

Attempt to ground high-flying bin liners

By Nick Davies

The Civil Aviation Authority has registered more than 400 plastic bin liners as aircraft, entitled to fly in uncontrolled air space. It may also have registered a manhole cover in Cambridge, but it is not sure.

The bin liners are fuelled with Calor gas cookers or electric hair dryers and have been given such names as Broken Wind, Hot Pants, and Fat Glenda. They are also causing apoplexy in the aviation world.

They have slipped through a loophole in the 1976 Air Navigation

Order which lays down the guidelines for what may be registered as an aircraft. The order says simply that the balloon must be more than two metres high.

Air spotters, who spend their time recording the registration numbers of aircraft, discovered that they could join the elite world of air entrepreneurs and spot each other's aircraft by simply stitching together plastic bags and paying a £5 registration fee.

Don Eaves, aged 34, a British Rail signalman from Southampton, has made about

20 balloons, all of which are officially registered with the CAA. He says they can reach an altitude of 300ft and have flown up to two miles.

"To start with, it was just a matter of getting your name on the register," he said. "But the idea grew on us. It's a harmless sort of hobby. It doesn't do anybody any harm. It's better than beating up old ladies."

He is the secretary of the Solent Aviation Society, which has 180 bin-liner lovers, the chairman, Andy Chown, has made nearly 200 registered air-

craft. They meet regularly to fly them. "Mind you, they don't like wind," said Don. "So there aren't many days when you can fly them sensibly."

The bin-liner fad has provoked hostile letters in the aviation press and an outcry from traditional model balloonists, who have been peaceably registering themselves for years. The Muppets registered bona fide miniature balloons for a film, and one balloon company made its 13th balloon a miniature to pacify superstitious customers.

The CAA is considering a recommendation to amend the Air Navigation Order to exclude the bin-liners and intends to double the registration fee in June. It is also trying to track down the flying manhole cover.

"We've heard this rumour," said a spokesman. "We think it was someone who was intending to build an aircraft and wanted to get himself a particular registration mark right away. We think the manhole cover is in Cambridge. It's probably just a rumour."

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