

The Great British Long Jump 2025

Name of Pilot – Richard Penney

Name of Co-pilot – Oliver Penney

Name of Balloon – Ultramagic Yeshko

Type and size of Balloon – M105 Eco

Date of flight 30th OCTOBER 2025

Propane at start 5 tanks 280 liters

Propane at finish 2 tanks 60 liters

Starting place – Haselbury Hall Crewkerne Somerset

Landing place Scupholme, Louth, Lincs LN11 7EH

Start time 0800

Duration of flight 8hr 20min

Straight line distance claimed 211 miles.

Average speed – 25.30 mph

Maximum height flown 10,314feet.

Wind direction – varying southwest, south.

**Witnesses to take-off – Sam Bennett
(inc. tel. no. & email) – 07727 138639**

**Witnesses to landing – Alison Robinson – Greens Farm LN11 7EH.
(inc. tel no. & email)
01507 327918**

Length of landing drag – 50 yards

Signature of Pilot – Richard Penney

GBLJ 2025

PLANNING

It's been a few years since I attempted a Long Jump, the last was with Jonathan Harris. Soon after he had checked out, you can read his excellent report on the GBLJ website.

I've always enjoyed long distance balloon flights. There is something about the planning and excitement of the unknown ahead. Your mindset is completely different from a normal flight when you check out the gradient winds and 25 knots at 2000 feet seems a little slow!

Having spent the summer in Namibia flying for Namib Balloon Sky Safaris (A wonderful experience but that's another story) I hadn't done much UK flying and was keen to push our boundaries a bit and do something equally special here.

My Son Oliver (also a pilot) is always keen for an adventure, despite this we both had work commitments until the last week of October, so our window of opportunity was small.

There's no doubt with more accurate modern weather forecasts (apps) you can plan better, however you still can't beat a 1/2 mill Air chart on the dining room table for proper flight planning and to plot a track.

Living in the southern half of the UK and with limited time (and lots of airspace) it is important to plan carefully to gain the most without having to drive to Scotland for example.

As the last week of October approached, we scanned the week ahead and could only see 2 potential slots on the 29th and 30th October.

Focusing on the 29th first we could see a good possibility of a good track from South Wales east/northeast with reasonable speed towards East Anglia.

This is a good track and I've done it before. The airspace is clear south of Birmingham and north of Luton and also allows for flight levels up to and exceeding FL10 in certain areas.

We had secured a good launch site with our friends Jonathan and Sue Dyer in South Wales and our 29th plan was all systems go until the latest forecasts the day before showed the rain front clearing much slower than originally forecast. After much deliberation and checking out every available forecast we deemed it too risky. We'd be flying into rain and low cloud, so we reluctantly cancelled it.

With only 2 days window left, our eyes turned to the 30th which prior had looked unflyable but suddenly showed a possibility, albeit a different track.

More studying forecasts and our trustworthy air chart, Yeovil in Somerset seemed a logical starting point with a track north/northeast dependent on flight levels.

A few last-minute calls to secure a launch site in the Yeovil area, Hugo Hall kindly offered a site in nearby Crewkerne and trusty Crew Sam Bennett stepped up to the mark.

We are very fortunate to have a unique Balloon for such adventures. Our Ultramagic M105 has double layer fabric, and it offers amazing fuel economy, along with a lightweight Tekno bottom end we don't have to carry the obligatory 11 cylinders for such a duration. In fact, we opted for 4 x 6 ltr and 1 x 40 ltr. Not much more than you would use on a standard flight in a 105 balloon.

THE FLIGHT

We planned to launch at 0800 and we took off at exactly that. A call to RAF Yeovilton the day before confirmed they weren't open until 10am, we passed directly over the airfield soon after takeoff.



Our Ultramagic M105 Eco inflating in Crewkerne Somerset

There was some patchy low-level cloud, we climbed quickly to 5000ft which gave us a perfect track northeast but between Bristol airspace to our west and Salisbury Danger area to our west.



RAF Yeovilton Soon after taking off.

We were not transponder equipped, and while it is possible to enter some airspace it's best to try and avoid if possible.

Despite that we kept a listening watch with Bristol. The weather was due to deteriorate as the day went on from the west, so the plan was to fly east as much as possible so by the afternoon when landing the winds on the surface would be lower.

After about an hour's flight we were flying past Longleat, the site of many a long tether with the Longleat Lion!!



