

HOVERNEWS

HOVERCRAFT CLUB OF AMERICA



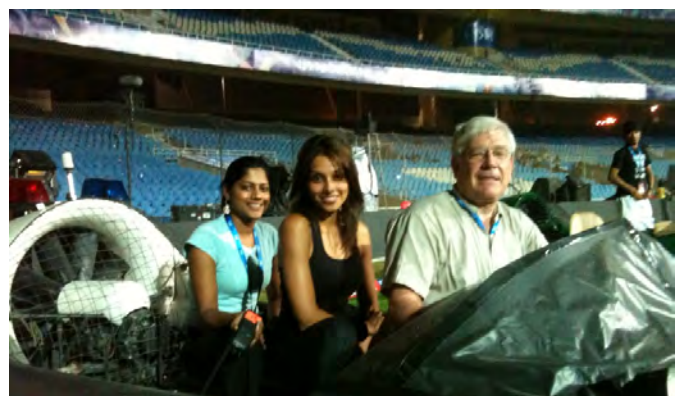
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Here is a photo of my hover on the way home from Bismark, North Dakota. Thanks for your help in all of this. Doug Holman

**From Indiana to India,
A story of Hovercraft, Cricket
and other British Institutions.
by Dave Reyburn**

**President Obama Learns
About Hovercraft “levitating”**



Phil Whitney during practice in Mumbai, India at the Cricket Championships. Read Dave Reyburn's epic article in the Feature section.

From Indiana to India



From left. Magnus, Rajiv, Rohan, Tom, Dave, Steve, Chris, Phil, Vivian

**A story of
Hovercraft,
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**by Dave
Reyburn**

“Ok everybody, START YOUR ENGINES NOW”, came a familiar Belgian accent over our headset radios. It was David Genon, our choreographer giving us the 2 minute warning, and time to warm up our engines. Chris jumped out of his craft and yanked on the pull start handle of my engine. Thankfully it fired to life first pull. My engine was having last minute flooding issues but tonight was not going to be wrecked by a sticky float valve! As I surveyed the packed stadium, I wondered if anyone could hear the sound of the eight angry bees revving up over the din of the loud pulsating music that seemed to be coming from everywhere. It was dark, and spot lights and laser lights were flashing all around the cricket pitch and the entire stadium. Fifty five thousand fans were waving and yelling, the excitement and anticipation was fast building for the opening ceremony of this final cricket match between the hometowns favorite Mumbai Indians and the Chennai Super Kings. This was the biggest game of the year for the Indian Premier league of Cricket, IPL 2010.

A quick look over my shoulder confirmed the dancer sitting in my back seat was centered properly. Everything looks good. Each hovercraft was carrying a dancer in the backseat. “Ok Phil GO” came Dave’s voice. Phil Whitney’s craft headed off to the right side carrying the Bollywood star Bipasha Basu, while Rohan’s craft headed to the left side. Wait a little longer until they reach mid field, and start to spin. OK, this is what we practiced for. This is why we’re here. Let’s go. Throttle up to 4,000 rpm and we’re away! ...

... Back in February, out of the clear blue I received an email from Chris Fitzgerald, president of Neoteric

Hovercraft in Terre Haute, Indiana. It read something like “Hello Dave, I’ve been in negotiations with a production company to bring 8 hovercraft and pilots to Mumbai, India to participate in the closing ceremony of the Indian premiere league of cricket. Would you be interested in participating on the team? All airfare, hotel and meals will be furnished”. It didn’t take too long for me to give a resounding YES! I’d done a fair bit of world traveling in my youth, but had never been to India, let alone hovered there. We had to load the craft in the sea container for shipping to India by March 1. That didn’t give much time to prepare. We delivered our Hovortreks to the factory in Terre Haute, and the guys at Neoteric gave all the craft a good going over to ensure there would be no mechanical failures. We shipped 6 Hovortreks. Two more were already in India.

Seven weeks later we met up at Chicago O’hare airport for the long journey to Mumbai.

