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# ASM

By Steve Swann

## the birth of a magazine

Editor of ASM in the 1970s, Steve looks at how the magazine evolved and the parachuting pioneers who helped fill its pages back in the day.

1966

AUSTRALIAN SKYDIVER

1969

AUSTRALIAN SKYDIVER

1970

AUSTRALIAN SKYDIVER

1972

AUSTRALIAN SKYDIVER

1973

Producing Australia's skydiving publications has always been a labour of love for those doing the editing and publishing. But in the 1960s, when our sport was born, the emphasis was very much on the "labour". It was before email, before the web – personal computers weren't on the technological horizon as Australia's first skydivers taught themselves to fall stable and land in the same paddock as the target. Desktop publishing? Not even a distant dream and digital photography was just a wild fantasy. Electric typewriters were still to make it into the mainstream when Australia's first skydiving publication was launched.

Back in the 1960s and 70s, the skydiving community was very small and widespread. But it had the same hunger for news and information about the sport – new gear, new techniques, competition results, gossip and photos – as every generation since.

That early challenge was met by jumpers themselves, with no financial support from the APF or anyone else for that matter – and we used stone-age tools, in comparison to today's technology.

It's great to see ASM flourishing now – a far cry from the all black-and-white magazine I produced with Bernie Keenan's help in the 1970s, typesetting it on an electric golfball typewriter in my lunch hours, shooting half tone film negatives on the sly in my employer's printing camera room and pasting the whole thing up after hours back in the office, the old-fashioned way with waxed galley proofs.

And then handwriting (with the help of my wife Jill) 400 addresses – the sum total of our subscriber base in those days – before stuffing envelopes and humping the whole lot off to the local post office.

### A Child of the 60s

Australian Skydiver magazine has been meeting the needs of jumpers for 45 years. It was born in Queensland, grew up in South Australia and has flourished in maturity back in Queensland.

The magazine's first appearances were under the masthead of the "Northern Star Digest", published by the Northern Star School of Parachuting, based at Archerfield airport near Brisbane. It first came out around the beginning of 1965. The earliest and only copy I have is dated May-June 1965 and was numbered as Edition 3, edited by Brian Mitchell. This was no slick, four-colour, coffee table affair. It was a basic as it gets – 28 pages of A4, printed on one side of the sheet only by Gestetner machine, an archaic, low-cost office printing press (a forerunner of the photocopier) that worked by forcing ink through a stencil onto paper.

Stencils were cut on an ordinary old-fashioned typewriter and then fixed to the machine's drum, which was rotated by hand. Talk about a labour of love!

In that issue, South Australian contributor Trevor Burns (D67 and soon-to-be editor and publisher of the fledgling magazine) wrote a piece arguing the case against opening at 3,000 ft, as opposed to the 2,200 ft laid down in the APF's Op Regs – a popular argument among many of those who resisted the idea of the young APF setting the rules. An early example of Trevor's commitment to the APF.

Within 12 months the "Northern Star Digest" had morphed into "Australian Skydiver", edited and produced by Murray Cosson (E15). It was still a rudimentary production (no photos, no colour) and even the date of the edition was hand-written onto the plain black and white pre-printed cover which enclosed the hand-stapled document. Murray's editorial column in July 1966 noted that the edition had actually been put together by Trevor Burns, who was taking over from then on. The magazine now moved to SA, where it stayed for the next 10 years.

Constrained for resources as ASM was in those days, one of its ambitious aims was to "print news of activities in all States, New Zealand, Malaysia and South East Asia." It was a big task for a one-man band but it was tackled with a volunteer enthusiasm and generosity not much seen these days.

Drop zone listings were offered at an advertising rate of \$3 a year. The only DZ listed in that first edition was Spencer

## On a wing and prayer

OK, so strictly speaking it's not a wing – actually a Para Plane which featured in this story from 1971. But those were the days when anything other than "round" was exotic and something about which to be very cautious. The story detailed Ray Williams' experience trying to cutaway from a mal with the even then antiquated 2-shot capewell system. One riser failed to release and at about 800 ft he was forced to dump his round reserve, fitted with a pilot chute which wasn't necessarily common in those days, and which didn't make the job easier. Ray survived (obviously) with several broken bones but the incident delivered, via ASM's pages, many timely lessons for jumpers.

