

# NAA NEWS

National Aeronautic Association



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**October 10, 2002**

Contact: Nicole Regele, 703-527-0226  
nregele@naa-usa.org

---

## **Cross-Country Balloonist Wins Harmon Trophy**

A record-setting balloon trip from New Mexico to Georgia has won Richard Abruzzo the National Aeronautic Association's Harmon Aeronaut Trophy for 2001.

Widely recognized in balloon-racing circles, Abruzzo spent 80 hours and 18 minutes--a world duration record--alone in an AA-6 gas balloon in February 2001 as he drifted from Albuquerque, NM, to Crawfordville, GA--a trip of special importance to him because the record he set broke a previous record established by his own father, Benjamin Abruzzo, in 1980.

"Richard's trip demonstrates the precise planning, skill and stamina required of gas balloon pilots when they attempt such records," said Don Koranda, President of NAA. "To go that long in that type of balloon is certainly a remarkable feat that all his fellow pilots will quickly acknowledge."

On the second day of the flight, as he passed over the Midwest, Abruzzo says time "passed slowly, and something that I was unprepared for were the emotions that the flight was stirring within me. With only myself to talk to, I found that my mind tended to reminisce about good times as well as difficult times. The flight's direct connection to my late father was flooding me with emotions that don't normally surface. I had not expected such feelings to arise and struggled to maintain my composure."

Abruzzo reports he was able to get short snatches of sleep on the second day but was awakened by "what I believe was a train passing underneath on my final nap of the day."

At the 76-hour mark (his father's record), Abruzzo says fatigue was definitely a problem. "As the afternoon wore on and the warm Georgia sunshine made me lethargic, I sang songs and even did pull-ups on the load ring in order to stay sharp for the coming landing."

The flight required four calendar days to complete: Abruzzo took off just before dawn on February 16, 2001 and landed around sunset on February 19, 2001.

The Harmon Trophy was created in 1926 by Clifford B. Harmon, a philanthropist with a special interest in aviation as a means to promote international understanding and harmony. He began by awarding prizes to an aviator, an aviatrix, and a balloonist. Much later, in 1969, the Harmon Trophy Trust added

a fourth category: astronauts. Today, the National Aeronautic Association administers the program and continues the tradition of naming winners in the ballooning category.

NAA is a non-profit, membership organization devoted to fostering opportunities to participate fully in aviation activities and to promoting public understanding of the importance of aviation and space flight to the United States.