Leaving from Chicago were Chris Fitzgerald from Terre Haute, Indiana, Steve Stafford from Bedford, Indiana, Tom Dienhart from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Phil Whitney from Bowling Green, Kentucky and myself Dave Reyburn from Goshen, Indiana. We were to be joined in Mumbai by the Neoteric dealer from the Jammu/Kashmir region of Northern India, Rajiv Kotwal and his family, and by Magnus Ivanoff, the Neoteric dealer from Sweden. The Volcanic ash cloud spewing from Iceland was causing worldwide disruptions in air travel and we were playing it day by day, but here we were trying to get on our flight to India anyway.

Our flight leaving Chicago was delayed 3 hours so we killed time sitting in the food court and telling hovercraft

stories (what else). Our flight, an Air India Boeing 777-300ER finally took off after even more delays. With Air India, we came to learn that a “short delay” means a very Long delay! We were originally scheduled to arrive in Frankfurt, Germany for refueling, but the ash cloud forced us to refuel in Cairo, Egypt. I had decided to journal on a small notepad so I would remember the details of the trip. My journal entries were few and ended by the time we landed in Mumbai. Our flight was supposed to last 19 hours.

The journal went something like this: “Finally arrived in Cairo 7:00am Chicago time, Cairo time is 2:30pm. Didn’t get much sleep. Seats too hard. Watched Sherlock Holmes and Avatar. 11:30am Indiana time, been sitting on the plane 14.5 hours now. Sitting on the ground endlessly waiting for new flight crew to arrive with no hope in sight. Had curry dinner again on the plane which is still sitting in Cairo airport. It’s 1:45pm Indiana time but it’s dark here about 7:45pm. No crew in sight. My butt is getting very sore!! Been on this plane 18 hours now. 24 hours now, still haven’t left Cairo. Playing with Tom’s iPhone. The last entry read “Finally landed in Mumbai, exactly 30 hours after we left the ground in Chicago.”

Whether or not that was some kind of world record, I hope never to be on a plane that long ever again!

After gathering our bags from baggage claim, we were greeted by a blast of hot air as we stepped outside to find our taxi transportation. The temperature was in the high nineties, but at least we were here! A harrowing 1.5 hour taxi ride through the streets of Mumbai gave us our initiation into driving in India. I find it’s best if you do it with your eyes closed otherwise you’ll be freaking out at the total chaos of trucks, cars, motorcycles, 3 wheeler taxis, pedestrians and everyone else crowding the lanes only inches from one another. Here, the lanes don’t

mean much. You just fit where ever you can. In spite of the apparent total chaos, I didn’t see any traffic accidents, and came to realize that’s just how things work here.

We arrived at our hotel aptly named the “Fortune Select Exotica”. It truly was a 4 star hotel, and not at all the Indian equivalent of a Motel 6 that Phil and I thought it would be. Our Belgian host Coruja Nsengiyumva along with Rajiv Kotwal and his family, were there to greet us. Traveling with Rajiv was his wife Sumalini, his 15 year old daughter Samira, and his 19 year old son Rohan, who was also one of our hovercraft pilots. We just had time to check-in, take a quick shower and then head off to the stadium to start work for the day. At this point we were all exhausted and running on adrenaline. None of us had slept much on the plane and we’d all been up now for a couple days straight.

Arriving at the DY Patil Stadium, we met David Genon, our Belgian choreographer from the Shenadoah Company. They were in charge of producing the closing ceremony show. We were given our badges and told to treat them like gold because without them we could not enter any part of the facilities. We were given a tour of the facilities, and then set about unloading our hovercrafts from the shipping container.

Rajiv had trucked his two hovercraft down from Kashmir. They brought two large heavy duty trucks each carrying a hovercraft and labor crew. It took the trucks 4 days and several thousand miles over very difficult roads to reach Mumbai. It was an incredible effort. After the hovercraft were unloaded, the trucks then became the home base for Rajiv’s labor crew. There in the dirt parking lot, they slept, ate and hang out for the entire week we were there. Everyday was a constant reminder that I was a visitor in a far different world than Goshen, Indiana.

