The official magazine of the Aircraft Owner and Pilots Association www.aopa.co.uk

AOPA UK

December 2024/January 2025

Flying from Shangri-La

Bored of life, **Matt Dearden** traded in his corporate life to follow his dream of bush flying. He offers a few of the stories that fill this is epic boys-own book: *Flying From Shangri-La* P.28

EPIC STALWART

The twin-engined Beechcraft Baron is this month's Hero P.20

SIKORSKY'S HELI

Igor's VS-300, the world's first helicopter, turns 85 – changing aviation forever. P.36

NICE & SMOOTH

In his series of what you can and can't do to your aircraft, Michael Powell, talks lubrication P.18

INTERVIEW

Record breaking wingsuit pilot Pete Salzmann on his legendary flight P.14

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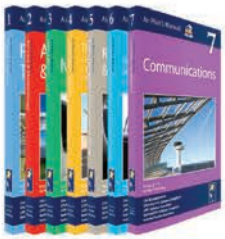

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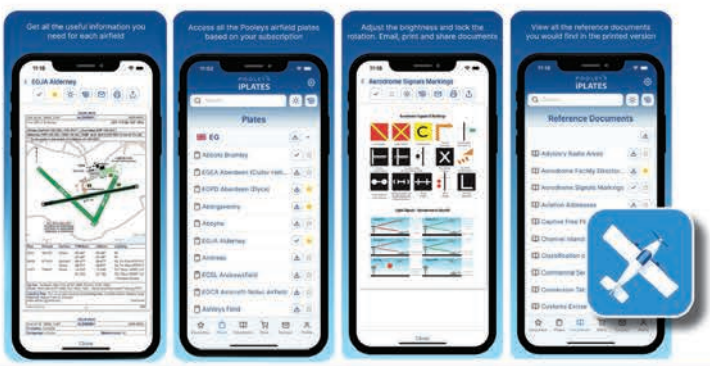

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THERE IS A CERTAIN TYPE OF FREEDOM THAT ONLY FLYING CAN OFFER

IF YOU'RE READING this, firstly, why? Go to the good stuff! And secondly, you're clearly a fan of aviation and what it brings to your life.

With winter here, flying might be a distant memory for you, or you might be the hardy sort who enjoys flying all year long. However you get into the sky it's important that you keep doing it.

In this issue we have a wide range of features on various or different ways people fly, from wingsuit pilot Pete Salzmann to Matt Dearden, who was a bush pilot in Papua and they both love the freedom flying offers.

Pete recently broke the record for the longest wingsuit flight and we talk to him about his journey toward becoming a record breaker.

Matt was kind enough to tell me about his life-changing career move to become a bush pilot. He shares some of his many stories in these pages – accompanied by some outstanding images. But if you finish the story and want more, Matt's book *Flying in Shangri-La* is on sale now.

I was also invited down to Blackbushe Airport where I met Mike Miller-Smith of Aerobility, who showed me around the charity's offices and hangar and and we spoke about how they can get anyone into an aircraft so the joy of flight is accessible to everyone. I also chatted to Chris Gazzard, the airport manager who is working hard to become an asset for the entire community - essential when aviation is under so much scrutiny.

"We have a wide range of features on various or different people fly, from wingsuit pilot Pete Salzmann to Matt Dearden, who was a bush pilot"

And in a slight change of transport we have a feature on Igor Sikorsky's VS-300, the aircraft that is considered the world's first helicopter. It first took flight 85 years ago, so it's time to look at the rotorcraft that changed the world of aviation.

Plus, as always, there are all the regular features including Michael Powell's series on the maintenance you can carry out on your own aircraft – this issue focuses on lubrication. And Martin Robinson's column looks at on how AOPA is ensuring the sky remains open. ■

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Material for consideration for the Feb/Mar issue should be received no later than 01 January 2025.

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"HE WHO FIGHTS, CAN LOSE. HE WHO DOESN'T FIGHT HAS ALREADY LOST"

AOPA fights to ensure the General Aviation pilots will also have space in the skies. **CEO Martin Robinson** discusses the hot topics in aviation that the organisation is addressing to protect your rights

WHEN AOPA speaks of "protecting your freedom to fly," we mean precisely that. We are committed to safeguarding the rights of general aviation pilots while recognising the need for necessary advancements. However, we maintain that any change must be both practical and cost-effective, offering genuine benefits – whether that involves pilot medical standards, airspace regulation, or safety measures.

