



Bill Cloninger

Notable – Accomplishments/Contributions, Record

7780 Bainbridge Road
Chagrin Falls, OH 44023

Bill Cloninger is a Hot Air Balloon pilot with over 1,800 hours as pilot-in-command. He received his pilot training in California in 1990. In 2017, Bill retired from active flying after a 27 year career of accident free flying.

Bill has been active in the Northeast Ohio Balloon Pilot's Association serving as President for three terms, 1995, 1996 and 2004. He has chaired the NOBPA Safety Seminar in 1996, 1997 and 1998. He is a lifetime member of NOBPA, the BFA, and the Lighter-Than- Society.

As a Flight Instructor, Bill has trained 17 pilots to license, all passing their Practical Test on the first try. He has taught a very successful ground school that preparing students to take their Private and Commercial Pilot Written Examinations. He is a frequent speaker at Balloon Safety Seminars across the US.

In 1997, Bill received a Balloon Federation of America Directors Award for his efforts in promoting Balloon Pilot Safety and Education.

In 2001, Bill lead the NightStar Project team, which targeted 4 US and World Records, setting three: general category AX-5 duration; feminine category AX-5 duration and distance. He personally set the World and US National Duration Records in an AX-5.

Since 2002, Bill has organized a Longjump Flight with a group of Northeast Ohio Pilots to encourage participation in the BFA's Longjump Challenge. That flight was the first of a series of such distance flights. Each year the flight has met and surpassed the minimum distance goals set by the pilots. Through the 2006 season, the "Ohio Group", as they have become known by the BFA Longjump Judges, has had seven category winning flights. This record of consistent group success is unmatched in the history of the BFA Longjump Challenge

Since his retirement from active flying, Bill has served as event staff on several competitive balloon events each year. He is also an avid bicycle racer competing in numerous age-group time trials annually.

In his professional career, Bill is a Senior Investigator in KeyBank's Anti-Money Laundering Investigation Unit based in Cleveland OH, and is active in the leadership of the Association of Anti-Money Laundering Specialists (ACAMS), a world-wide association of over 80,000 financial crime professionals worldwide.

See additional pictures from the NightStar Project record setting flight on the following pages



Inflation



Sunrise



In Flight



Landing



Flight Crew for February 9-10, 2001 World Record Flight. From left to right: Orv Olivier, NAA Observer; Bill Cloninger, Pilot; Jerry Kest, Primary Chase Driver; Debby Young, Crew Chief; Pat Karl, Radio Wizard; Chuck Holt, Secondary Chase Driver; Ronnie Stroup, Radio Wizard; Mike Leimbach, Backup NAA Observer.

The Following biography information is from the official program of the BFA 2008 National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky



BILL CLONINGER

Basic Data:

- Pilot since June 1990
- Ratings Held:
- Lighter-Than-Air Free Balloon
- Commercial Pilot
- Pilot in Command Hours: 1,280

Awards & Recognition:

- 1995 NOBPA Club Champion

- 1997 BFA Director's Award
- 2001 World and US Records- AX5 General Category Duration 12 hours 21 minutes
- Montgolfier Diploma Nominee

Club Affiliations:

- Northeast Ohio Balloon Pilot's Association, President, Treasurer
- Pacific Coast Aeronauts, member
- NABA, member
- BFA, Chairman Crew Achievement Program, Finance Committee Member
- NAA, member

Most Memorable Flights:

- World Record Flight Feb. 9-10, 2001, launched at 8:20pm on a full moonlight night and flew through the night into the next morning in sub-zero temperatures in South Dakota. A spectacularly beautiful flight, setting new US and World Records.
- August 1993, flight over Niagara Falls.
- Annual Winter 'Longjump' flights – in 2002, 2003 and 2004. Has flown over 100 miles each flight over the winter landscape.

Commercial Activities:

- Owns LTA Aviation, Inc. Great Lakes Distributor for Aerostar Hot Air Balloons,
- Operates a traveling ground school which prepares students for the FAA written examinations.
- Operates Amish Country Balloon Tours, a balloon ride operation in Chagrin Falls, OH
- Trains several new balloon pilots each year.

The Harmon Trophy nomination for Bill Cloninger is on the following pages

**Harmon Aeronaut (Ballooning)
Trophy Nomination**

Nominee:

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Citation:

William Cloninger led the NightStar Project which made three attempts and set three World Records within 37 days in 2001. This outstanding team effort is unprecedented in balloon record history.

Justification:

William (Bill) Cloninger created and lead the NightStar Project which targeted four US and World Records to be attempted during the winter of 2001. The project envisioned a campaign of three attempts to be flown by multiple pilots in a single Aerostar AX-5 balloon. This team concept is unique in hot air balloon record attempts. Of the six hot air balloon record attempt flights flown in the US in 2001, the NightStar Project made three of them. Two were successful setting three US and World Records. The records achieved are:

AX5 General Category Duration – 12 hours 21 minutes
flown February 9 –10 by William Cloninger, Pilot

AX5 Feminine Category Distance – 288 Km
AX5 Feminine Category Duration - 9 hours 32 minutes
flown February 26 by Deborah Young, Pilot

The aircraft featured a number of significant innovations including,

- a double walled envelope design utilizing fabric specifically engineered for this application,
- a prototype light weight burner system

- an innovative automated position reporting system (APRS) which enabled real time position reporting of the balloon and chase vehicles accessible via the internet.