We had a group of about fifteen young Indian men who were assigned to helping us unload the Hovercraft. It was very difficult work unloading the craft since they were stacked on top of each other. We had to carefully move them off of each other without damaging the fiberglass bodies. The temperature in the back of the container was around 120 degrees and there was a very strong odor of fuel making it hard to breathe, on top of this we were working in the dark in the back of the container, but slowly we got the job done, and our Indian laborers would hoist the 500 pound hovercrafts up to shoulder level and carry them across the rock strewn dirt parking area to a designated area in a parking garage about 50 yards away.

*Phil serving drinks to everyone.
The airline crew pretty much abandoned us.*



Lowering Rajiv's craft from the truck. Rohan in the truck. David Genon in black at left. Dave R and Chris at the back of the craft.

When we needed some lighting, they responded by bringing in some makeshift lights, then one kid proceeded to connect the live 220v wires with bare hands, somehow without electrocuting himself. A little tape over the connections, and drop the wires in the dirt (and water puddles) to trip over. No problem. The whole place seemed to be wired like this.

These kids were wearing flip flops and stumbling across concrete debris and roots sticking out of the ground, and against all odds they managed to deliver every hovercraft safely without damage. As we would lower the hovercraft gently to the ground, I would clap and say "Good Job!" and the Indians would all clap and cheer "Good Job Good Job". It required a



lot of coordination with Chris giving instructions to Rajiv in English, who then translated to the Indian laborers. It was total chaos in the container with the Indian kids chattering back and forth so loudly so that no one could hear anyone else trying to give instructions. But everyone got stuck in and we got the job done. At least we thought the job was done, but then we realized we really needed to get the hovercraft closer to the stadium entrance which was 1/4 mile away. We thought briefly about trying to hover them over a long a narrow concrete driveway, but the dust was incredible. India is a very hot, dusty, dry country this time of year, and the first time we fired up an engine we were completely engulfed in a dust storm. Not such a good idea to try hovering over there.

I went in search of some thing to help us transport the craft since carrying them seemed out of the question. After a while we found and commandeered a couple perfect sized equipment trolleys that we could slip under the craft and pull them down the road with. This technique worked brilliantly and after a great team effort we finally had all eight Hovtreks parked on the grass at the stadium entrance. This small patch of grass was to be our home base for the next 5 days. Why wasn't the container parked in the right place to begin with? As Chris would say in his Australian accent "Well that just wouldn't be India mate".

Carrying Steve's craft to staging area.



It was getting late at night on Thursday, and none of us had slept in a bed since we got up early Tuesday morning to leave for Chicago. Mumbai is 9.5 hours ahead of Indiana time, but time became a meaningless thing since we were so exhausted. If you asked someone what time it was, you got different answers. Do you want Indiana time, or Mumbai time? Does it make any difference? We still needed to get the hovercraft running and test out the cricket pitch. This meant hooking up batteries, filling the fuel tanks, making sure everything is working. Eventually a couple of us hovered out into the stadium under the floodlights for the first time. The grass in the stadium is bent grass, just like you would find on a freshly mown golf course fairway. The stadium owner likes his grass a lot. They water it and roll it constantly. He was very concerned that our craft might damage the grass. No amount of explaining that a hovercraft produces a footprint as light as a bird will convince you until you see for yourself. We soon put to rest any fears they had as we hovered around doing spins and maneuvers over the grass while leaving no trace behind us. It was a relief to hover on the grass since it was the one spot in Mumbai that wasn't covered in dust. With the events of the day behind us, we returned to the hotel with a sense of accomplishment and crashed out until the following afternoon.

Home base for the hovercraft. Note the cricket giant partially assembled in the background

