

General Aviation

October 2012

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Published by: Fairweather Media Ltd,
The Studio, Kettys Close, Withiel, Bodmin,
Cornwall PL30 5NR. Tel: 01208 832975.
Fax: 01208 832995

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Design: David Tarbutt
Printing: Holbrooks Printers Ltd

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Material for consideration for the December issue of *General Aviation* should be received by 1st November, 2012

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Published by AOPA, which is a member of the International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations.

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Front cover:
Maule
Photo: Austin Brown

Chairman's message

From Olympics to lobbying

Without question, the Olympics and Paralympics have provided a huge boost to the general well-being of the nation, and the impact of the airspace restrictions put in place can now be viewed from a full and proper perspective. This will no doubt include a detailed assessment of the effect on general aviation-dependent businesses hit by the massive reduction of GA movements overall – but the somewhat unsettled weather throughout the period also played a part in curtailing flying activity. However, from an operational point of view, judging from comments gleaned from a variety of sources, for those pilots who did fly in the restricted period and talk to Atlas Control the arrangements went smoothly, apart from difficulties experienced in the first few days. Full marks to Dawn Lindsey and the Olympic Airspace team for their continued effort in communicating and consulting with GA industry in the preceding months that led to the relatively manageable arrangements, at the same time satisfying stringent security requirements. For myself, I flew a couple of return trips from the restricted zone with no problem, though accepting the busier than normal radio chat on departure as a necessary but temporary imposition. A first for me was to be wished “Have a nice day...” by one of the friendly Atlas controllers on termination of the service!

I was fortunate enough, however, to experience the other side of the coin in being able to attend the Paralympics Opening Ceremony. I would not have been the only GA pilot in the 80,000-strong audience in the Olympic Stadium to be delighted to witness the Tecnam Twin aircraft fly over and do a couple of orbits at about circuit height. The aircraft was flown by Lance Corporal Dave Rawlins, disabled through action in Afghanistan, and lit up, courtesy of LED strip lights and brilliant pyrotechnics, like a Roman candle. This was not the only GA activity associated with the Games as fixed and rotary wing GA aircraft were flying above continuously and generally inconspicuously in support of the television broadcasting. Following all this excitement it has required a positive effort to direct one's attention to the issues of interest to AOPA and general aviation at large.

Two notable events in the AOPA calendar took place in September, the first being the AGM on the 19th and the second the AOPA Bonus Day at Duxford on the 23rd. The draft minutes of the AGM will appear on the AOPA website as soon as they have been produced and it is especially pleasing to welcome Mick Elborn and Nick Wilcock onto the management board. Neither will wish me to extol their virtues in public but, amongst many other contributions, Mick devotes significant hours to maintaining the AOPA website, and Nick is well known for his deep understanding and valuable communication of all aspects of pilot licensing. The AGM is a formal meeting that is a requirement of any company listed at Companies House. The Duxford event on the other hand is quite informal and is intended to provide members who attend with a programme designed to both entertain and inform. Apart from the facility to wander around the aircraft exhibits, members taking in the presentations can raise issues and, over lunch, do a bit of networking to use current parlance, or simply have a good chat about flying and aeroplanes as I prefer to put it. Since it had not yet taken place at the time of writing it not possible here to report the highlights. However, the attendance of IAOPA Europe's lobbyist Lutz Dommel underlines the importance of the AOPA lobbying activity, that is, influencing politicians in order to achieve sensible decisions that preserve and enhance the future of general aviation in the UK and Europe. The GA lobbying activity on Capitol Hill in the USA is so effective because of the substantial resource provided by AOPA US, an association whose membership is much larger than that of all the other country AOPAs put together. But examples of the power of lobbying in the USA, such as preventing the imposition of GA user fees, show the way to go, and why IAOPA Europe will continue to support Lutz in this vital activity. Clearly, funding is required, so please keep those subscriptions coming in, and do not hesitate to remind those non-member pilot and owner friends who benefit from our efforts that they should join up too!



George Done