

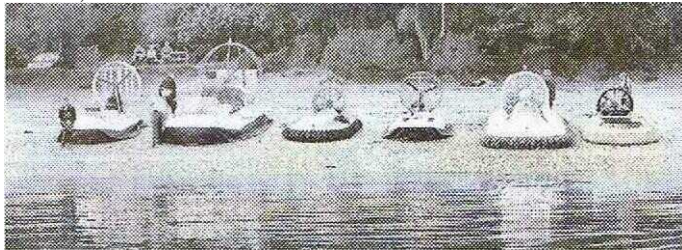
# Light Hovercraft



The **Hovercraft**  
Club of  
Great Britain

## Five Day Scottish Hover-In

For a couple of years now we poor Southerners have been teased by the pictures and videos on John Robertson's web site - the freedom and sheer beauty of the venues is difficult to match. So the idea of a Scottish hover-in was born... we knew it had to be longer than the usual weekend, due to the distance many of us would have to travel... so the spring half term was chosen, John located a suitable site and we were set!



Left to right: Ian Brooks' Surveyor. John Robertson's Prospector, Martin Dougal's Fish, Mat Robertson's Scout, Trevor Black's Osprey 5, Chris & Jenny Campbell's Fish

As the date approached, and I was frantically completing modifications to my craft, (newly completed but you know how it goes - always something to be done!) And [hen there was the matter of installing a marine radio, no mobile phones where we were going.

The great day arrived, and on Monday morning we shovelled 4 very sleepy kids into the car at 3.00 am, hooked up the craft and off we went. Fantastic - you've never seen the roads so clear as that time, we passed through the Birmingham and Manchester blackspots with hardly a vehicle in sight. By 7:00 am we were having breakfast at Penrith, and feeling like we were almost there.

Arriving in Arrochar, it took a while to find our accommodation — who'd have satnav? As I wasn't allowed to camp (it wasn't me, honest, I wanted to camp...), we had rented a flat above the local pub. How handy is that? We could tell instantly the clientele that usually frequented the flat ... almost no crockery, but a cupboard full of pint glasses! But the best part - the flat backed onto the Loch, with a beach large enough for the craft, and from the balcony we could see the venue, about a mile away, on the other side of the water. It was looking good already — just get the craft into the Loch and I wasn't going to need the car at all!

Ruth could tell I was itching to get away - the clothes were thrown into the cupboards and we climbed back into the car for the short drive round to the site.

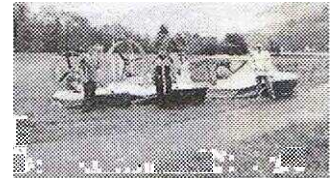
There, we met John. Whilst this was the first time we had met, it didn't feel like that as we have been "virtual friends" for a couple of years. Anyway, the craft was unloaded and away!



The Surveyor in action

By later on that day, others were arriving on site - Martin Dougal (Flying Fish), Chris and Jenny Cambell (Flying Fish), John and Matt Robertson (SevTec Prospector, Scout and UH 18) and Malcolm and Barry with his boat, Sanbuca... I owe him a couple of beers, but couldn't possibly reveal why... All I will say is, when building to plan, build to plan! Over the next day or so, the rest of the participants arrived — Trevor Black with his Osprey 5. Steve Holland with a SevTec Vanguard finished the night before (and what a finish, a real credit to him). Keith and Anita Oakley arrived, complete with sound gear, to help us with our quest for ever lower noise levels, and Tony & Jackie Sheppard, to train John as Scrutineer for the Scottish branch. Not a bad turnout, considering it was 400-500 miles for many of us.