Our days would start with breakfast or lunch in the hotel restaurant. There was continental cuisine as well as traditional Indian cuisine served buffet style. We would then gather in front of the lobby for our taxis to take us over to the stadium. Each day it was hot and sunny. It was in the low hundreds and humid. After a half hour drive we would arrive at the stadium. The first thing you noticed was the security. There were literally hundred and hundreds of uniformed police everywhere. I use the term "police" loosely, because most of these fellows seemed to have very little authority, almost none had any weapons, and the ones that did, we're not sure they had any bullets. But they made up for it in numbers. They were everywhere. Sitting around, standing around in groups with nothing to do. After making our way through

the first gauntlet of security checks we soon discovered that it was mostly for show. You didn't really need to empty your pockets of cell phone, camera, etc... even if their metal detector wands went off they weren't really interested in searching you. At the main entrance to the stadium the show of force was significant with 3 metal detectors and about 17 police manning the checkpoint and an even larger number just standing around. If you preferred not to go through the hassle of passing through this check point, you just walked 50 yards down to the next entrance where there was one sleepy looking cop sitting in a chair, who would let you pass by without so much as looking up. Well so much for security. As each day drew closer to the final match, the police presence grew more and more. Apparently the threat of Islamic terrorism against the IPL was real, but I think if they really wanted to do something they wouldn't have had too much difficulty because the security forces seemed completely disorganized.

We had a large tent just outside the stadium that was air conditioned, and an endless supply of bottled water,



7UP and Diet Pepsi. They also served a Curry buffet twice a day, lunch and supper, and that is where we ate and rested most of the time. We needed to drink bottled water all day long because of the threat of dehydration. We would work on the hovercraft preparations in the afternoon, and do our practices in the evening. On days when there were cricket games going on in the stadium, we could not practice until around midnight, since the games didn't finish until 11:30pm.

Our initial practices were rough. The preliminary choreography was complicated, and as time went on, it became more and more simplified as we all came to an understanding of what would work best. They didn't know hovercraft too much, and we didn't know their timing requirements, but after a few nights of practice we finally settled on a routine. Of course this routine was to change again and again, but that's India as we say! After a long night of practicing, we would put the hovers to bed and head back to the hotel. Leaving the stadium, we were struck by the sight of all the laborers sleeping on the ground. They had been moving large sections of stage back and forth into the stadium. And now they were sleeping on them. They just laid down in large groups and went to sleep with no bedding, oblivious to all the noise still going on around them at 2:00am and with the stadium lights still shining brightly. There was an ever present reminder of the societal class system in India.

Arriving back at the hotel, the vehicles were searched briefly by security guards then we all had to pass through a metal detector and have our bags checked before we could enter the hotel. It was like this everywhere even at the shopping mall next door. We must have looked a real sight coming back to the hotel each night at 2:00am filthy dirty and sweaty and walking into a 4 star hotel. The showers were great and we'd hit the pillow exhausted, but sometimes it was difficult to turn it all off. Phil Whitney and I shared a room, and one night after arriving back at the hotel around 3:00am, we just couldn't sleep so we stayed up talking and laughing until we couldn't laugh anymore and eventually dozed off to sleep.

Throughout the night we kept hearing this loud buzzing sound that would come and go. It would startle you right out of your sleep. After the second night of hearing this random loud buzzing sound I finally got up and went to investigate. Upon opening the door and looking out into the hallway I saw a teenager standing at the next door

Our hovercraft security guard.



pressing the door bell. These hotel rooms have door bells!! And they're LOUD. I never heard of anything so stupid. I said "What are you doing??" He replied in his Indian accent "I'm trying to get my colleague to answer the door" "Well knock it off! You're waking everyone up!" And that was the last door bell we heard again.

By now Magnus Ivanoff had joined us, having arrived from Sweden. We were particularly concerned that he would not be able to fly out of Sweden because of the ash cloud, but he made it and picked right up on everything without much briefing. Most of the other Belgian crew had also been delayed in getting to Mumbai but they also arrived around the same time. They were working on a 12 meter tall Cricket "Giant" that was to be rolled onto the cricket pitch after we did our hovercraft maneuvers. The Giant was built in Belgium and transported here in pieces. The Giant was very realistic and had moving arms that swung a cricket bat and hit a huge ball about 10 feet in diameter. The tethered ball would then sail up and away carried along by a guy running and holding the tether. It was really something to see.

Our final practice was a dress rehearsal with music and dancers and all the elements that would be involved in the ceremony. There was also a game that evening for the runners up to determine third and fourth place.