Gulf Skydivers at Whyalla in SA, which boasted a seaweed pit and 30-second delays at \$3 a slot – obviously Trevor, who lived at nearby Port Pirie, was trying to kick-start the column by listing his own local organisations.

A full page advertisement offered a Paracommander main (the high performance round canopy we all lusted after) at \$220, a 24 foot diameter will reserve at \$40 and a 16 mm gun camera at \$50. With the nation only having switched to decimal currency in February of that same year, the prices were also, helpfully, listed in pounds.

By May 1967 the magazine, while still printed on an old Gestetner, had now stepped up, being printed on both sides of the sheet and it boasted heavier, separately printed covers which carried photos and ads, as well as two pages of black and white photos pre-printed on a better quality stock and hand stapled in.

Sydney correspondent (and Parachutes Australia founder) John Mahaffy reported on a great Easter weekend of jumping by Sydney Skydivers Club members near Taree, NSW.

He listed 146 descents for the weekend and some great relative work, including a perfect double 4-man star with backloop and re-link and 4-man raw egg passes. "Mostly the jumps were from 8 to 10 grand and worked out at \$2 to \$2.45 – no complaints about that," John noted. To put that jump cost in perspective, an annual subscription to ASM (6 copies) cost \$2.50 and the average weekly wage was \$55.

In 1969 Trev Burns was canvassing the idea of having the magazine printed offset, asking readers to express their opinions. Surprisingly many wrote back saying they "couldn't give a damn". While the prospect of lots more photos being printed was attractive, some worried it would put up the price of the magazine too much.

ASM's listing of DZs on the inside back page now ran to 11 clubs or centres around the country. Not everyone listed their operation though – perhaps spending \$1 or \$2 went against the grain.

## Genuine Jumping Veterans

In the September issue of 1969 correspondent Don Mardle of the Saigon Sport Parachute Club submitted a piece on sport jumping in the middle of a war zone.

## Editorial meeting

(From left) Bernie Keenan, Trevor Burns and Steve Swann with SA parachuting pioneers Col Parsons and Phil Edwards at the 1971 Gulf Meet at the SASPC's Lower Light drop zone.



"To most Australians in South Vietnam, jumping is a sport which must be put on the shelf for a year or so while they serve out their tour here," he observed, referring to the large contingent of conscripted National Servicemen in the country. "The Saigon club has been in existence for some time now but, due to a number of reasons (for example, Tet 1968), the club has closed down jumpwise a couple of times," he wrote.

Tet of course, was the massive, surprise nationwide Tet Vietnamese New Year holiday offensive launched by the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong against the allied forces – not a bad excuse for curtailing club jumping! Don ended his article with contact details and the wry invitation: "Why not look the club up and enjoy your stay in Vietnam?"

In mid 1970, ASM finally went to offset printing, opening up the possibility of photos on every page. It was still a black-and-white only affair on the inside pages but the covers varied in colour from issue to issue, appearing in duotones from shocking pink or basic blue to dashing green. The move also allowed impressive centrespread photo layouts for the first time.

An editorial at this time explored the rise of the "commercial centre" in Australian parachuting. By then there were at least as many commercial centres as clubs operating in Australia and ASM observed that "by virtue of the fact that centres are run as businesses, the great majority of students make their first leap at a commercial centre. Like it or not, the commercial parachute centre is here to stay and, in the not too distant future, a parachute club will be a very rare bird on the Australian jump scene."

But the dilemma then was that few, if any, commercial operators were enrolling their first jump students in the APF. This was long before it became an agreed requirement.