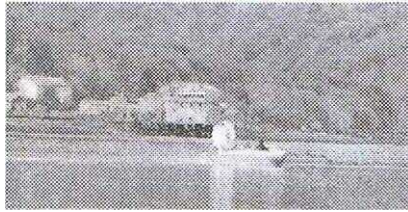
On Tuesday, we decided to head off down Loch Long, hanging a right into Loch Goil — about 12 or so miles in all. The weather conditions were interesting, one moment flat calm and the next 2-3 ft chop. The new craft was marvellous; it felt stable and secure in all the conditions, whilst the stiff headwind and chop brought the speed well down, the craft coped well. Then, as soon as it had appeared, the chop disappeared leaving all calm again. They say the weather can be changeable, but it had to be seen to be believed.



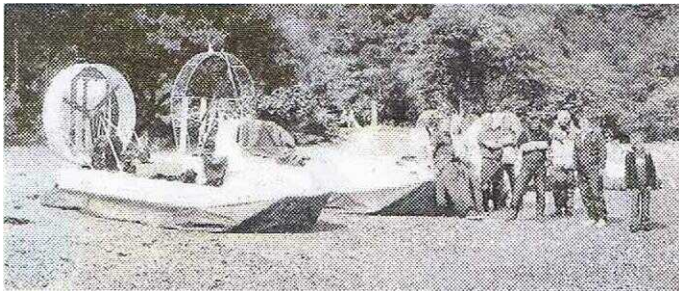
Wednesday came and found, the poor weather; it lashed it down most of the morning. I tried to fire up the craft, and found the thrust engine wouldn't run... convinced it was wet, I broke out the WD40... after a couple of hours of getting frustrated, someone produced a meter and gently suggested I might check the wiring... muttering and blue language... but I quickly found that there was zero volts on the ignition unit... Hmmm... I wish I had clipped those wires up better! Still, replacing the displaced connector, the engine fired up immediately. As if to confirm my lightening mood, the sun came out, signalling time for another run down the Loch. Fantastic.

On Thursday, Martin announced a plan to cruise down to the Holy Loch, and attempt a passage up river to Loch Eck - an ambitious plan, by my past cruising experience, as the Holy Loch was about 20 miles, cutting the corner right into the Clyde estuary, and Loch Eck a further 10 or so, but the craft was up for it and so was I.

Loch Long has an interesting military history - it was used during the war to train commandos and later as a torpedo test range, with many of the old installations still in existence. The tradition continues today, with several 'grey' installations protected by an ever present Police launch... we kept well clear, didn't want to finish up in clink!



It turned out that the river passage to Loch Eck was not possible, courtesy of a low bridge; which was a shame, or maybe it saved us from the wrath of the fishermen. We'll never know. Still, we gathered together in the marina and found a cafe for lunch, just as the sun came out. Fantastic. Incidentally, this really showed the benefit of the marine radios, as we became split up in the search for a passage up the river, but a couple of quick calls and we were soon organised again.



Ardentiny Beach

On the run back, we pulled up on Ardentirmy Beach for a photo-call, getting a few good shots of the craft, including a formation shot taken from the boat and the usual interest from the locals. After a few moments we were joined by a flotilla of "outward bound" kids in canoes... all clamouring for a ride, which we were pleased to offer until their instructor pointed out that his insurance would not allow it.

Friday, my last day as I had to return south on Saturday, and we decided to adjourn to the pub in Lochgoilhead for lunch. We had a great run there - craft going well... until disaster struck, a mile from shore, when the thrust drive belt broke. Still, no drama when a quick radio call had Sanbuca appearing on the scene complete with tow rope, so I made an ignominious approach to the slip. Bugger. Trailered home, and that was an end to my fun, but what fun!

