

# Broome or Bust

By Dan Cosgriff

I have had an interest in seeing the Kimberly for many years, it being one large area of Australia that is continually reported to be spectacular, by air, land or sea, or indeed a combination of same. On moving on from my trike days some years back, where the Atherton tablelands and immediate surrounds became smaller each time I flew, I took the plunge into a three axis aircraft, with the purchase of a Jabiru UL500, to be affectionately christened Mighty Mouse (unrelenting, tough little bugger).

In essence, this model came out during the Jabiru development, with a MTOW of 500kg, long wings with winglets, 85lt fuel tanks behind the cockpit seats, and a 2200cc engine installed in a 3300cc engine bay, with the propeller remaining at the original station, hence a large space behind the engine to the firewall.

This aircraft is a joy to fly with no vices except its keenness to go go go. It consistently cruises at or near 100 TAS, but at 2700 RPM burning 10.5 Litres per hour, and with that in mind, I set out to some distant places to get the confidence to expand my travels even further.

On completing some in depth evaluation, I installed a liquid cooled head kit onto the engine, using the space behind it to install some of the components, and successfully completed shake down trials earlier this year. Now I was ready to tackle the Broome or Bust project.

I had the basic plan for this trip in place for some time. Now I needed to complete the detail regarding:

- Specific route (with contingencies for overfly, weather, strip condition etc)
- Fuel consideration (burn, destinations and alternates, availability)
- Possible overnight stops (selectable if one found the locale interesting or not up to scratch)
- Accommodation (include a small tent etc)
- Remote area conditions (equipment for same)
- Communication (minder, family, weather etc).

After many attempts to work in with the extremely unseasonal weather on the east coast for winter in the tropics, I finally managed to depart on Tuesday 25th June, covering the following pattern.

Innisfail overfly Mount Garnet, Georgetown, Croydon, Normanton to land at Karumba briefly for a fuel top up. On joining, I noted the wind sock was vertical, strange but the strip is now excellent in length, as I proved when I unintentionally landed upwind, finding the sock wrapped around the pole on arrival.

Onto Burketown looking for accommodation and a fuel top up, but the former was simply not available so out with the standby tent and into the survival pack extras. Yes the ground at Burketown airport is hard, but it got harder as I continued my journey. The landing here was pure crosswind with bite, where I should have taken the hint as landings remained that way for most occasions through the trip.

Early next day: Burketown to land at Hells Gate, a roadhouse between Doomadgee and Borroloola, which was right on the edge of the strip. The approach from the west needs to be angled to allow for the moderate rock formation right up to the fence, but the strip is wide with plenty of small stones to make things interesting. After a chat, nice cuppa and excellent piece of fruitcake, I pressed on to land at Borroloola. Just outside the parking area gate is a library with free internet. And just around the corner a servo with everything one could want except premium unleaded: that was another four or five klms away. But a gent took pity on me and provided a lift there and back, which was graciously accepted.

I proceeded on southwest to Cape Crawford, an interesting three road junction/pub on the net, but the wind gods were not happy with my intentions. It rumbled all the way at 6500ft for the 35min sector and worsened on decent. This is shallow canyon country and with no sock, I tried an approach from the south and was not impressed with the condition of that end of the strip. Hence a missed approach was in order with little altitude gain and an early right turn followed by a 270 deg turn and back into the approach. This was decidedly out of my hands, so I again aborted to take a course to my next destination at Daly Waters, just off the Stuart highway in the middle of the Territory. Unfortunately the choppy wind conditions had set in and

the 97 min sector seemed more like three days. Climbing did nothing to avert the repetitive unsettled streams that one encountered.

The old bomber strip at YDLW is 10,000 feet long and some 275ft wide and what a pleasant sight. Sitting in the aircraft after shut down, I felt I had been through a few rounds with Cassius Clay, so two nights were in order at this watering hole, and were just tops.

Two day later: YDLW south 22nm to meet the Buchanan Hwy to head west, to overfly Top Springs, Victoria River Downs to land at Kununurra. Unfortunately, the arrival here before descent was marred with thick smoke haze, making it necessary to descend early, to maintain perspective but miss the famous Lake Argyle, which was clearly visible on the GPS. Three day stay here included a day trip on the lake which was a high-light of the trip.

I managed to speak to many fliers here regarding the very choppy wind at low altitude, which were being experienced all over the Kimberly. The tourist jocks plough on, seeking hours for better days to come, but I decided to avoid this nuisance, so changed plans to miss some of the sights only available at low altitude.

Onward from YPKU to Drysdale Station where again I thought I had good information from the net and expected to be here a couple of days. I was greeted with a nasty choppy crosswind on arrival, early in the am, and then was informed the station doesn't do any of the tourist things anymore, just rough overnight stays with good showers and a bar with meals. I made the most of all four, but pressed on the following day to Kings Cascade, which was not flowing at the time. Again reasonable altitude was required to beat most of the chop, so onward to the outer parts of the coast, which is dotted with small islands and very scenic. The go here is to use seaplanes for the tourist, as there are virtually no land landing sites. The area is certainly pristine and devoid of any permanent people.