"It's difficult to give \$10 away (the APF annual fee in those days) when it could just as easily go into your own business," the editorial said. "The result is that few commercial centres are affiliated with the APF." It went on to recommend a basic student fee and then an additional fee for an "A" licence, which together would add up to \$10.

It was an editorial position strongly promoting the value of the APF in an era when there were still vocal doubters and antagonists to the national organisation.

How much more forcefully might that editorial have been received back then, had any of us foreseen the phenomenon now known as "tandems"?

## The Coming of Ram Airs

Technology was beginning to make its presence felt in 1970, as more jumpers realised they didn't have to go on thumping into the ground under round canopies. A feature spread that year, headlined simply "Ram-air Parachutes", gave a detailed background of how the new-fangled Parafoils and Para-Planes worked, explaining that "these new designs are of the gliding type with desirable characteristics far exceeding any other known parachute."

The author advised those who were sceptical that "seeing is believing. The leading edge of the ram-air parachutes is open or physically missing."



A group of men and Ray Williams stood the side of a small plane. He looked down at the plane and said "I'm not sure I can fly this thing." There should be a lesson in the way for everyone.

After descending the student Ray got out at 2,000 ft. He was a flying expert. After some fumbling he found it and had the main inflated at 1,500 ft. The wire was severely restricted to about half its normal size. Ray immediately checked for the position of the pilot chute as he realised he was in a position to dump his round reserve.

As he was checking the wire started to vibrate. He was first hit then accelerating rapidly.

He released the base toggle line. The plane is fitted with a system which catches the forward surge of the wire during deployment. By holding the toggle in at a 90 degree angle (quarter) and the wire runs over it.

Some time later he checked for the pilot chute. He thought they had been seen in the clouds on top of the plane as they were not about 2000 ft above him.

It was a very close call. He pulled the control on the harness. He was not sure of his position. He was not sure of the line. He was not sure of the line. He was not sure of the line.

A look at around 1000 ft showed Ray he was down to 500 ft. He had to dump his round reserve. He would have to try to throw the reserve chute.

For the first time ever, Ray was jumping a reserve chute with a pilot chute. He was not being rescued.

He tried to throw the reserve to the left. The wire was not attached. He tried to throw the reserve to the right. The wire was not attached. He tried to throw the reserve to the front. The wire was not attached. He tried to throw the reserve to the back. The wire was not attached.



**Keep it to yourself**

SA jumper Terry Angus and the old outside dunny at the Lower Light pub feature in an ASM advertisement in 1974, encouraging jumpers to subscribe to the magazine. The ad's message – "You don't pay for their jumping. Why pay for their reading?" – sought to discourage the few paying subscribers which ASM had from handing the mag onto their mates to read, without actually supporting the publication themselves. This was before the APF helped underwrite the magazine's production – you only received it in the mail if you paid for it.

**Over a Beer**

Gossip and DZ news from around the country was directed into ASM's "Over a Beer" column, a feature of every issue.

In October 1971, Trev Burns commented on the generosity of the farmer who allowed the SA Sport Parachute Club to use his paddocks: "How's this for a friendly landlord? Early in August (1971) I lost my watch while jumping at Lower Light. After spending a couple of hours searching for it in knee-high grass, I gave it up. A couple of weeks ago George Quigley, owner of the SASPC's DZ, got to hear of my loss. After erecting a 50 yards square fence around the area where the watch disappeared, he herded in 500 sheep. After a couple of days they ate the ground bare and up turned the watch. It's guys like George who help make up for all the 'bad' farmers around the country."

Is it any wonder that the Lower Light drop zone, now owned by the SASPC and located on National Highway 1, 40 minutes north of Adelaide, today carries a respectful sign, identifying it to passing traffic as the "George Quigley Airfield"?

World news items made another appearance in "Riding off in all Directions" in December 1972 under the headline 'Another Lonely Leap': "Author of 'The Long Lonely Leap', US Airforce captain Joe Kittinger, who free fell from a balloon at 102,800 ft and later wrote the fascinating account of his experience, has been shot down over North Vietnam. He was last seen descending under canopy," the story noted.

