

# ame, soared conquered

**She** rises at dawn, masters her fear and floats high  
over a slumbering city.

ear of heights. I've confronted it  
years by jumping off the high  
rowing myself on a trapeze and  
on glass floors in some of the  
buildings. I jumped out of a plane  
as wearing a parachute but still,  
the ground and with eyeballs app-  
their original positions, I vowed  
ould I take on the sky. Yet here I  
go hot-air ballooning.

oning might not be considered an  
out it still involves a degree of risk.  
a form participants must sign to  
erstand the balloon operators are  
e should the trip end in their  
family-owned company Balloon  
lifting people into the air for a  
of Australia since 1982, so it  
s doing.

s will lift with the golden glow of  
g over the horizon as you soar  
the company website. Until now,  
wanting that glow have had to  
arden or the Hunter Valley, but  
flights have started from the rela-  
cation of Homebush.

efore lift-off, flyers call a phone  
firm the meeting place and time  
ght will take place. Flying depends  
er so to avoid strong winds, flights  
hen I call, the recorded message  
ight is on and that the group is to  
e (!) at the Pullman Hotel in Syd-  
ark.

ode is warm but casual and hats de-  
ded for warmth and to protect  
intense heat of the balloon's pro-  
There are 14 in our group, many  
s celebrating anniversaries, birth-  
Christmas gift vouchers before

a boyish, charming Englishman,  
too young to me to be in charge  
our lives but he assures me he

has been flying for 10 years and, like all balloon  
pilots, has a commercial pilot's licence.

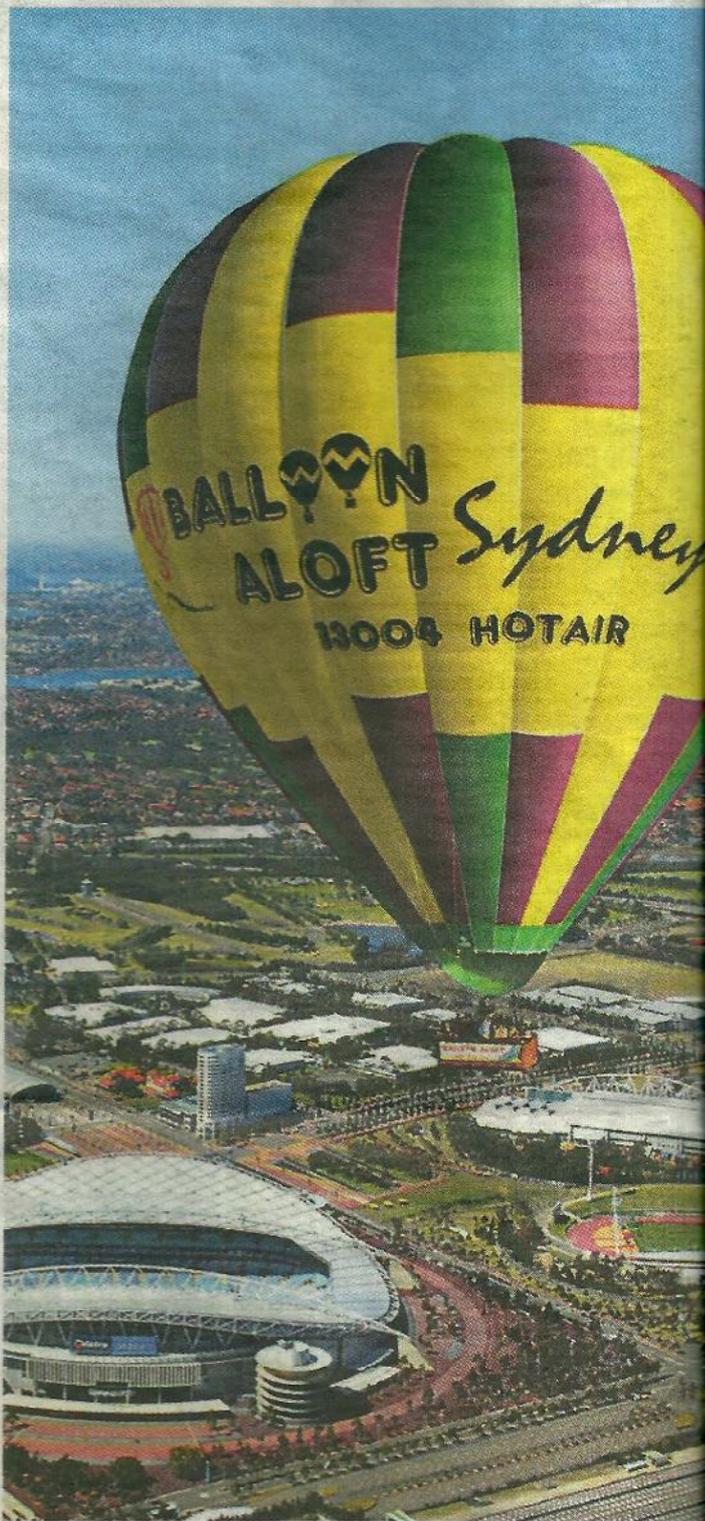
He tells us there's a south-westerly blowing  
but as there isn't a cloud in the sky we're in for  
fine views and good flying. We have to take his  
word for it because, at this hour, it's still too dark  
to see. Because of the wind direction we can't  
take off from Homebush today. Instead, we split  
up into a minibus and four-wheel-drive and head  
west, towing the basket and balloon. We stop  
near Doonside, where Matt releases a test balloon  
to check conditions, then head on again to a field  
by a highway in Rooty Hill for the take-off.

