

Balloons Over Mildura – Wet Weather Landing & Retrieval Guide

Wet Ground Operations

With the recent rainfall leading into the competition, many paddocks will be significantly softer than normal. Good decisions before landing and during retrieval will minimise delays, vehicle recoveries and, importantly, damage to local farms.

The relationship we have with our landowners is one of the biggest reasons we're fortunate enough to fly here. Please treat every property as if it were your own.

Landing Selection

Where possible:

- Choose paddocks with firm, well-drained ground.
- Favour higher country rather than low-lying areas.
- If multiple landing options are available, choose the one with the easiest vehicle access rather than simply the closest.
- Consider where your retrieve vehicle will need to travel before committing to a landing.

Avoid:

- Grey clay country wherever possible. It may appear dry on the surface but can become extremely slippery and impassable within a few metres.
 - Waterlogged paddocks.
 - Areas where surface water is visible.
 - Depressions, drainage lines and gullies where water naturally collects.
 - Freshly cultivated paddocks if another suitable option exists.
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Understanding the Ground

Not all paddocks dry equally.

Generally:

Ridges and higher ground

- Usually drain faster.

- Tend to remain firmer.
- Are normally the safest route for retrieve vehicles.

Gullies and low areas

- Stay wet much longer.
- Often contain hidden soft patches.
- Can trap even four-wheel-drive vehicles.

If you're unsure, stop and walk the area before committing a vehicle.

Retrieve Vehicle Tips

- Walk the intended route first if ground conditions are uncertain.
- If one vehicle starts leaving deep wheel ruts, stop immediately.
- Don't assume momentum will solve the problem—it usually makes recovery much harder.
- Avoid unnecessary turning on soft ground.
- Wide sweeping turns create less damage than tight turns.
- Keep to existing tracks wherever practical.
- If access looks questionable, consider carrying the balloon further rather than risking bogging a vehicle.

Remember:

A 15-minute carry is usually far quicker than a three-hour vehicle recovery.

Crop Protection

If retrieval through crops is unavoidable:

- Enter at the shortest practical point.
 - Drive one clear path in and one path out rather than creating multiple tracks.
 - Follow existing tyre marks whenever possible.
 - Minimise the number of vehicles entering the paddock.
 - Walk equipment where practical.
 - Avoid spinning wheels.
 - Keep turning to an absolute minimum.
 - Take extra care around irrigation infrastructure, fences and headlands.
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If You Become Bogged

- Stop immediately.
 - Continued wheel spin causes significant ground damage and makes recovery more difficult.
 - Reduce tyre pressures if appropriate.
 - Use recovery boards or recovery equipment before resorting to excessive throttle.
 - Ask nearby teams for assistance before the situation worsens.
 - Consider leaving the trailer outside the paddock if it reduces ground pressure.
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Communication with Landowners

If speaking with a landowner:

- Be polite and patient.
- Explain what you're doing.
- Ask permission before entering where possible.
- Thank them for allowing access.
- Report any accidental damage immediately.

Our reputation depends on how every team behaves.

Final Thoughts

A slightly longer walk is almost always preferable to:

- Getting a vehicle bogged.
- Damaging crops.
- Damaging access tracks.
- Upsetting landowners.
- Delaying the competition.

Good judgement on the ground is just as important as good judgement in the air.

Let's work together to keep the event running smoothly while protecting the farms that make ballooning around Mildura possible.

Make ABS-solutely sure that you don't over commit. 🍷