Kittinger was shot down just before the end of his third tour of duty, having flown a total of 483 missions. He spent 11 months as a prisoner of war in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" prison. This man is a legend and was an inspiration to most of us who took up jumping in the 60s and early 70s.

**A Record Star?**

The same 1972 edition of ASM recorded a 16-man star built over Pakenham, suggesting it was almost certainly the first 16-man built outside of the US.

With five jumpers in Labertouche's 185 and 11 in the Pilatus Porter, the jump run was at 13,500 ft. The 16-man was together at 43 seconds but 3 seconds later a grip broke and it spread into a "U", ASM reported. "It was being flown back nicely when another grip broke and, as if by signal, everyone turned and tracked off. Whether it can be recognised as a record or not, it remains that for 3 seconds it was a perfectly round, stable 16-man. It was almost worth not being on it, just to see it!"



The "APF Newsletter" column in that edition also reproduced an honour roll of those who had remained financial members throughout the 10 years since the Federation had been opened to individual members in 1962. Some very familiar and significant names here: Niels Asche E19, Trevor Burns E61, Brian Clark E22, Tam Dickinson D11, Phil Edwards E74, Steve Filak E8, Claude Gillard F4, John Gillett C167, Doug Irvin E106, Allen Jay F12, Louis Johnston F34, Andy Keech F1, Bill Kenny F13, John Mahaffy F17, Dave Millard F15, Jock Moir F30, Ron Pearsall E40, Pat Snell D107.

In 1972 "Over a Beer" commented, somewhat disapprovingly, on the trend to discard the pneumatic soled French Paraboots in favour of sneakers, still themselves something of an American oddity in those days when the Australian public had, not that long before, referred to anything so sporty as 'sandshoes'. "Terry Trewin, one of the local jumpers here in Adelaide, broke his ankle late in January jumping Addidas shoes. Who will be next?" the column asked.

Maybe it had more to do with wind conditions on the day or the canopy Terry was jumping or whether his PLF was good enough – but really it was symptomatic of skydiving's final move from the almost military mindset from which it had sprung. And it was the liberated 70s afterall.

**Those Who Made it Happen**

Photography has always been one of ASM's most compelling attractions. But in an era when freefall photographers were few and far between and camera gear was big, clunky and very, very expensive, sourcing photos was a huge challenge.

In the 1960s and 70s pretty well everyone shot black and white – but those who could do it at all (let alone well) were real artists.

Colour or black and white: it didn't matter – there was no instant, digital feedback in those days. Just a few hours back in the darkroom, labouring over dishes of chemicals.

As editor of ASM through much of the 70s, the highlight of my month was to open the mail to find a treasured package of black and white prints from Andy Keech, in the US. He supplied numerous covers and photo spreads in those days, inspiring local jumping photographers to emulate him.

Other prolific photo contributors from ASM's early days included: Mike Richards, Ted Harrison, Chip Maury (USA), Geoff Thomas, Joe Finta, Dave Tapp, Tony Holtham and Blue Thompson. (Apologies to all those I've missed).

ASM's writers were the other essential, unpaid ingredient in the editorial mix. Without an enthusiastic and knowledgeable team of editorial contributors any magazine will quickly run out of steam. Those who freely and frequently wrote for ASM in its infancy included: Claude Gillard, John Middleton, Jim Czerwinski, Clive Smith, Dave McEvoy, John McEvoy, Chris Fowler, Gene Bermingham, Tug Molony, Mike Deakin, John Mahaffy and Louis Johnston.

**Advertising Supporters**

Apart from subscriptions, publishers have only one other source of income with which to pay the bills – advertisers.

Despite the attractive rates charged in 1971 (a full page cost \$20 and a half was \$12), ASM wasn't beating them back with a stick. But to be fair, we were offering advertising to a very limited number of manufacturers and retailers, who themselves were trying to make a living from a tiny population of jumpers by today's standards.

