

2005 Harmon Trophy Nomination

Andy Cayton
4326 Wilma Edwards Road
Black Creek, GA 31308
912-858-2529

This nomination is a result of Andy Cayton's U.S. National and World Record breaking flight, the longest solo flight ever in a hot air balloon, and what he has gone through to achieve these milestones.

On February 28 to March 1, 2005 Andy flew his specially built AX-8 hot air balloon for 16 hours, 34 minutes and 1066.2 miles breaking both the U.S. National Records and also the World Records (pending) for distance in the hot air balloon subclasses AX-8 and AX-9. As previously mentioned, this flight is also the longest solo flight ever in a hot air balloon.

Andy is from Savannah, Georgia and had to first travel to Sioux Falls, SD to stage the balloon and then later to Minot, ND for the launch. The average altitude Andy flew was 17,200; Andy actually spent approximately 12 hours around 18,000 feet where the temperature was -15° F. Because Andy was needed to be the crew chief as well as pilot, he was very busy prior to the launch. This extra work load caused him to inadvertently launch without a very important piece of equipment; his cold weather jacket. Andy was very cold during the flight but never quit. To add to the difficulty of flying a precision flight at altitude at night, his altitude auto pilot system failed to operate the burner; therefore Andy had to manually fly every aspect of the flight. If you were able to look at the barograph trace of the flight, you would see what a remarkable job he did of holding level flight at this cold altitude, even at night.

If the before mentioned challenges were not enough, while at altitude his oxygen prematurely ran out and Andy was forced to descend earlier than planned. His previous military training as a special operations helicopter pilot certainly helped him get through all of these difficult challenges.

Other Contributing Factors

Andy has demonstrated a 'Never Give Up' attitude. Andy has medical challenges, and has had setbacks that might cause others to give up.

Cancer:

Andy has cancer, and for this attempt could not consider a flight during the prime month of January because he was again taking chemo treatments. When considering the physical challenges Andy had to go through during his flight, the effects of his cancer and treatments certainly make his accomplishment even more impressive.

Previous Disappointments:

In 2000, his AX-6 world record hot air balloon envelope was destroyed by fire in a launch accident.

In 2003, with a new AX-6 world record envelope, Andy put together another attempt for distance. While he made a good attempt, it was unsuccessful.

In 2004, with redesigned and custom built equipment, Andy and team traveled to Minot, ND for an AX-6 duration record attempt. Shortly after launch, while in flight, the envelope suffered a catastrophic failure and a potentially fatal hard landing followed. Andy was saved from serious injury because the heavy loaded balloon came down into deep snow, which softened the impact.

Still he never got discouraged and quit. All these failures were learning experiences and Andy used them to change, modify and improve both his equipment and also his flight plan. Andy stayed with the project and in 2005 his persistence was finally rewarded.

Submitted by:

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Andy Cayton Record Flight Photographs



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Citation

Andy Cayton broke the U.S. National and World distance records in the AX-8 and AX-9 subclasses, and also flew the longest solo flight ever in a hot air balloon.

2005 Montgolfier Diploma Nomination

Best Performance – Hot Air

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