It's a team effort to get the basket off the  
trailer and on to its side. The balloon is attached  
to the basket and two large fans fill it with cold  
air before the burners turn the air hot. Once the  
basket rights itself, we are divided into small  
groups and each given a section of the basket to  
stand in. We clamber inside, the anchor rope is  
detached, we wave goodbye to the support crew  
and lift gently and gracefully into the air.

Matt explains how the lower air currents are  
cooler and slow us down, while the higher, war-  
mer currents accelerate us. After take-off, Matt  
brings us down low over parkland to see horses  
before carrying us across a freeway, with car  
horns beeping, and into a swift but totally com-  
fortable ascent to 3000 feet.

From here we can see all the way west to the  
Blue Mountains and can make out the city sky-  
line far off in the east. Clouds float beneath us  
and the only sound is that of the occasional pro-  
pane blast from above. It is so peaceful at this  
height and despite the landscape below being  
reduced to toy-town proportions, I feel no fear.

We fly for an hour, passing over green space  
and then, increasingly, over new housing estates  
of north-western Sydney. Matt brings the bal-  
loon low over houses, sending legions of dogs  
into a barking frenzy, and for us to wave to peo-  
ple below. I'm amazed by how many backyard  
pools there are but mainly by how little outdoor  
space there is around new houses.



**Suburban dreams ... mid-week flights now operate from Homebush.**

While I'm disappointed, on this flight at least,  
we haven't been able to lift off from Homebush  
for harbour and city views, I understand why  
this is a weather-dependent sport.

Time, and balloons, fly when you're having  
fun and, all too soon it's time to land. We grab  
the rope handles, bend our knees and brace for  
what turns out to be a smooth, controlled and  
uneventful landing in a field in the new  
Newbury housing estate near Kellyville.

After the tranquillity of the flight, the plane

back into rush-hour traffic for  
to Homebush doesn't take a  
ballooning does lift spirits at

Kate Duthie flew courtesy of Bal

Balloon Aloft has weekday flights  
a 45- to 60-minute flight. Meet at  
Olympic Boulevard, Sydney Olym  
Optional breakfast following the  
bookings phone 1900 028 558