ASM's stalwart band of advertising supporters in the early years included Parachutes Australia, Southern Cross Parachutes and Ramblers Parachute Centre. Steve Snyder Enterprises was among the rare international advertisers, promoting its groundbreaking Altimaster 11 and the Sentinel automatic reserve opening system, together with ParaGear, which booked the occasional page.

If we carried 3 or 4 pages of advertising we'd done a good job. Jumpers who wanted to list their gear for sale got a free run in the classifieds.

However, ASM briefly thought it might have cracked the advertising revenue big time back in 1973 when Winfield cigarettes booked a full page (the outside back cover) promoting their fags. At the time, prominent Victorian jumper and cameraman Tony Holtham had just completed shooting a TV commercial, featuring comedian Paul Hogan as a laconic skydiving smoker who makes a cool jump under a roundie onto the front lawn of a stately rural residence, lands by the pool and utters the promotional phrase "... anyhow, have a Winfield", before lighting up.

It gave us all a warm feeling (ignoring the prospect of lung cancer) and Winfield donated \$3,000 (big money in those days) to the Australian Team Fund.

SEND FOR YOUR COPY OF OUR NEW '67 CATALOG  
A HANDY REFERENCE BOOK FOR ALL MAKES OF SPORT PARACHUTING EQUIPMENT AND ACCESSORIES  
300 PAGES, ILLUSTRATED, PHOTOGRAPHIC & JUMP ADVERTISING CONTENTS  
EARLY MAIL IN \$3.00 (EXCLUDES POSTAGE) WITH YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS  
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AERO CLASSIC INSTRUMENT PANEL  
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EXCLUSIVE PARA-COMMANDER COLOR COMBINATIONS  
BLACK, GOLD AND RED. AVAILABLE ONLY FROM PARA-GEAR. Colors do matter. They are important to you. Use the right color combination to make your gear stand out. In black and gold, you'll look like a professional. In black and red, you'll look like a champion. In black and white, you'll look like a winner. In black and blue, you'll look like a leader. In black and yellow, you'll look like a hero. In black and green, you'll look like a warrior. In black and purple, you'll look like a wizard. In black and pink, you'll look like a princess. In black and silver, you'll look like a queen. In black and gold, you'll look like a goddess. In black and red, you'll look like a devil. In black and white, you'll look like an angel. In black and blue, you'll look like a saint. In black and yellow, you'll look like a king. In black and green, you'll look like a prince. In black and purple, you'll look like a noble. In black and pink, you'll look like a duchess. 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**Jumping, booze and drugs:  
was it really a problem?**

The 1974 Nationals generated what was ASM's biggest ever news story – but unfortunately we weren't reporting on dazzling competition performances or new sporting records. The festering issue of alcohol and marijuana mixing with skydiving shot to the surface with the tragic deaths of two jumpers who, having adjourned with most others to the pub after the competition was called during the afternoon, decided to do a night jump at 1.45 am the following morning.

With the clandestine assistance of a few who lined the runway at Rylestone, NSW, with some car headlights and the help of an experienced jumper who also owned and piloted the Piper Navajo, they decided a 3-man from 5,000 ft might be a good idea.

They got out as planned but the third man wisely decided to dump immediately. The other two linked up. They went all the way in without ever breaking off. The fatalities occurred in late December 1974, already a shocker of a year with 9 deaths and were at first reported in the daily media as "just another" couple of skydiving fatalities. But the proverbial hit the fan in mid February 1975 when Parliamentarian Ian McPhee, apparently tipped off by disgruntled constituents who were also jumpers, raised the toxic subject of jumping, booze and drugs in Federal Parliament. It was a public relations disaster for the sport. Both the APF and the Department of Transport's inspector of parachuting were pilloried for supposedly not being able to control the allegedly rampant problem. (DoT was the forerunner of CASA).

The front page headlines in major daily newspapers and five pages in Hansard (the official parliamentary record) were an absolute low point for the sport.