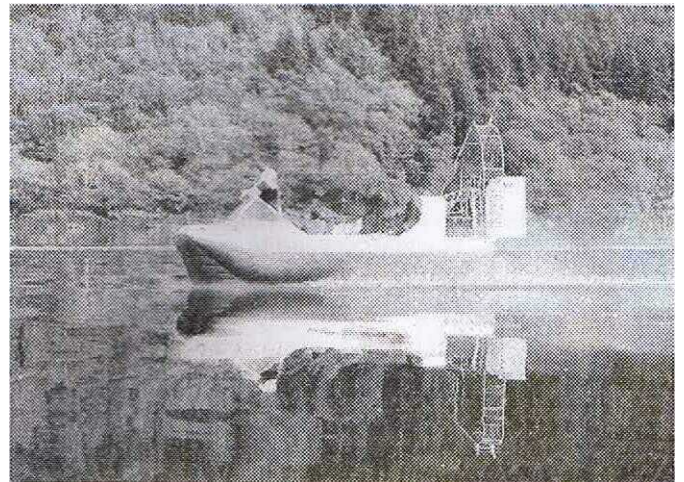
One thing that was very interesting for me at this hover-in was the very distinct differences between the craft here and at any other that I have attended: For one, my craft would be one of the largest at any "regular" hover-in; it was definitely middle-size at this event. For another, integrated craft were outnumbered 2-1 by propeller craft; I have never seen a propeller at a southern event; But what was the same was the camaraderie and friendliness of the event. This was the first proper outing for my new craft, and the first time I had seen this type of craft apart from a quick ride in the US, it has to be said how impressive these craft are.

The SevTec craft are all very similar, and all impressive; I have flown 3 sizes now. The smallest (Scout, 10') is incredible fun, nimble yet stable and with impressive 'go' from its 21hp. It brought a smile to my face, I should say! My son wants one, and maybe that's my excuse to build one.



The largest (Prospector, 18') was stable, quiet, powerful yet there is no need for ear defenders and normal conversation is possible. It has a heater installed! You feel that you could do a hundred miles in this machine. The SevTecs all have one other thing in common; you won't be needing waterproofs (well, unless it's raining), what little spray there is doesn't make it into the passenger area.

The UH 18 was unlike anything else. What a machine, with the distinctive 'thrum thrum' from the prop and 350 lbf thrust, it goes. And goes. And goes. 50 mph, without a whisper, and



there's stacks more where mat came from, if you are brave enough! I watched this craft rounding the end of the Loch from the balcony of our flat, and it's a sight to behold - none of the usual screaming and spray; it was just gone.

Each person who experienced these machines came away impressed beyond expectation; take a ride, and see what you think... you may be surprised too!

Enough of the rambling, all that is to be said now is that this was a vintage hover event, the climax of my hovering career to date and I would just like to say a huge "thank you" to John for arranging it, to our host for generously allowing us to use the site without charge, and to the residents of Arrochar and the surrounding villages for being so hospitable.

Ed: thanks to km Brooks for the article

## ROAMIN' IN THA GLOAMIN'

Or HOVERIN' IN THE HEATHER  
Or LOCH LONG T WISH YE WERE WHISKY

Or THE WIND BLOWS COLD AROUND THE TROSSACHS AT MGHT

Ardgarden is a small settlement at the top of Loch long; previously known only for its two camp sites, a tourist centre and a Youth Hostel (now closed down). The nearest town of Arrochar (2 miles) has several inns, a restaurant, a chip shop, a petrol station and a branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland in a wooden shed. The local fish processing works have long-since closed. It's the sort of place that the inns stop serving food at 7pm sharp and the garage opening hours are flexible. The whole of Loch Long's rock strewn edge is lined with pine forest, which sweeps up to the bare rock of the surrounding mountains. In June, there are rhododendrons, broom and gorse in flower. In the Loch itself, seals bask on the banks whilst the dark shapes of porpoises cleave the silver waters in the sunshine. The whole National Park is unfeasibly picturesque and tranquil.

Tranquil that is until the raucous sound of half a dozen infernal combustion engines, associated mixed propellers and ducted fans, and the shouts of glee from intrepid hovernauts were heard in The Highlands once again.

The week-long cruising event was organised by John Robertson, who had negotiated the use of a closed down campsite on the lochside for launching the hovers. In attendance were John (Sevtec Prospector and UH18), his son Matt (Sevtec Scout), Ian Brooks (Sevtec Surveyor), Steve Holland (Sevtec Vanguard), Trevor Black (Osprey 5), Martin Dougal (Flying Fish), and Chris and Jenny Campbell (Flying Fish). Also in attendance with his rescue boat was Martin's mate, Malcolm Grove. Tony Shepherd and Keith Oakley attended for some days accompanied by their good ladies.