Longleat House is the site of many great balloon meets.

We needed more of an Easterly track to achieve our plan so once over the M4 and in open airspace we climbed to FL10 and turned to a heading just to the North of RAF Brize Norton and heading directly for north of Oxford and Northampton.

This was perfect for us and as per the forecast the speed was around 30 kts. It was now freezing cold and there was snow blowing around us. We needed our extra layers of clothing and hats!! The snow was virga from high level cloud, we speed through it, there were no reports of rain on the ground and the visibility remained good. A unique fun experience!!

Once overhead the M40 and Brackley the most obvious landmark was the controversial HS2 sweeping across the British Countryside changing the landscaper forever.



HS2 construction - London to Birmingham near Brackley

The speed and direction were very stable, and we enjoyed our Marks and Spencer sandwiches and snacks. We were soon overhead on the Famous Silverstone race track.

This was perfect to us and amazingly on track for a fly past of the new HQ of Ultramagic UK near Towcester.

A quick call to Chris Freeman and Matt Rate, and all the local crew came out to give us a wave. Not that we could see them!!

Soon after we crossed directly over Northampton and over the Racecourse, the site of another well attended great summer Balloon event.

Our track was stable and direct to Peterborough at 30 kts which was fine except we were on course for the Wash and limited land before the sea, thus cutting our distance short.

We opted to fly on to the south of Wittering MATZ and as soon as we cleared to the east of the MATZ we descended from FL80 to around 2000 ft to gain more northerly direction up the east coast.



Quick selfie somewhere, happy with our progress

A quick weather check with RAF Wittering confirmed the winds on the surface were 140 deg at 5 knots.

The plan worked well, although the speed lower was less than we wanted at around 20kts but we had plenty of fuel and so could afford to ride it out. We were happy the actual surface winds being still light.

Our track was great and soon the MATZ of Coningsby was on track. We really didn't want to go too high and lose our northerly track and end up on the coast.

After our MATZ penetration was approved (at 2000ft) they called and asked if we could facilitate an altitude change to 3000ft. We obliged and maintained this level as requested.

Soon after 2 Typhoon bombers passed below us. It happened so quickly, and the noise was deafening but an absolute highlight of the flight!!

It was now 1600 hrs., we had been airborne for 8 hours and our snacks has all but gone! At 1615 we descended to a low level to start looking for a suitable landing site.

True to form despite the surface winds being light all day, the weather front had caught up now and the winds were around 12 to 15kts on the surface.

We had fuel to continue onto Grimsby and beyond but sadly we would run out of daylight plus our bladders couldn't hold anymore.

At 1620 we landed in a really nice grass field which was dry and no fences and a 50 meter drag.



2 happy pilots after 8 hours 20 mins airborne

It started to rain during pack up, we had timed it perfectly.

Nothing in this report mentions Sam who has single handedly crewed and driven for us and miraculously arrived less than 5 minutes after we landed – top bloke!!



Top Crewman and PUT, Sam Bennett

Not only that he'd jet washed the vehicles en-route and fixed my Phone holder and clock.

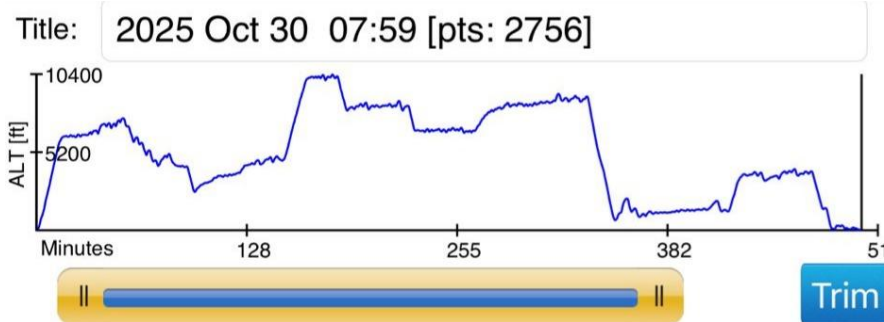
Mrs. Robinson, the landowner, was very welcoming and couldn't quite believe we had arrived from Somerset!

Once packed up it was time to head for home. Quite depressing when you set the sat Nav and it says 4.5 hours and 250 miles.