ASM went in boots and all in its April 1975 edition, reproducing all the Hansard transcripts and lengthy reports from APF president Claude Gillard and director of safety, Grahame Hill. It wasn't pretty – our layout and headlines were "in your face". But this was something the sport had to confront head on. And quickly.

One element of that report was the reprinting of Grahame Hill's January 20, 1975 letter to APF safety officers, written in the immediate wake of the incident:

*"If we look at the past year's statistics in their worst form (as the press and DoT would), this is what we could come up with: If we say we have 700 active parachutists jumping each year (experienced only). We had 9 deaths in 1974. That makes it one jumper in 70 will 'go in' if we have another year like 1974,"* Grahame warned.

It was a sobering assessment and a useful base from which to measure the sport's progress ever since, both in self-discipline and attitudes to safety – not to mention technology and improved gear.

Apart from the obvious and painful truth that booze and drugs really were an issue (albeit not that widespread) this tragic episode crystallised the entire debate, both within the skydiving community and in broader aviation and bureaucratic circles, about whether parachutists could be trusted to regulate themselves and whether the APF was the body to do it – whether, in fact, the APF was worth supporting at all.

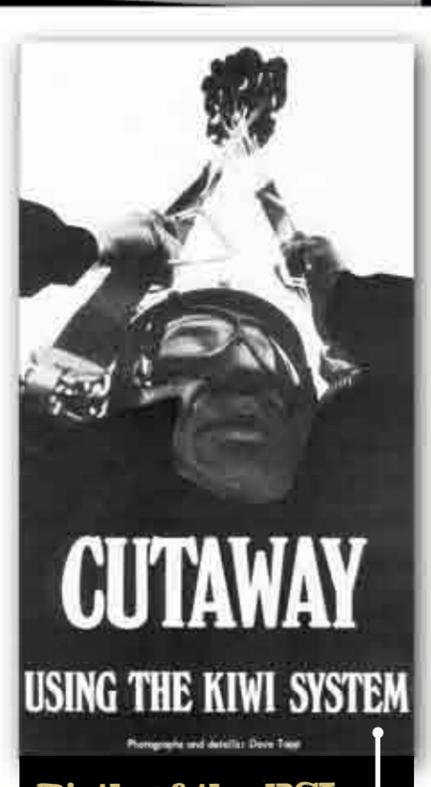
As my editorial introduction to our series of articles noted: *"It goes further than just the exercise of what some believe to be repressive laws which prohibit the use of certain drugs.*

*It comes down finally to a question of safety and our fitness to control and discipline ourselves. If parachutists cannot demonstrate self-discipline, then there are agencies which will do it for us – and not as nicely."*

ASM was firmly in the APF camp on this occasion, as it always was.



**Is it really a problem?**



**Birth of the RSL**  
Long before the invention of the 3-ring circus and ram air parachutes, innovative jumpers and riggers were tackling the question of how to get reserves out more quickly and reliably, particularly for students. This feature spread from ASM in the 1970s explored the latest New Zealand variations of the proven Steven's cutaway system, the original RSL.

**Handing It On**

By 1976 pressure of everyday work and the need to devote more voluntary time to student training in our own club (the SASPC), meant Bernie and I, who had recently gained our senior instructor ratings, reluctantly decided to pass the magazine on.

Claude Gillard, who's company Southern Cross Parachutes had been underwriting the publication's costs since Trev Burns had moved on, bravely cranked out an edition or two before the magazine finally moved back to Queensland under the stewardship of Dave McEvoy in late 1976 and it hasn't looked back since!



**Cutaway**

The opening page of a 3-page photo spread in 1973. Mike Richards mounted a motor-drive camera on his chest to capture the full sequence. This shot captures the moment of cutaway. The ring-pull section of the old capewell mechanism has disengaged but the male fitting has not yet pulled free, leaving the risers hanging by a thread. A fellow Canberra jumper caught the main as it collapsed and brought it down between his legs – possibly Australia's earliest recorded case of CRW?

