

NAA NEWS

National Aeronautic Association



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Transcontinental flight wins balloonist second Harmon Aeronaut Trophy

Richard Abruzzo makes record-breaking flight across the U.S.

Arlington, VA – The National Aeronautic Association awarded Richard Abruzzo the Harmon Aeronaut Trophy for his 2003 solo transcontinental gas balloon flight across the United States.

Abruzzo's flight from San Diego, Calif., to Waverly, Ga., earned him the trophy, awarded to the year's most outstanding balloonist. His flight also set a ballooning distance record for balloon class and size AA-6 and AA-7, traveling 2,074 miles and breaking a record set in 1983. His balloon is a 37,000 cubic-foot non-pressurized helium-filled homebuilt balloon.

"This outstanding flight clearly demonstrates how careful preflight planning, weather forecasting and piloting skills must come together to accomplish a difficult and highly prized goal," said NAA President Don Koranda.

Abruzzo, a 40-year-old from Albuquerque, N.M., began his historic flight from Torrey Pines Gliderport on February 2. The flight's success was in jeopardy almost from the beginning--slow winds stalled the trip over central Mexico and in Texas. There was also a danger of Abruzzo being blown into the Gulf of Mexico without a place to land.

Despite the possible pitfalls, which included navigating through restricted air space in several states, Abruzzo landed on February 5. The trip took 73 hours—or just over three days—and carried him through two countries and seven states.

Abruzzo also won the Harmon Trophy in 2001 for setting a world duration record, flying for 80 hours, 18 minutes. He broke a 21-year-old record held by his father, Ben. He has also won the America's Challenge Gas Balloon Race on four occasions and was on the first team to fly a balloon from North America to Africa (1992).

The Harmon Trophy was created in 1926 by Clifford B. Harmon, a philanthropist who used aviation as a means to promote international understanding and harmony. Originally, the trophy was awarded annually to the world's outstanding aviator, aviatrix and aeronaut (balloon or dirigible pilot); in 1969, a fourth category, astronauts, was added. Today, NAA 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. For more information on NAA and its award and recognition programs, visit www.naa-usa.org.