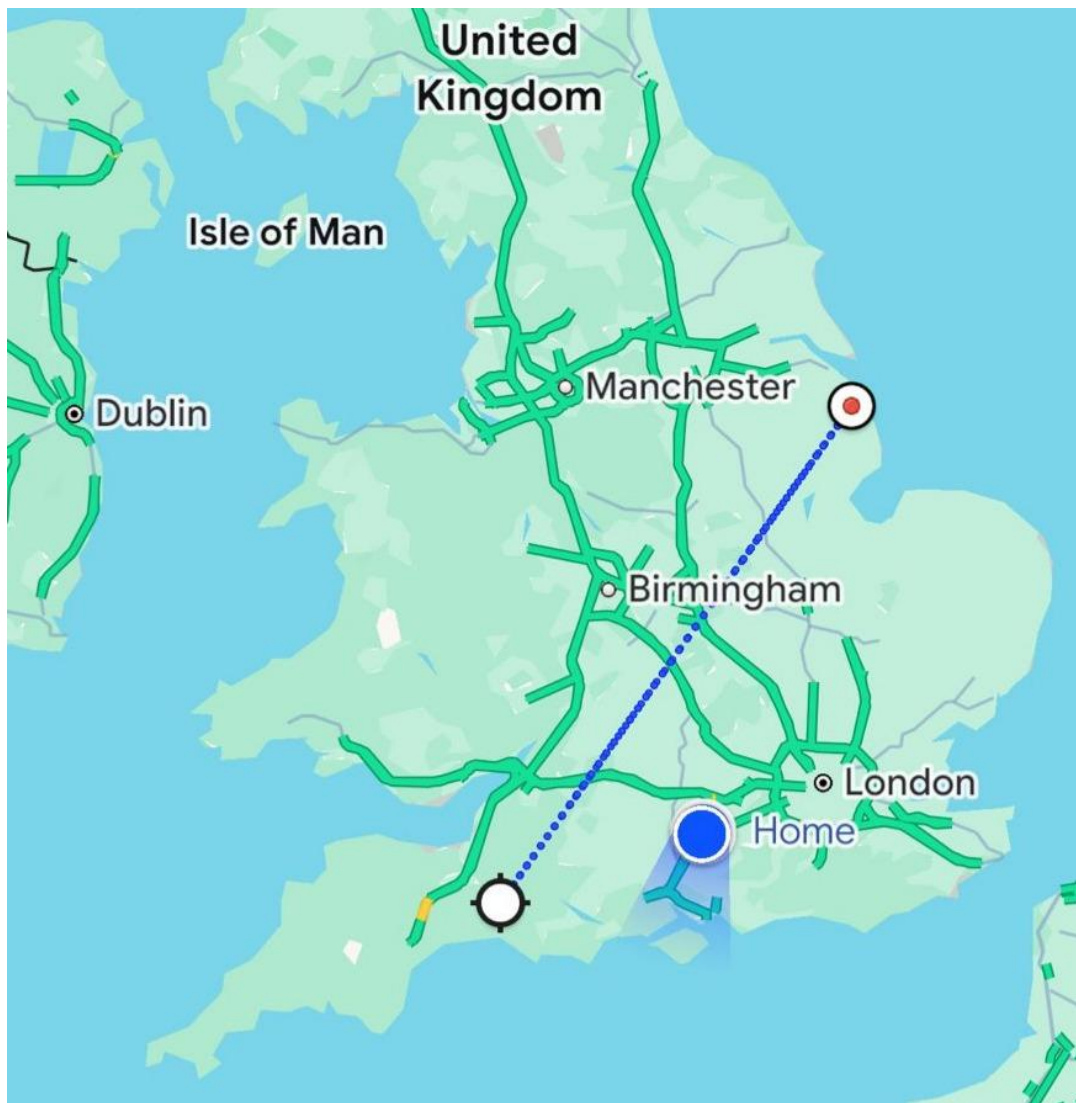
Oliver and I would like to thank everyone that supported us on our adventure, but most of all Sam, who drove over 600 miles in a day. He's booked for 2026 in case you're wondering!!

As a side note if you are ever considering a Long Jump do it!! They take a lot planning but are really rewarding. It's not about the winning but the taking part and best of all it improves your planning and flying skills.

Go for it!



Actual flight track



Straight line flight track

Richard and Oliver Penney
G YSHK
Ultramagic.co.uk