Take the current requirements for Class 2 medicals, for example. These standards are increasingly impacting older pilots, prompting some to transition to the Pilot Medical Declaration (PMD) on the advice of their aeromedical examiners. The requirement for age-based ECG tests, with no accompanying clinical evidence, seems driven by general government health statistics rather than specific medical criteria for pilots. This approach appears to be less about individual assessment and more about blanket regulations that may not accurately reflect an older pilot's health.

Interestingly, the PMD system allows pilots to self-certify their medical fitness without any direct medical oversight, which raises questions. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) appears to accept this system with minimal concern, even though no doctor evaluates the pilot's medical condition under a PMD. This disparity highlights a crucial issue: liability. Aeromedical examiners (AMEs) require insurance coverage for their medical assessments, while PMD-holders likely bear the liability for their declarations.

AOPA remains steadfast in advocating for sensible, evidence-based medical standards. While the ICAO medical panel continues its review of appropriate requirements for private pilots, we emphasise the importance of adopting up-to-date medical practices. Many ICAO member states, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA, have implemented national medical standards that serve pilots flying within their extensive national borders. However, in the UK, where our smaller geographical area means pilots frequently fly internationally, an ICAO-compliant medical standard is crucial for cross-border operations, such as flying to France.

ORGANISATIONS FIGHTING FOR YOU

IAOPA and AOPA USA are actively representing the interests of General Aviation pilots at ICAO, pushing for a balanced, modernised approach to medical certification. The UK CAA should support this work, recognising the advancements in medical science over recent decades. We advocate for the removal of age-based discrimination that prematurely forces capable pilots out of the cockpit solely due to reaching a certain age. Our goal is to ensure that healthy, experienced pilots can continue flying safely and legally, supported by fair and progressive medical regulations.

SEEKING CLARITY ON UKADS1 FUNDING PROPOSALS.

I recently wrote to the UK DfT/CAA in respect of their airspace design consultation expressing a few concerns. The recent consultation document on the funding mechanism for UKADS1 raises important questions, particularly around the proposed "user pays principle" outlined in Chapter 9. The language in the proposal, coupled with references to the Transport Act 2000, has sparked concerns and a need for clarification on how the existing framework can support cost recovery for airspace changes.

The current rules for airspace charges are based on specific calculations that factor in aircraft weight and distance flown. Under this system, route charges apply up to 20 nautical miles from the aerodrome, with separate charges for operations in Terminal Manoeuvring Areas (TMAs). These fees are primarily for IFR operations and generally cover most aircraft, with exceptions for state and military aircraft.

The "user pays principle" is a well-established legal concept in Europe, but its definition under UK law is not as clear. This introduces the risk of a broad interpretation that could unfairly impose costs on airspace users who may not benefit from the changes. Understanding precisely what the regulator means by this principle is crucial, especially regarding the formula for fee calculation and the cost recovery method.

Another concern lies in the separation of cost bases. How will the regulator distinguish between IFR and VFR costs in the new system? If the existing route charging formula remains, there must be assurance that sub-2-tonne IFR and VFR flights will not be inadvertently

"Another concern lies in the separation of cost bases. How will the regulator distinguish between IFR and VFR costs in the new system?"

affected by the new charges. This point needs explicit clarification in the consultation document.

Additionally, in legal terms, charging must be efficient; it is not permissible to impose fees if the cost of collecting them outweighs the amount recovered. Transparency is needed on how these costs will be calculated and justified.

In summary, we need more details on how these proposals will work in practice. How will the funding model ensure fairness while maintaining operational efficiency, and how will the regulator avoid burdening users who derive no direct benefit from airspace changes?

The reply I received simply stated that there will be another consultation!

AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT

Airspace management, especially below 500 feet, varies considerably depending on the region. While ICAO provides general guidelines, local rules and regulations ultimately define how this low-level airspace is used. Here's a breakdown of key considerations.

Typically, airspace below 500 feet is classified as uncontrolled, giving general aviation pilots and drone operators some flexibility. However, exceptions exist near airports or in specific zones like Control Zones (CTRs), where air traffic is actively managed. These areas prioritise safety, and strict regulations must be followed.

