

## Orienteering at 670kph

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This is an Orienteering story with a bit of a difference. It's a story which takes place in a far-off land called Southofthebombayhills. It involves excitement, cunning, deceit, and a bit of good old fashioned route choice.

It all started on a fine day in Ohakea. The course planner had set the course months ago and being a generous sort of chap had allowed me to mark my own map two days earlier. The course didn't seem too difficult to look at, but as always there were many places providing the potential to trip and fall. At 0830 it was time for the pre-race brief. The chief controller and technical advisor was conducting the briefing and as I entered the room, I observed that I was the only one present.

The brief began.

'Just relax and remember although I will be behind you for the entire course I am only there to observe. All I am looking for is good navigational technique and safety throughout' and ended with 'See you for start in 5 minutes'. Five minutes, what about time to warm up, stretch, have a cup of coffee? Just enough time to go and put on my special race kit. Specially designed and custom fitted for this type of race - my race kit was a stunning shade of olive green with pockets and zips and a strange looking hose attachment on one side. After squeezing into my gear, I ventured outside to inspect the vehicle that would be my means of transport around the course. After a thorough 3,2,1 inspection (3 wheels, 2 wings, and 1 engine) I climbed aboard my Aermacchi Fighter Jet and waited for the checking officer.

The course I was about to do was slightly different from your standard Orienteering course. Instead of the fastest time, the object was to complete the course as close to the planned time as possible (+/- 5 seconds is normally acceptable). Not all controls had to be visited on the way to the final control and the result was not a win / lose situation but instead a pass / fail which could result in the end of a career. Enough of the rules, on with the race.

Now I have heard complaints before about 5 or even 10-minute walks to the starting area. The journey to my starting area was a quick 150-mile journey to Gisborne (about 18 minutes), and no guarantee that I would be able to start once I got there due to bad weather. The journey there was relatively uneventful, and the weather was fine with just a strong north westerly blowing. A slight holdup due to a train crossing the runway (not so unusual for those who know Gisborne) and then just a little further to the start.

The funny thing with these courses is that the start is marked as just another circle, the penultimate control is marked as a square, and the finish is marked as a triangle???. I sighted the start, descended to 250ft, accelerated to 300kts (about 550km/hr), and prepared to start my watch. 3, 2, 1, HACK, we were off. The first leg was from a place called Young Nicks Head to the edge of Lake Waikaremoana and was supposed to take about 8 minutes.

After about two minutes the instructor's voice comes over the intercom 'For practice, you hear two large thumps near the nose of the aircraft'. Immediately I remove the navigation chip and insert the emergency chip into my skull. 'Right, suspect bird strike near the front of the aircraft. Looking for any visual signs of damage.'



'You see the remains of a bird stuck to the nose of the aircraft and what looks like some blood and guts near the engine intake.'

This spells bad news because the instructor has just given me a clue that at any stage, he will close the throttle and I will have to glide the aircraft to land. I started a climb and turned back to Gisborne. Sure enough without much delay the throttle was closed and I was forced to make a landing in this now rapidly sinking brick. Once the instructor was happy that we would safely land he told me to carry on with the flight.

However, I now had a major problem. I was back where I started, the stopwatch was still running and was already showing five minutes. Time to start thinking. I did some quick maths and realised that to catch up my time I needed to go 60kts faster for 25 minutes. This would then only give me a few minutes to go before the target to fine tune the timing and also it would mean I was now travelling at 670km/hr, 250ft above the ground. Was that going to be a little fast for my orienteering skills? Only time would tell, but now wasn't the ideal time to be testing it!

I made my way back on to track and continued to head towards Lake Waikaremoana. My frequent timing checks were indicating that I was catching up time at about the predicted rate, so I decided to continue with the correction. At the first control I turned left and headed south noting that the fuel was getting close to minimum required. Things were going smoothly but a large lake is easy enough to find and the next controls were a lot more difficult.

Halfway along the next leg I spotted a good handrail. A river that led all the way, all I had to do was keep it on my right shoulder and I couldn't miss the control. Amazingly the instructor decided that I probably needed a bit of time to sort myself out and so let me go all the way to the control without incident. That would be the end of Mister Nice Guy.