Next stop Cape Leveque, or the Kooljaman tourist resort. This is located on the southwest tip of King Sound, and indeed a very nasty location to fly aircraft. It has down drafts, up drafts, side drafts and rotor just to name a few without using colourful language. Make sure your control check "full and free" is completed before attempting to negotiate a landing. Unfortunately, there was no room at the inn, so after a good look around and forking out \$45 for a landing fee, I took off for a nice afternoon journey coastal, to Derby, and a short but excellent overnight. Derby has its own airport and in good nick as well, but most RPT aircraft use the Curtin base, as it allows all up weight with its longer runway. Unfortunately, it is 30 odd minutes by road from town whereas the local is only a few minutes.

Next morning it was onward to destination Broome, but knowing its best to beat the tower opening of 0830, I was off early to arrive at 0819, for a couple of excellent days venturing around this nicely laid out town. The tourist season was in full swing, but there was still plenty of rooms for all. Apparently in the wet season it is only occupied with locals and a few less of them as well.

Refreshed, I set out two days later, again earlier this time to beat the 0715 tower opening.

YBRM to land at Fitzroy Crossing for some breakfast. Then onward to overfly Caojebut, Margaret River to land at Halls Creek, and again another excellent overnight with services. Following morning I took on a challenge but was confident with the aircraft performance, to track east across the top of the Tanami desert, to overfly Kalkarindji and pick up the Buntine Hwy some time beforehand. Then north to Top Springs, where I rejoined my outward journey, and onward to Daly Waters for another overnight. The next day was my longest. Start-ing just before the sun was above the trees at 0700, I tracked east to overfly Cape Crawford, made a precautionary landing at Wollongorang Station to check all was well, which it was, then onwards to overfly Hells Gate, Bourketown, to land at Normanton and alight at 1520. Take away the time change of +30mins. The pub there was a welcome sight, and it was a toss up what came first, shower and clean clothes or a schooner. I grabbed a schooner and took it with me for a shower.

So far so good with one sector to go for home. The day dawned well but with a flukey wind in Normanton, but no rush, allow plenty of time for the forecast drizzle to clear off the southern tablelands and allow my passage. Take off was choppy, but all things were calm at 5500ft for an hour or so when about to overfly Croydon, and the chop caught up. Up to 7500 and subsequently to 9000 to remain in the smooth air, but BNE CTR had other ideas, with two close warnings on Georgetown, which was one of my alternates to

failing to continue to YIFL. I decided to land at YGTN to take stock of current weather condition, but the ride down to landing was full of the sort of excitement that I could well do without.

Unfortunately the forecast was for winds at 100/35 with a severe turbulence warning from Weipa to Valley of Lagoons up to 8000ft.

Right, the pub at Georgetown was the place to be. I booked in, rode out three days with no change in sight, and with Mighty Mouse securely tied down on the airport cables, I took the bus home to Cairns to carry on my requirements there, until I returned to Georgetown eight days later. There again, I had a nice relaxing overnight in the pub and set off at gentleman's hours on a perfect day, to overfly Mount Garnet for YIFL.

## Overview

This trip at first would seem to be a massive undertaking. However, from the start, I viewed it as a repetitive plan of short journeys. And taken in that light, the planning soon came together, one sector at a time, repeating the same requirements.

## Considerations in hindsight.

I would consider taking some company on a similar journey. I don't think the size of my aircraft would allow for any two people to travel over such distances in remote areas with due consideration to items such as endurance and fuel availability. Taking another aircraft would cover other requirements as well and would be a better solution. It would certainly be much different up and down the east coast for example. Company away from the flying would also be handy but that would depend on the individual.

Booked accommodation: this is difficult; if you want to remain uncommitted like myself, then you risk not getting suitable accommodation where and when you want it. Yes a standby tent is handy but it and its extras take up room and weight, and generally the ground is hard.

Communication: this is another item that needs to be better organised in remote areas in particular. You not only need a phone company that is available in these areas if at all, but you then need the specific operating system on your phone to use that company. I actually checked this out before I left and I subsequently found it worked where it shouldn't more times than it didn't work where it should. Whether its via mob phone or direct internet access, a weather forecast is a vital must have before departure. The net is available in most civilised places and for a dollar or two you can get the general BOM info, the aviation BOM info, NOTAMS and forecast off NAIPS, all simple and no cost. If you practice the searching at home you can easily get all that is required within 15min use of a reasonably fast computer.....I did it often.

## Stats

Innisfail to Broome 1594 flight plan nm

Broome to Innisfail 1454 flight plan nm

Total distance 3048 nm

Total hours flown 40.6 hours

Total fuel used 392 Litres

Total fuel cost \$824

Total beer consumed ????? Litres

**To the would be cross country flyer, dare, but prepare..... well.**