pristine businesses or huge rows of offices – not by a long shot.

It turns out that Jose Luis was fairly busy when we arrived (Hey – it’s the kiting season in Argentina right now), so we did not get to spend a lot of time with him while we were there. The small office and showroom seem to serve their purposes, however, and they were still in business when we left Argentina. My only comment is that Jose Luis seems to be doing all he can to keep the doors open and the money flowing in – which I always figure is a good thing! We spent about a half hour there, and we received a few presents from Jose Luis – John’s copy of a CD containing a fine version of “Adios Nonino” - among them.

Then Guillermo showed up and we all went to lunch. We’d already enjoyed three magnificent meals in Argentina (The luncheon on the Buenos Aires docks with Gustavo Sonzogni, the dinner at the Tango Show with Roberto Cassanello and Gustavo Sonzogni, and the marvelous meal at the BBQ Hall in Comodoro

Rivadavia), and now we delighted in a fourth. Jose Luis and Guillermo took us to a “local” BBQ place on some fellow’s rooftop within walking distance. Yeah – I know it sounds suspicious, but the food was absolutely “to die for” as the saying goes. Every single thing the man put on a plate melted in your mouth, and he had “the touch” of the proper blend of ingredients, freshness, and spiciness to make every dish absolutely superb. Again, I would willingly eat there often if only the commute weren’t quite so long and expensive!

And then we visited Guillermo’s factory, and the nice folks who worked there. Yes, kite factories can appear “cramped” and “cluttered” and “disorganized” – and the Alto Vuelo factory is all of that. But it’s also staffed with people who seemed hard at work and care about their products and are happy with their jobs. And Guillermo’s factory was very busy cranking out more products when we happened by (Hey – it’s Kiting Season down there, folks). So about the only thing I can say is the folks in the factory seem to be working well and being happy. Nope, I didn’t get a chance to examine much of anything other than a few kites, and I tried like crazy to stay out of the way of those people who were very busy being quite productive.

And before I leave the topic of the Alto Vuelo firm, it think it fair to inform KiteLife readers who have never heard of Alto Vuelo that this is Argentina’s only kite manufacturer, and that the company pretty much stands alone - for some very good reasons.

To start with, the customs duty on kites and associated items (components) coming into Argentina exceeds 50 percent. Yes, that’s a “biggie” for sure! So, if Argentina is going to have ANY kind of a kiting population at all, there must be a firm in Argentina to supply reasonably priced kites, and Alto Vuelo is that firm.

And secondly, the kiting population of Argentina is so small that there’s not enough money in it to warrant anyone going to Argentina to compete with Alto Vuelo. So if you’re a kite pilot in Argentina, you must deal with Alto Vuelo!

Yes, Alto Vuelo has a captive audience. But as Mark Reed said to me long ago, “Sure it’s nice being the king bullfrog all right, but it’s really a pretty small pond.” Well, Mark – it’s a “puddle” down in Argentina rather than a pond! But, without turning Mark into some industry visionary, he’d also uttered another sound piece of wisdom. When asked what I could do to help HIS business succeed, he looked me straight in the eye and replied, “Teach someone to fly!” Well, that’s what we hoped we were doing in Argentina – priming the pump, so to speak!

So we understand Alto Vuelo’s problems, but have no solutions other than to try to create a larger customer base...

Finally, on our last full day in Argentina, we went souvenir and Christmas shopping in the morning and spent the afternoon flying among our friends all afternoon and into the evening. We even divested ourselves of a couple of our kites in order to make room in our luggage for the gifts we’d received and the shopping we’d done. We’d make onto the plane somehow!

And, come evening, we managed to make it across the road from the flying field for one last night of shared camaraderie with some food and a few glasses of our favorite beverages. Yes, we’d let it be known that we’d enjoy saying a heart-felt “Adios, amigos” to all who cared to join us. And as I counted heads during one of the saner moments of that last gathering, I came up with a magic number – 24 of us were there that evening. And that was exactly six times the number of people at our first gathering at that same spot just two weeks earlier. And I now knew the name of everyone at the table, and John and I had gone around and shaken hands and given Argentinean hugs to every one!

There were many people at that table whose names are not mentioned in these two reports, but that does not really matter. Those fine people are the heart and soul of Argentinean kiting, and each and every one figures “large” in the future of kiting for

their country. It was important to us that they were all there – not so much for us, but for Argentinean kiting!

So John and I told them the truth, as much as we could! We said we'd try very hard to come back to Argentina next year, and we would hope to come for a month rather than two weeks next time. And, in our own ways I guess, we tried to tell them that we cared for them, and that we loved Argentina, and we loved them too! Nope – nothing maudlin, just a little shared honesty among friends we knew and trusted. And we meant it, too!


So – do YOU want to join us in Argentina next November? We'd love to have you come along, and we'd welcome anyone who'd be interested in helping us to grow kiting in Argentina. Besides – flying kites in sunny 85 degree weather with laboratory-grade breezes in the 5-12 MPH range ain't all that bad... So think about it, won't you?

Fair Wind and Good Friends –









Dave "Geezer" Shattuck

As the Assistant Editor, Dave "Geezer" Shattuck is a driving force here at Kitelife and a regular at many NW events as well as other locations throughout the year.

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