According to ICAO Annex 2, aircraft must maintain at least 1,000 feet above obstacles overpopulated areas, ensuring a 600-metre buffer around any structures. In rural or unpopulated areas, this minimum drops to 500 feet, provided aircraft stay clear of people, vehicles, or buildings. Exceptions are granted for certain operations like take-off, landing, or specialised tasks such as aerial surveying and agricultural work.

OPERATING UNDER VISUAL FLIGHT RULES

Visual Flight Rules (VFR) require maintaining specific weather conditions to ensure visibility and safety. Pilots flying below 500 feet must stay alert to meet these visibility minima. In controlled airspace, special VFR clearances may be necessary if visibility is reduced, ensuring safe navigation through busier areas.

National authorities have the power to designate areas below 500 feet as restricted or prohibited. These can include military installations, city centres, or sensitive infrastructure zones. Pilots must consult aeronautical charts to identify and avoid these areas, as they are strictly enforced for safety and security.

Drones generally operate under 400 feet, following guidelines set by ICAO and national authorities. Operating near airports or in controlled zones often requires special permissions, and manned aircraft always have the right of way.

LEARNING FROM EUROPE'S U-SPACE

European U-space electronic conspicuity requirements are not restricted solely to operations below 500 feet above ground level (AGL). The requirements for U-space, which is a set of services and regulations to manage drone traffic and integrate it safely with manned aviation, apply more broadly across designated U-space airspace.

The scope of U-space requirements depends on the classification and definition of the U-space areas established by national authorities, not just on altitude restrictions. These areas can be defined at various altitudes to ensure the safe coexistence of manned and unmanned aircraft. U-space regulations mandate that both drones and, in some cases, manned aircraft operating within these designated areas be electronically conspicuous, meaning they must transmit their position and identity to support situational awareness and traffic management.

Therefore, while operations below 500 feet AGL are common for drones, the electronic conspicuity requirement can extend beyond this altitude if it falls within defined U-space airspace. Always refer to national regulations and specific U-space airspace boundaries to understand the requirements in each area.

The United Kingdom does not have an equivalent to the U-space rules so are we lagging behind? ■

Martin Robinson
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AOPA NEWS

The Islander will be put back into production

INVESTMENT

BRITTEN-NORMAN GIVEN GO AHEAD TO RESTART MANUFACTURING

Ireland-based Beechlands Enterprises has received significant capital investment and is permitted to accelerate production of the Islander aircraft to boost its aftermarket business

BRITTEN-NORMAN has stated that due to investment from Northern Ireland-based Beechlands Enterprises it can restart manufacturing the Islander.

The investment will accelerate production of the iconic Islander aircraft and transform aftermarket business.

Britten-Norman will scale manufacturing operations in the UK up to eight aircraft a year in phase one. Manufacturing will be focused primarily on the unleaded piston version of the Islander, with around 20% of aircraft being delivered as turboprops.

As part of the company's focus on manufacturing, it will invest in more advanced manufacturing tools and machinery, enhancing component production capabilities. These upgrades will help reduce lead times, increase output, and improve overall cost and efficiency.

As part of the investment, Patrick Cowan, former Deputy Chief Engineer at Belfast based aeroplane manufacturer Short Brothers, will be joining the board of Britten-Norman.

Alison Rankin Frost, Director of Beechlands said; "We're delighted to invest in Britten-Norman. Great people, great product and, now we have provided more capital, great prospects."

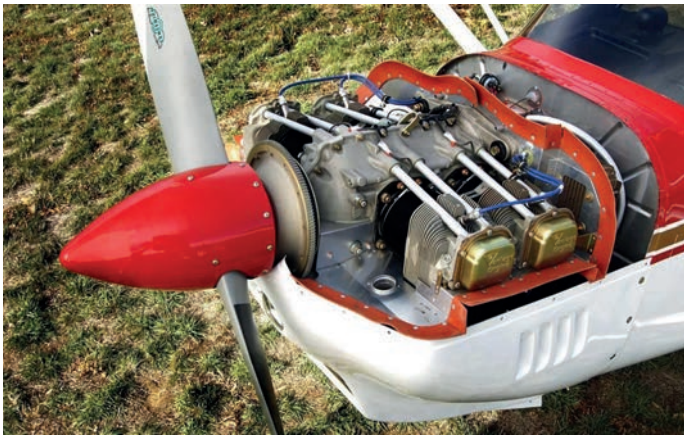
William Hynett, Britten-Norman's CEO, commented: "This welcome investment from Beechlands will enable Britten-Norman to complete its aircraft manufacturing repatriation programme, with the first aircraft destined for the Falkland Islands. We will also be focussing on our important international aftermarket operations, ensuring our long-term position as the manufacturer of choice for reliable, high-intensity, low-cost, short-field, sub-regional air transportation." ■