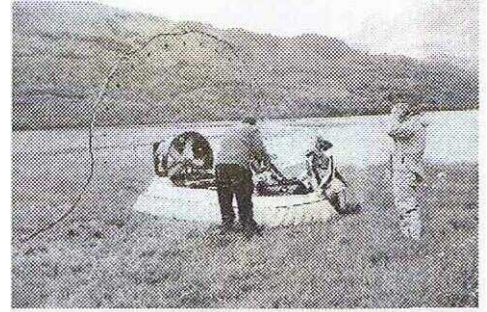
The week's hovering began with a day of exploring the local area by hover and in Malcolm's boat. Tidal Loch Long is about 15 miles in length, and varies in width from about half a mile at the top (northern) end to 3 or 4 miles wide where it meets the River Clyde by the Holy Loch. About half way down, the western bank is parted by the entrance to Loch Goil. The main man-made features of the Loch are storage areas associated with the Navy's nuclear submarines, which are enthusiastically guarded by Police launches. A glance at the marine maps for the area reveals that much of Lochs Long and Goil are given over to ranges and trials areas. A close watch was kept for torpedoes as we hovered.

Subsequent days were notable for their objective cruises. The objective was invariably a pub for lunch. Whilst the weather in the first week of June was cold and wet for most of the UK, we were lucky to have mostly warm and sunny weather. There was some occasional rain, and a particularly miserable hover in a hail storm, but our memories will be mostly of lazy liquid lunches in pub gardens overlooking the water, basking in the early summer sunshine. Lochgoilhead, and Holyloch Marina (65 miles round trip) were but two of the highlights visited.

Malcolm's boat is of the fast-fisher variety, and was only

pressed into active service once when Ian Brooks' Sevtec broke a drive belt. A replacement was found relatively nearby (100 miles is practically next door in Highland-speak). Unfortunately, his craft suffered again later in the week with a broken engine frame support. Otherwise, all of the craft worked reliably all week with only minor maintenance required. The only injuries sustained were courtesy of the local midges which seemed to have a taste for Tesco's Insect Repellent.

Stunned silence met the results of Keith Oakley's noise testing machine. Initial results debunked the theory that propeller-driven craft are much quieter than fans; the Flying Fish were marginally noisier than the



the Osprey 5 was one of the quietest craft. All I can say is that the propeller noise, being deep and throaty, is more pleasant on the ear than the ducted fans. As for the Osprey being quiet, that may be true but its high pitched voice is clearly audible from much, much, much further away.

The whole event was not organised under the auspices of the HCGB. This is becoming a trend for a number of reasons. Firstly, none of the Sevtecs would meet the scrutineering requirements principally because the guarding of the propellers is of the cage variety more familiar to most of us on airboats in the US. I am no expert, but it seems to me that there is a wealth of experience operating these propellers on airboats, hovercraft, and microlights. The regulations regarding propellers on cruising craft need revisiting. Insurance is another factor. Most cruising hovercrafters have their own insurance. If you have flashed out £100 for third party, or £300 for fully comp why should you have to pay again for club insurance at an event? Finally, on a weekend's event, do we really need to spend half or most of Saturday morning scrutineering? We are not going to race the craft. If everybody is like me, I will probably have spent most of the previous week's evenings working on the hover and the campervan, honing them to the peak of perfection and loading them with all the kit. Perhaps for cruising craft we should be looking more towards an annual scrutineering (like an MOT). Until these points are addressed, I think that we are going to see more private invitation-only events like the recent Blackwaters, Severns and Ardgarten.

Enough of the drum-beating. Suffice to say that a very enjoyable week was had by all. I would like to thank John Robertson for organising it, and, in particular, send our sincere appreciation to his wife for providing the food for a BBQ (which turned out to be enough for several days' of BBQs).

Jenny Campbell