The three World Record Attempts occurred over a 37 day period from January 19 to February 26. In order to mount such an ambitious mission schedule, a large team of over 50 volunteers were recruited.

The attempts all took place in the upper midwest, over 800 miles from the NightStar Team's base in Northeast Ohio. The Team's equipment was staged in Sioux Falls, SD. Each attempt involved travel through some of the worst winter weather of the season to mount the mission.

The 2001 NightStar campaign envisioned three flights. General category duration attempt first to test the equipment with Bill Cloninger as pilot. This flight was to be followed by a General Category Distance attempted to be piloted by Bill Cloninger. Then finally a dual record Feminine Category flight was planned, to be piloted by myself, Deborah (Debby) Young.

Attempt 1. January 19, 2001 – AX-5 General Category Duration

The Team traveled to Sioux Falls, SD on January 18. The 16 usual hour drive from Northeast Ohio took 19 hours due to white-out conditions, blowing snow and black ice encountered in southern Minnesota. Meteorologist Lou Billones informed us that the flight window had moved up. Now the optimum launch time was 4:30pm instead of midnight. This meant that almost all of the flight would be at night, a very cold dark night as there was no moon that night with sub-zero temperatures. Launch was accomplished on time at 4:31pm. With the temperature at a high of -4°F. The flight was going as planned until it was terminated after a powerline strike at approximately 9:30pm. Pilot Bill Cloninger was uninjured and the aircraft sustained only minor damage to one suspension cable.

This unsuccessful attempt record attempt was very successful in being a “shake-down” flight for the aircraft and pilot under record attempt loading. The next day the Team had the aircraft inspected by the manufacturer and the equipment was left with Aerostar for flight turnaround servicing.

The Team arrived in Northeast Ohio in the early morning of January 21 after an uneventful drive home.

We went back on Weather Watch on February 1. Our equipment was ready to and we had modified many of our operational procedures to reduce pilot workload and distraction. The second attempt would be another duration attempt and we decided to forego the General Category Distance attempt for this season.

Attempt No.2 – February 9 & 10 – General Category Duration

On February 5, Meteorologist Lou Billones identified a duration flight opportunity for the day February 10. We mobilized the Team to travel to Sioux Falls on February 8. The drive out was delayed 6 hours en route with ice, freezing rain, followed by blizzard conditions from Des Moines to Sioux Falls. We finally arrived in Sioux Falls at 4:30am February 9. Lou Billones informed us that the flight period had moved up to that evening with the optimal (and only) launch period from 8:00 to 8:30pm. It was to be another night flight, this time with a full moon. There was considerable concern whether or not the powerline strike would affect Bill's ability to execute this mission.

Bill Cloninger launched the NightStar balloon at approximately 8:20 pm with temperatures at -8° F from Lincoln County Airport, Tea, SD. He flew through the night into the next morning, landing at a few minutes before 9:00am with 20 mph surface winds and -18° F surface temperature. He flew a near perfect flight, in spite of much adversity including bitter cold and burner problems which negatively impacted fuel consumption. This mission was successful. Worries about the impact of the powerline strike two weeks earlier on Bill's mental state were unfounded.

The aircraft was again inspected by Aerostar and left with them for turnaround servicing. The Team arrived home, happy and tired, on February 11.

Attempt No.3 – February 26 – Feminine Category Distance and Duration

We went on Weather Watch on February 20, 10 days after the last attempt. The turnaround of the aircraft is behind schedule however, Aerostar committed to having it ready when we need it.

Lou Billones alerts us to a potential flight period for the Feminine Distance and Duration attempt on Monday, February 26, from Des Moines IA. We travel on Saturday to Des Moines with our drivers going on to Sioux Falls (through another blizzard) to pick up the aircraft and return to Des Moines on Sunday.

The optimal launch period remains the same – at sunrise, but the place area keeps changing. We finally commit to Ottumwa IA as snow and low clouds are forecast for Des Moines. At 6:52am after inspecting some damage to the inner wall fabric, I launched the NightStar balloon and flew for 288 km in 9 hour and 32 minutes landing near LaSalle IL. setting two new records.

On this attempt, Bill Cloninger managed the ground operations, including the chase, and coordinated with our Flight Control Center, as I did for him on the two prior attempts.

Conclusion

The NightStar Project Team set three of its four targeted World Records during the 2001 campaign. This truly remarkable team achievement is truly unique in the recent history of hot balloon record flight. The NightStar Project Team mounted an unprecedented

three attempts in 37 days utilizing two pilots and one aircraft. This outstanding achievement was due to the inspiration and leadership of Bill Cloninger. Therefore, please accept my nomination of William J. Cloninger, for the Harmon Aeronaut (Ballooning) Trophy, in recognition of his efforts in making the NightStar Project the most outstanding international achievement in aerostation for 2001.

Respectfully submitted:

Deborah L. Young