FAA ISSUE NEW AIRWORTHINESS DIRECTIVE FOR LYCOMING ENGINES

THE US'S Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued an airworthiness directive (AD) targeting specific Lycoming engines that are equipped with certain connecting rod assemblies.

The AD was issued in response to multiple reports of connecting rod failures that led to serious engine issues and in-flight shutdowns.

According to the agency, the AD requires regular oil inspections to check for bronze metal particles, and if any are found, further checks of the connecting rod bushings for damage or wear. If necessary, these parts must be replaced with approved ones.



Lycoming engines have come under fire from the FAA

Some 16,000 Lycoming engine models manufactured between January 2009 and February 2017 will be affected by this rule. Meanwhile, the FAA estimates costs to U.S. operators to be $3.76 million for oil inspections, $1.36 million for connecting rod bushing inspections and roughly $12.19 million for necessary replacements.

After reviewing information and taking all the feedback into account, the FAA said that the directive will take effect Dec. 5, 2024. ■

LEAH MANSFIELD APPOINTED NEW DIRECTOR OF BLAC

THE BRITISH Light Aviation Centre (BLAC) Ltd has recently welcomed Leah Mansfield as a new director.

She is a barrister; her legal expertise was instrumental in the revision and update of the BLAC Articles of Association and the addition of an Object to the Memorandum of Association to support AOPA's activity as a Training Organisation.

Leah has also worked on the CAA's Licensing and Training Simplification Working Group, bringing her valued legal skills to the project.

Leah brings her passion for aviation and legal skill to BLAC

She is also a member of both the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and the British Women Pilots Association and has an interest in warbirds. ■

Flight Sim eVTOL

Microsoft Flight Simulator allows you to fly the Joby eVTOL air taxi. The developer announced today its six-motor aircraft's profile will be included in the next generation of Microsoft Flight Simulator 2024.

Boeing Layoffs

Boeing recently announced it would begin issuing layoff notices to its employees as part of its plan to trim 17,000 jobs or what works out to10 per cent of its global workforce.

Tom Cruise using GA

PPL holder Tom Cruise has revived an old trick to try to restore the *Mission Impossible* franchise to its former financial success: He's adding aeroplane stunts.

Visit AOPA .co.uk for much more news and views

RECORD BREAKING

WINGSUIT DISTANCE RECORD SMASHED

Revolutionary wingsuit foil pushes human flight to new limits with 12.5km BASE World Record

Salzmann flying over the Swiss alps with his foil

AUSTRIAN WINGSUIT pilot Peter Salzmann has taken human flight to a new level, debuting an innovative wingsuit foil at Switzerland's Jungfrau mountain. With this new technology, Salzmann flew without engine propulsion for nearly six minutes, covering a distance of 12.5 kilometres which included an altitude difference of 3,402m, setting world records for Longest BASE Flight Time, Furthest BASE Flight Distance, and Biggest BASE Jump from start to landing.

The Jungfrau, the highest peak in Switzerland's Interlaken region, is a renowned destination for expert BASE jumpers. Jumping from a ledge at 4,063m on the mountain's north side, in conditions that included temperatures ranging from –5 to +9°C and winds reaching up to 37 km/h, Salzmann hit a top speed of 200 km/h, and flew for a total of five minutes and 56 seconds before deploying his parachute.

With his newly developed wingsuit foil, Salzmann managed to fly further than the previous record for the Longest BASE Flight distance (7.5km) by covering 12.5 km. And finally, the jump's altitude difference of 3,402 metres established a new record for Biggest BASE Jump from start to landing.

Salzmann, a world-class wingsuit pilot known for his daring flights and a skilled aerial camera operator, continues to push the boundaries of humanflight with the aid of cutting-edge technology.

"With his newly developed wingsuit foil, Salzmann managed to fly further than the previous record"

"The wingsuit foil flight today was just like out of space. It was a really challenging flight; I had everything in this flight. It was a true challenge – it was exhausting, but also the best feeling in between. All in all, I'm happy that everything went well, and I could manage the longest foil flight," said Salzmann.