The IPL has figured out a formula to take the staid game of Cricket which can last for days without end, and package it into a 3 hour Televised spectacle involving laser lights, loud music, cheerleaders, special effects, and fireworks all energizing the fans, thus turning it into a pretty exciting sporting event.

As we were preparing our hovercraft that evening for the practice, a large group of young ladies in cheerleading outfits with pompoms were walking past us into the stadium. It was like a US pro football cheer leading squad just walked by and they certainly looked to be far from home here in Mumbai. I asked one of the girls where she was from. "We're from all over, but most of us on this team are from South Africa", she replied. Each team in the IPL has its own cheerleading squad that draws talent from western countries including the US and South Africa. The cheerleaders were grouped in threes, around the edges of the field and had their own little stages where they would cheer from during intermittent breaks in match play.

The matches were televised to a very large TV audience purported to be a billion viewers during the final game. This was quite plausible considering the population of India is almost four times that of the USA. There was technical wizardry on display everywhere, with sound and TV equipment spread around the stadium, even 3D Cameras recording the events. There was a "Spider Cam" which hovered over the field

Dave's craft coming out of the container. Lots of help.

suspended by four steel cables from the light towers. This was all computer controlled allowing the camera to move virtually anywhere over the field at any height and swoop in capturing the action from any angle. The crews manning all this equipment seemed to be mostly British or other foreigners and were very professional and organized, in great contrast to the chaos of life outside the stadium.

The hot humid weather was affecting some of our Hovercraft engines. We anticipated the need to lean the jetting on our carburetors to compensate for this. Phil and I have the older Fuji carbureted engines and had to jet down a few sizes otherwise the engines would run too rich and bog the rpm's down. Most of the other craft were using the fuel injected Hirth engines which are computer controlled and therefore unaffected by changes in temperature and humidity. Re-jetting seemed to take care of the problem until that evening, when the humidity really came up so high you could see the moisture droplets in the air, it almost looked like smoke through the stadium lighting. After further carburetor adjustments my engine was running well again.

Final practice went pretty well but not perfect. Our routine had us in two groups of four hovercrafts, converging from opposite sides of the field, doing several spins along the way to the opposite end of the field, where we passed each other in front of the VIP area, made a 180 degree turn and ended up parallel to each other in a line at the stage. The dancers would then jump out of our craft and run up on stage, where they were joined by a large group of other dancers for several musical numbers - Bollywood style.

Rohan had initially been selected for the prestigious job of transporting the Bollywood singer/star in his craft (because they felt she should ride in a white craft), but things changed again, and this responsibility then fell to Phil Whitney, because Phil's craft worked better from a TV camera perspective due to the flashing red and blue lights on his duct. Phil was only too happy to oblige. Rohan was the least experienced of the hovercraft pilots, and had been feeling the pressure for a few days. He was now relieved to know that Phil was going to take her instead.

With the practice session over with for the night, we



resigned to our fatigue, and headed back to the hotel, knowing that tomorrow was the big day and everything was going to go well, we were going to do just fine.

The big day had arrived, and with it more heat and humidity. I think we were all feeling a little nervousness and hoping that nothing would go wrong. Phil and I had a word of prayer before we left the hotel room, knowing that if everything was to go just right, it wouldn't be due to our efforts alone. We arrived at the stadium a little early that day to go over last minute preparations, but we spent quite a bit of time sitting in the shade and drinking water, while waiting for our cue to enter the stadium. The ceremony was to precede the game, and our craft would enter the stadium several hours prior to the start of the ceremony. In the mean time, workers were busy all day long hustling stages and equipment past us and into the stadium. The time came for us to start engines and move our craft into position on the grass at the far edge of the stadium. One after another, they started up and moved out over the dusty concrete and into the narrow entrance of the stadium. When it came to my turn, my engine wouldn't start! It was cranking, but it wouldn't fire.

"Oh No - not now!" I thought to myself. Chris saw that I was having difficulties and came to help. We started running through some diagnostics. Check for broken wires from the ignition. Check for fuel. Remove the spark plugs and check for spark. I'm getting a spark. Ok, so it's flooding. Chris was pulling the starter handle while I operated the throttle and choke. The heat was incredible, and I was feeling heat exhaustion and a little panicky. About this time, an Indian fellow was pulling on my arm, trying to get me to come with him. I didn't understand what he wanted and pushed him away. We were desperately trying to get my engine started.