Over the control I turned left again, noted the time and fuel, and headed to the next point which was 8 miles east of Waipukurau. Things were looking up - I was catching time and so far, I wasn't lost. Then a voice from the back 'You have been informed by AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control System) that there is a SAM (Surface to Air Missile) Site at Waipukurau with a range of 10 miles.'



'Right, ahhh....' stalling for time 'ahhh.....' realizing I don't have any time 'Right then, what we are going to do is, ahhh....., my plan is' the cogs start turning 'at time two zero I'm going to turn on to the next heading and travel for 3 minutes paralleling my next track then turn back onto this track until time two seven forty at which point I will re-intercept the next track.'

'Okay, are you sure that will work?' the tone suggesting that I had missed something.

It had to work. I would be traveling the same distance inside of the course therefore not losing any more precious time and avoiding the SAM Site by at least 10 miles.

At 17 minutes the penny dropped, and I knew what the instructor had been questioning. I was behind time so if I turned at 20 minutes, I was going to pass too close to Waipukurau. @#\*&#!!!

'Turning now.' I whimpered and explained the problem to an all-knowing instructor who I'm sure was enjoying this. The problems were compounding because now I wasn't sure where I had turned, I wasn't sure how long to travel, and when I turned back to intercept the course, I would not know how long till I would cross the course. Things were looking less than flash.

I decided to use the WAG (Wild Ass Guess) technique. After three more minutes I turned back on track and started looking for good relocation features. While my brain was working overtime trying to read a map at close to 700km/hr, I somehow managed to notice that the fuel was getting low, very low. So now I was trying to find out where I was, when I was, and if I could get there. By looking at the map I could tell that I was within 60 miles of base and referring to my flight reference cards I knew that by climbing to 17 000ft I could get home with only 200 kgs of fuel.

Not exactly the best way of doing the job but desperate times call for desperate measures. After explaining this to the instructor I decided that I may as well turn back on track because I would rather be inside the course than travelling further outside.

All I had to do now was find where I was and work out how to get to the control. I looked around and spotted a long ridge to my right. There was only one feature that that could be, and it was the right distance away. Then I spotted a road running parallel to me on my left. If it was the right one, then it would take me to the control. I still had enough fuel, but it was getting low, however once past the next control I would be within 40 miles and would only need 170kgs of fuel. I spotted the control and had a quick look at my watch. I was going to be ahead of time! I pulled back the throttle and started to decelerate to 300 knots.

Turning at the control I noted the fuel and time. It looked like the fuel was going to last but now I was ahead of time by 10 seconds and would have to make another correction. There was only one more chance to correct my timing before the final control so my correction would have to be good because there would only be 1 minute 20 to make it in. The instructor was keeping quiet, and I was feeling reasonably smug about the fact that I had managed to get back on the rails. I identified the feature I was going to use as a timing check. Hoping that the timing was under control I looked at my stopwatch. It had stopped. Not just stopped it had gone completely blank. Thanks Casio. What was I going to do? Lie. 'Timing looks good I'll keep this speed to the end.' No point giving the game away just yet.

There was the final control in sight. I pointed it out to the instructor and headed straight towards it. Once overhead I immediately pulled into a steep climb and kept climbing to 15 000ft. If we ran out of fuel now, we would at least be able to glide home. There was still the problem though of the stopped stopwatch. I decided to bluff 'Not bad, only 5 seconds off at the target.'

'I had you spot on actually.'

'Oh, I must have looked at my watch late.'

I think the instructor must have been impressed because he let me get back home without further incident and gave me the top mark on the course.

Afterwards I was talking to Bim Jarr (*aka Jim Barr – Anthony's father*) who had been standing on the bridge that was my final control. He told me how impressed he was with the way that I had come in so low and then pulled up quickly as if I was dropping bombs. I agreed that it was pretty cool because I didn't have the heart to tell him that I was trying not to crash.

Anthony Barr