Salzmann's achievement marks not only a personal milestone but also a leap forward for the wingsuit sport. Fellow Red Bull Skydive Team members Marco Fürst and Marco Waltenspiel, who worked with Salzmann on aerial camera work during their world-first flight through London's Tower Bridge in May 2024, praised the wingsuit foil's development. "The foil is an exciting innovation. It merges traditional wingsuit precision with advanced foil technology, enabling more efficient gliding and improved speed. I admire athletes who invest their time and energy to elevate their sport in unique ways," said Waltenspiel. ■

ALL YOUR NEWS ON THE MOVE

CHANGED YOUR EMAIL or recently set one up? Let us know via the AOPA UK website *(Membership, Change of Details)*, and keep up-to-date on all the latest news and more.

Update us now at membership@aopa.co.uk

In an attempt to keep the airport operational, it has now been put up for sale

FOR SALE

FANCY BUYING GLOUCESTERSHIRE AIRPORT FOR £25M?

The historic airfield is up for sale

INTERNATIONAL REAL estate advisor Savills has been jointly appointed by Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucester City Council to market the freehold interest in Gloucestershire Airport, which includes 100% of the shares in the operating company, Gloucestershire Airport Limited. Offers are invited for the aviation hub, which sits on a 350-acre site with planning consent for an additional 320,000 square feet of business space.

Established in the 1930s, Gloucestershire Airport is strategically located between Gloucester and Cheltenham, adjacent to the M5 motorway. This prime position makes it a busy gateway for business travel, flight training and private aviation. The airport has two primary tarmac runways and advanced navigation systems, which have enabled it to accommodate 66,106 aircraft movements, according to CAA statistics, ranking it the UK's busiest 'General Aviation' airport in 2023.

The Gloucestershire Airport site already has two thriving business parks spanning around 700,000 square feet, plus planning consent for an additional 320,000 square feet of business space on development land. Gloucestershire Airport Limited holds the long leasehold interest in the majority of the site under seven leasehold titles and owns the freehold interest in the land where the main airport access road is situated.

Between 2021 and 2022 the airport received almost £10 million of capital investment funded by the Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, Gloucester City and Cheltenham Borough Councils, in the runways and associated infrastructure. These upgrades, as well as surplus land and a range of potential redevelopment and other commercial opportunities, has positioned the airport well for future success as a vibrant business and aviation hub.

Jason Ivey, Managing Director at the airport, said: "To lead such a diverse and vibrant business such as Gloucestershire Airport is an absolute privilege. Since taking over as the Accountable Manager in July 2023, I have been amazed at the team spirit and local support from our operators and customers. Although both Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucester City Council have been incredibly supportive of the airport over the years, we now enter the next chapter and I can't wait for the business to fully realise its true potential with the right investor." ■

The historic airport is up for sale for a cool £25 million

BLACKPOOL PLANS TO ENTICE HOLLYWOOD

BLACKPOOL Airport is hoping to get itself on the radar of film producers and directors by becoming a go-to movie location.

The council-owned airfield has already provided the back-drop for high-profile shows such as Top Gear, and bosses are now hoping to attract more interest from filmmakers.

Steve Peters, managing director at Blackpool Airport, said: "Our airport aprons and hangars provide the perfect back drop for a whole host of large-scale filming opportunities.

Opened in 1909, the airport was originally a Battle of Britain aerodrome and is the base for numerous aviation operators.

Peters said: "Our various teams are on hand to assist with every aspect of what filmmakers need and we can also work with our customers to source props from Legacy aircraft to two-seater Chipmunks.

"With its rich history and versatile spaces, Blackpool offers a unique blend of modern amenities and historical charm, making it a prime location for any production."

The airport's website said: "Its coastal location also makes for dramatic shots from the air – with filming from light aircraft and using drones both possible." ■

CAA APPOINT NEW GROUP DIRECTOR OF SAFETY

THE UK Civil Aviation Authority has announced the appointment of Giancarlo Buono as its new Group Director, Safety and Airspace Regulation. With over 30 years of experience in the aviation sector, Giancarlo brings a wealth of industry knowledge and leadership expertise to the role, where he will lead the organisation's safety and airspace regulatory functions.

