

Perlan Glider Crosses 62,000 Feet over Patagonia

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The Airbus Perlan Mission 2 recently achieved a glide above a pressure altitude of more than 62,000 feet, thanks to stratospheric mountain waves in El Calafate, Argentina. While pending official validation, it is anticipated that the newly reached altitude marks a gliding altitude world record. The Perlan 2 glider is pressurized and capable of soaring up to 90,000 feet. The initiative behind the mission is to fly an engineless glider to the edge of space to support high-altitude flight, weather, and climate change research.

Jim Payne and Morgan Sandercock piloted the recent mission and passed the Armstrong Line—a point in the atmosphere above which an unprotected human's blood would boil if the aircraft were to lose pressurization—during the flight. To reach such a high altitude, El Calafate was selected as a suitable location as rising air currents around the area can reach more than 100,000 feet for short periods each year.

“This is a tremendous moment for all the volunteers and sponsors of Airbus Perlan Mission 2 who have been so dedicated to making our nonprofit aerospace initiative a reality,” said Ed Warnock, CEO of the Perlan project. “Our victory today, and whatever other milestones we achieve this year, are a testament to a pioneering spirit of exploration that runs through everyone on the project and through the organizations that support us.”

The Perlan 2 was built in Oregon and is based in Minden, Nevada. The glider features a carbon-fiber capsule with a passive cabin pressurization system. This system is highly efficient and eliminates the need for heavy and high-power consuming compressors. Additionally, a closed-loop rebreather system in the Perlan 2 uses only oxygen metabolized by the crew. A wave visualization system depicts rising and sinking air in the cockpit.

The Perlan 2 does not affect the temperature or chemistry of the air surrounding the glider, allowing it to be a highly suitable platform for atmospheric research. Flights for the Perlan 2 will continue as weather and winds permit through mid-September.

“Innovation is a buzzword in aerospace today, but Perlan truly embodies the kind of bold thinking and creativity that are core Airbus values,” said Tom Enders, Airbus CEO. “Perlan Project is achieving the seemingly impossible.”