Philip holding the Giant's cricket ball.

engine to see if it would start. It would not start! Not again. We determined that a float valve in the carburetor was stuck open. Banging on the carburetor did not seem to help. We somehow got the engine started, when Magnus had a great idea. Being the excellent mechanic that he is, he pinched off the fuel line while I ran the engine for about 30 seconds before shutting it off. This way, excess fuel would not build up in the float bowl. This worked well and we tested it several more times over the next hour to make sure it would start each time. It did. If any of us had a mechanical breakdown during the event we would have to physically carry the hovercraft off the field. We put that option out of our minds.

Back to the present moment ... OK, this is what we practiced for. This is why we're here. Let's go. Throttle up to 4,000 rpm and we're away! I could see Phil's craft in front of me nearing the stage as I started to pull out. Steve's green craft was leaving

I had visions of having to stand by the side lines while I watched all the others out on the field. I'd come all this way and worked so hard for this moment, and now my engine wouldn't start and there was this guy trying to pull me out of the hovercraft! Chris was staying calm and collected. He got the engine started. Thank GOD.

It turns out, in all the excitement I had cut my arm on the fan guard without realizing it, and blood was running down my arm. It looked bad but it was just a scratch. The guy just wanted to put some anti-biotic on it and clean it up. I had 3 guys standing over me tending to my arm. I felt so bad I apologized and shook his hand thanking him. He was pretty gracious to me.

I closed the fan guard into place and started to move out. I had moved 10 feet and the engine died again. In my haste I had pinched the fuel line under the fan guard. Again Chris pointed out the need to keep a cool head and do things calmly and slowly. I was up and running and took my place on the field next to the others. My craft was running well and I was feeling much better.

Now it was a matter of waiting several hours while the stadium started to fill up and the sun started to go down. The whole group of us went off and found a quiet place for a last minute meeting to go over all the details of our routine, and to make sure everyone understood how it was going to work.

Back in the stadium we waited patiently for what seemed like several hours. The music was pulsating from the sound system and was quite deafening. I had some of those push in foam ear plugs which helped keep the noise out of my ears. We decided to test start my

at the same time as mine but to the left side of the field. We were followed by Chris on my side, and Tom on Steve's side. Then Rajiv and Magnus brought up the rear. We were separated by about 20-30 feet, doing several spins as we proceeded toward the VIP viewing area in front of the stage. We were totally focused on our job and unaware of the huge roar rising from the stands as the hovercraft started flying around the field. Our radio headsets blocked out much of the noise and allowed us to focus on our job, which was to get the dancers to the stage in style. We crossed each other as planned and hovered into formation lining up with four hovercrafts on each side of the stage. Phil's craft arrived at the stage first as Bipasha stepped out of his craft and made her entrance on the stage. At some point she turned in Phil's direction and threw her sunglasses out into the grass. Phil noticed but didn't pay too much attention.

Everything went flawlessly just as we had practiced. Now it was time to shut the engines off and relax for a few minutes while we watched the dancing and singing and celebration. We had the best seats in the house. After the musical numbers were over, we were given the signal to start engines and move back to our starting positions. There we would wait for another 20 minutes watching the entire show from our vantage point in the hovercrafts parked along the edge of the field. Phil however, still had another job to do. This time he was hovering a male Bollywood star named Shahid Kapoor to the stage. I'd never heard of them, but I guess they're household names in India! Shahid was not about to be outdone by the glamorous looking Bipasha, so he decided he would stand in the craft while it was moving. Phil took it easy on him and made sure he didn't fall out. No fast spins or anything. Just like a pro, he delivered him to the stage

for another musical number with all male dancers this time. While Phil was sitting there watching the show he spotted the sunglasses still lying in the grass. “Hmmm, I might as well pick them up since no one’s looking”, Phil said. Later on he joked they might end up on eBay.