Giancarlo joins the Civil Aviation Authority Board and Executive Leadership Team from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), where he served as Regional Director for Safety and Flight Operations in Europe. In this capacity, he played a key role in advancing global aviation safety standards and regulations, working closely with international stakeholders to enhance operational safety and efficiency across the industry.

Giancarlo Buono is the CAA's new safety boss

A seasoned leader, Giancarlo's career encompasses both civil and military aviation. He started as an officer and pilot in the Air Force before transitioning to commercial aviation, where he held several senior positions prior to joining IATA.

Rob Bishton, Chief Executive of the UK Civil Aviation Authority, said: "We are delighted to welcome Giancarlo Buono to the team. His extensive experience in regulatory frameworks and operational safety will be crucial in advancing our mission to protect people and enable aerospace. Giancarlo's leadership will help us uphold the highest safety standards while fostering innovation in the UK's aerospace sector."

Commenting on his appointment, Giancarlo Buono said: "I am delighted to join the UK Civil Aviation Authority at such a crucial time for the aerospace sector. The Civil Aviation Authority plays a vital role in safeguarding the safety of air travel. I look forward to collaborating with colleagues and stakeholders, driving innovation, delivery excellence and contributing to shaping the future of aerospace." ■

Elixir CAA approved

Elixir Aircraft, the French manufacturer of training aircraft, revealed that its two-seat aircraft has just been certified by the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Elixir can now begin deliveries to schools.

Gamebird firefighter

Game Composites is building a single-engine firebomber that its designer says will carry more firefighting equipment and fly farther and faster than any other aircraft in its category.

Lilium goes under

eVTOL start-up Lilium has filed for bankruptcy days after the German federal government and the Free State of Bavaria have failed to guarantee $108 million in loans the company needs.

Peter Salzmann

The wingsuit record breaker and aerial camera man on making history

Pete Salzmann

Peter Salzmann is a world-class wingsuit pilot, known not only for the remarkable flights he's made across the globe, but also his skills as an aerial camera operator and his passion around using technology to expand the limits of human flight. His latest jump set new world records for the Longest BASE Flight Time of 5m 56s and Longest BASE Flight Distance of 12.5km (7.77 miles). Additionally, the jump's altitude difference of 3,402m (11,161 feet) also established a new record for Biggest BASE Jump from start to landing.

Q: What first attracted you to adrenaline sports?
A: I always loved Jackie Chan, and I always wanted to be a stuntman. My friend and I would practice stunts growing up. Not just jumps, but coordination things, balancing, everything that challenges your body.

Q: How did that morph into wingsuit flying?
A: I just kept getting higher and higher. I kept upping my jumps from 20m to 25m to 30m and doing tricks like jumping out of a moving car or being dragged along by one. Deep down, I knew I was addicted to the sense of freefall and began skydiving at the age of 20. 18 months later, I was BASE jumping. I felt like, 'this is it.'

Q: You've been doing aerial sports for more than 17 years now, are you bored?
A: When I'm on the ground, I long for what I can't do. Everyone has their passion. For me, it's flying.

Q: And what is it about wingsuit flying?
A: For those not in the know, a wingsuit is supportive jump clothing worn to improve an athlete's performance and control during freefall. There are wings between the hands and feet and a large wing area between the legs, which inflates and develops a wing profile to help the wearer fly forward and travel horizontal distances. Before a jump I'm so focused. You're in the moment and there's no turning back in your mind. If everything goes smoothly in your head, then everything is set.

Q: Is It dangerous?
A: It's a precarious sport. Eying up a jump, there might come a point where I think 'Wait a minute, maybe it's not right today after all, I'd rather leave it for now.' With a difficult jump, I measure the data and then at the exit, even if the data is good, I listen to my gut. If your gut says it's not right today, you have to be strong enough not to do it and go back down.

Q: What is the wingsuit foil and how was it built?
A: The wingsuit foil has a 2.1m wingspan and features a sandwich construction with a foam core and 3D-printed components. It attaches to the front torso of the wingsuit pilot. The idea was inspired by wing foiling and hydrofoiling. wingsuit foil developer Andreas Podlipnik, Red Bull Advanced Technologies and I collaborated to develop it. It took about three years to develop the wingsuit foil, from the initial concept to the final wing design. During this time, six different prototypes were created and tested. Before airborne tests, initial flights were conducted at the indoor wingsuit tunnel in Stockholm, Sweden.

Q: Is there much innovation to be had in wingsuit flying?
A: I try to innovate to keep the sport fresh, and it gives me a feeling of success. I want to advance things, develop something further and not be satisfied with the current state of development.

"I try to innovate to keep the sport fresh, and it gives me a feeling of success. I want to advance things, develop something further and not be satisfied..."

For the wingsuit foil project, I worked directly with designer Andreas Podlipnik to create a wingsuit capable of travelling longer distances than ever before. I'm not really about records, I'm more into the innovation side, discovering new flying equipment. It would be great to have a headline like: 'Red Bull and Peter Salzmann develop new, innovative flying equipment that immensely improves performance in flying'. Mission accomplished on both fronts.

Q: What's your next challenge going to be? Where do you go from here?
A: As for the future, I find it hard to imagine not doing it, but I can see myself paragliding at age 80, even if I'm no longer flying wingsuits. And then, of course, there are high alpine jumps in the Himalayas and elsewhere, requiring days of hiking, acclimatisation and sleeping at 6,000m. That is such a huge goal and passion of mine. ■

Salzmann putting his revolutionary foil through its paces

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Welcome to the COMMUNITY section of the magazine. Bringing you help, advice, and other insights from the world of AOPA, in an honest and up front way to help you stay flying. Something to say? Please contact us at ***editor@aopa.co.uk***

WORDS AND IMAGES Andre Faehndrich

ENCOURAGING THE FUTURE

The 18th Annual Young Aviators event took place at Deenethorpe Aerodrome and was a huge success thanks to all who helped

THE DAY unfortunately started with low cloud, and very little wind, which stopped any visiting pilots from landing, nor any based ones from taking off, so we had to wait until 3pm when conditions improved and flying could eventually commence.

If we had started flying at the normal time (10:30) with the expected number of pilots (17) and finished on time (17:00 to 17:30) we would have been able to fly everyone, and some adults as well. However for the first time in 18 years Mother Nature refused to play ball.

However, a busy day was planned, with 123 youngsters registered and more than 200 people on site.

Thanks has to go to Sebastian Pooley, Steve Dancer and all the team at Pooley's for all the goody bags. Lizzie, Kelly, Mandy at BGA, BMAA and AOPA HQ, as well as Brenda at CAA STEM, and others for extra contents for the goody bags – thank you one and all for your generosity. Nigel Kemp and his marshallers (Alan Field, Kevin Jarvis, Jeff Webb and Kari Webb) for all their usual help and assistance.

Sue Stowe and Steve Slater for the eggscellent Egg Crash Test Workshop, a very popular item, and new once again after an absence of a few years. Phil Jackson for the brilliant aircraft drawing and sketching, which proved extremely popular again this year.

Jon Edginton and his very competent team (Lee Edginton, Gavin Richards, Damian Mattock and Mark Parker) for the Navigation and Map Reading – which got many thumbs up, especially from some of the Scout Leaders.

Ian Malcomson and Igraine Malcomson-Smith, for their excellent Bus Stop control as usual, which made the flying, once we got going at 15:00 a breeze, despite having to control a sea of very keen flyers, who at that stage were getting very frustrated at the lack of flying - in fact as we always tell all registered participants, and it gets repeated at the General Safety Briefing right after registration, that we cannot guarantee flying everyone, as we are so dependent on the weather, as was proven on Saturday, for the very first time in 18 years.

Andy Webb and his team from Skysmart (Sam Jones, Rhys Parker and one other) for the Maverick Top Gun Challenge with their amazing Virtual Reality goggles, and fully moving seat (designed, built and operated by his incredible apprentices) and the Paper Plane challenge (with paper planes from "The Plane Guy") again operated by Andy's team.

Paul Oakley, Harvey Davies and Tala Hussein, who were an amazing help with wherever it was needed from stuffing goody bags, to registration of everyone arriving, to chasing up things to make them happen – absolutely invaluable help. Thank you all.

The four aircraft that were put into static for cockpit visits and chats with a pilot– thanks to Kevin and Mick for organising, as a few others that were due to go into static were grounded at their departure airports.

We're already booked at Deenethorpe Aerodrome for Sat 6th September 2025 for the 19th Annual Young Aviators event, and I hope to run a few more events there during 2025, but I need to work all that out, as well as the all-important sponsorship to cover my costs, especially the insurance for flying.