The Cricket Giant was a huge hit as he was wheeled into the stadium and moved around on a large trailer. The Giant swung the bat and knocked one out of the park. There were people on tall stilts walking around and dancers in traditional Indian dress. It had elements of a “cirque du soleil” show Indian style. We were given the signal that this was the final dance and we were to leave the stadium as soon as the lights went black. So it was engines on again, as we waited for the lights to go black. In front of me was a forest of dancers. I wondered how we were to fly our hovercraft to the other side of the field with all these people in the way. As quickly as they appeared, they disappeared into the darkness, once the song was over.

“Time to go boys”, I announced over the radio. I led off, and all the hovercraft followed suit as we made our way out of the stadium with people walking both ways on each side of the hovercraft in tight quarters. They generally moved out of the way when they heard us coming though. Chris had one more job to do, and that was to hover the two team captains to the stage for the coin toss.

Once safely out of the stadium and parked, we let out a huge sigh of relief. There was a lot of high-fiving and celebrating going on. This show was never about us, but we were just so happy to have pulled off our little bit as professionally as possible.

As Chris Fitzgerald put it “In reflection I have nothing but praise for the whole team. Total cooperation, complete agreement, everyone put shoulder to the wheel and it all went off with clock-like precision. Considering the complexity of the undertaking there were unlimited possibilities for disaster to strike. Everyone with Hovercraft experience knows exactly what I mean by this statement.”

Dave Reyburn and Chris Fitzgerald.



Our part was over with and the Cricket match had just got under way. But we still had a long night ahead of us because we needed to load the hovercrafts back into the container to be ready for shipment the following day. We would have tomorrow to relax. Magnus had to leave early to catch his flight back to Sweden, so we said our goodbyes at the Stadium.

The container loading went better than expected and I think we were finished by about midnight. We were helped by our new Belgian friend Vivian Tramasure, who was a tremendous help in physically loading the crafts, and also figuring out a better loading pattern for the craft with tall tail lights. All of this was accomplished with a minimum of fiberglass crunching sounds as the craft were stacked millimeters from each other and the roof of the container.

With the container locked up, and feeling pretty hungry, we headed to the tent looking for some dinner, but they were closed up. Good thing, because David Genon ushered us up to the VIP lounge where there was the most incredible curry buffet feast awaiting us. Most of the VIP’s had already left, and they were just giving speeches and handing out the awards, so we dined and watched from the air conditioned luxury of the VIP lounge. Most Excellent! (The Chennai Super Kings had defeated the Mumbai Indians in the final match.)

The following day we decided to head out to the old Mumbai shopping district by the sea and do some shopping and sight seeing. Our flight home was scheduled to leave that night at 1:00am, so we had to make the most of our time there. We took two taxis and ended up at the Taj Hotel. This was one of the sites of the terrorist attacks. In November of 2008, Muslim terrorists from Pakistan, in a coordinated attack on more than ten different locations in Mumbai killed at least 173 people and wounded at least 308 in a siege that lasted 3 days.

We could see no evidence of the fires and explosions that took place at the Taj hotel and the train station. Everything was repaired and made like new again. While we walked along the sea side promenade buying trinkets from street vendors, an old gentleman tied a string around my wrist and made a mark on my forehead. This is a blessing, for which I blessed him with 40 rupees. Later on I was walking through the market and a young man came along side me and asked in English “where did you get that from? – did you go to a temple?” “No” I replied. “I paid a man on the street 40 rupees”. “Oh well then it doesn’t count” he said. We laughed. He was quite curious to know where I was from and we discussed the city of Chicago a little.

Overall I found the Indian people to be very friendly and courteous and willing to engage in conversation with a stranger like me. We shopped for a couple hours for souvenirs, before heading back to the hotel. I bought a great designer watch for twelve bucks that actually keeps time! Shopping in the market place was a real treat. Everyone wanted you to buy something from them and



expected you to haggle with them, and beggars would hound you for money. One particular lady was holding a small child and would say “I have no milk for my child”. One look at her told me both she and the child were pretty healthy and she was wearing a pretty nice Indian sari. Nevertheless she hounded us until we handed her a few rupees. Chris said “If you give one some money, you’re going to have to bring enough for the whole country”. But that’s the way it is there.

As we headed back to the hotel, Rajiv made the comment that there were really only two problems with India, over-population and corruption. Both were proved true as our cabbie made an illegal U-turn near the hotel and was pulled over by a traffic cop. The cabbie jumped out to take care of it. 50 rupees later (\$1.25), he jumped back in. “OK all taken care of” he said and we proceeded to the hotel.

So after saying our goodbyes, Steve, Tom, Phil and I headed back to the airport. One last harrowing ride through Mumbai traffic and we’d be on our plane and out of here. Or so we thought. Our troubles began as we tried to get our boarding passes from the young fellow at the Air India counter. It seems the plane was over booked and they were going to put us on Air France instead. Oh really? A quick check on the Air France counter showed that it was shut down and there were no more flights leaving with Air France. So this kid was basically lying to us, for whatever reason.

While we were at the front of the line arguing with this fellow, another Indian came up from behind me and pushed his arm around me with his passport, and a 100 rupee note handing them to the kid, as if to say “Here take this bribe and give me my boarding pass in spite of the fact that I’m third in line”. The kid took his money and kept punching on his keyboard. The guy behind me started complaining about this, and I had to turn around and tell Mr. Bribe to get back in line and wait his turn. To which he responded “It is not my intention to cut in front of you”. Yeah right.

Well things went from bad to worse when the kid abandoned his computer terminal and another guy came along with a container of chi tea and started serving tea to everyone. So our ticket counter was converted to a tea serving station and we still had no boarding passes.

We came close to starting a war and that’s what it took to get four boarding passes on this flight. With our passes in hand we proceeded through immigration and on to the gate to wait on the plane which was (you guessed it) delayed for another 4 hours.

Let me just give you a travelers tip right now. Never fly Air India. The people trying to get on this flight did not believe in cueing or waiting, they stampeded the door to get on the plane causing massive delays. Pushing and shoving each other, little kids getting trampled, old people in wheel chairs getting shoved aside. It was unbelievable. Phil and the others were going to have none of it, and waited until the melee had settled down before trying to get on the plane. When we got on the plane we found out that the stampeders also had no interest in seating assignments. You just sat wherever you could find a seat. Just my luck to sit in the crying baby section! Tom and Steve found seats near the rear of the aircraft. I saw Phil walking back up toward the front of the aircraft. He had a funny expression on his face as if to say “I’m outta here Dave”. The Boeing 747-400 was packed. There was not a single seat left on the plane. Eventually we took off, headed for Frankfurt, Germany.

This flight to Chicago normally takes 20 hours, including two hours in Germany. Some hours into the flight I went looking for Phil. No sign of him in the cattle section. I wandered up to first class where I was stopped by a flight attendant. “Yes may I help you?” he asked, sensing that I didn’t belong up there. “I’m looking for a fellow American who’s traveling with me”. “Oh, try seat 2A” he said. I found Phil sleeping happily stretched out in first class under a soft comforter. On this aircraft there were only 14 first class seats on the main deck. These seats have about 4 feet of leg room so that they can completely recline into a bed. Awesome!

“Phil - How did you get up here?” I asked. “They just brought me up here and sat me down” he said. “Here, you’ve got to try this chair out. You just press one button and it reclines straight out into a bed”. So Phil and I swapped seats for a couple hours and for the first time in my life I flew first class. The stewardess woke me up for some first class lunch, and I actually got some sleep for the first time on that flight.

We weren’t quite so lucky on the Frankfurt to Chicago segment, and the pushing and shoving and stampeding continued as we attempted to board the plane again, much to the horror of the German boarding officials. This behavior didn’t end until we got off the plane in Chicago.

I was really glad to be back on US soil. It had been a really neat trip. It was an incredible experience. I really enjoyed spending time with my Hovercraft buddies and I made new friendships. I think we may have set a new world record for the greatest human effort expended to hover for the least amount of time, but it was worth it.

Our hovercrafts are due to arrive back in Terre Haute some time in June, and I’m already looking forward to my next Hover adventure – The World Hovercraft Championships this August in the UK.