Without all these amazing people the magic of Young Aviators would just not be able to happen. Thank you one and all - you are all incredible people, and I could not do this with out you all. ■

The remote control aircraft was hugely popular with the Scouts on site

There was plenty to do throughout the day for the 123 young aviators who took part

WORDS AND IMAGES Michael Powell

SMOOTH TIMES AHEAD

In his series on what you can and can't do to your aircraft, Licensed Engineer **Michael Powell** gets greasy

LUBRICATION IS an essential and continuing maintenance task. As I was told a long time ago "a few litres of oil is a lot cheaper than a new engine".

Lubrication is also essentially a simple task requiring nothing more than an oil can, grease gun and, of course, oil and grease.

Aeleron, rudder, flap and elevator hinges are best lubricated with engine oil. Clean all the accumulated muck off the hinges with a soft rag and then dribble oil along the hinges. Do this on a frequent time interval as any oil or grease is swiftly removed by the airflow and the ravages of the lovely British weather.

The undercarriage is usually fitted with grease nipples and these require the use of a grease gun. Similarly the control linkages concealed behind the instrument panel are usually fitted with grease nipples and do not immediately seem accessible. You will need to be fairly flexible – or very small!

GREASE NIPPLES

When operating the grease-gun check that grease is seen to issue from the bearing to confirm that grease is reaching the bearing correctly. Grease nipples get blocked and it may be necessary to clear the nipple by removing it and pumping grease through the nipple to clear the blockage. If this does not work then a new nipple is required. If a new nipple is not available locally then LAS can supply one, or, as usual, your friendly Licensed Engineer can - and probably will – help you.

Check that grease is seen to issue from the far side of the bearing when operating the grease gun. If no grease is seen to issue from the bearing then the bearing will have to be dismantled and thoroughly cleaned of old grease prior to reassembly.

Coat all the bearing surfaces with new grease when reassembling. Check that grease is seen to issue from the bearing after reassembly.

Engine oil is quite literally the life-blood of the engine and it is recommended that an oil and filter change is carried out at least every 50 hours.

This is even more essential if the aircraft is fitted with a variable-pitch prop where the state of the oil (for example; old and dirty) is closely connected with the performance of the pitch-change controller, oil pump, and propellor internal hydraulic pitch-change mechanism.

There are companies who will analyse used engine oil and give a report on their findings, ie. signs of a bearing breaking up. There is, of course, a charge for this service and it may be argued that a regular 50 hr change makes an analysis a costly and unnecessary option.

It should be noted that different engine oil grades are used in summer and winter. It is generally the case that the engine manufacturer will specify a lighter oil for winter use. This gets the oil circulating quicker in winter so that, hopefully, the engine warms up quicker and oil gets to bearings quickly thus reducing wear. The aircraft's handbook should give the guidance needed. Some aircraft are fitted with cowl flaps to reduce the flow of cold air over the engine. It is worth checking that cowl flaps, if fitted, are working correctly.

A cheaper option sometimes used is to simply blank off part of the cooling air inlet with aluminium foil. However, care should be taken if this option is used to ensure that it does not result in uneven cooling or over-heating of the engine cylinder heads.

Make a note in both log-books so that you can refer to the make and grade of oil used at the next 50 hour oil change. ■

Grease nipples get blocked and it may be necessary to clear the nipple by removing it

YOUR HERO THIS MONTH WE BRING YOU THE BEECHCRAFT BARON

SOMETIMES A design simply works and endures the test of time. For more than 50 years, the Beechcraft Baron has been at the pinnacle of twin-engined personal air transportation.

Among many worthy challengers over the decades, the Baron soldiers on as proof that legacy aeroplanes are still in the game of winning orders.

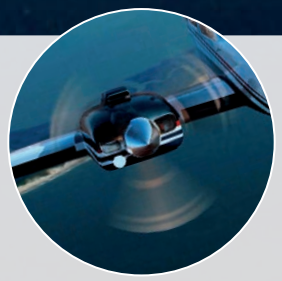
If you need to move four people and their gear 600 nm in three hours, there are several aeroplanes to meet the mission. But do they have twin-engine redundancy and its resulting reassurance, known-ice capability, weather radar, the ability to get in and out of short/unimproved airstrips, or a service network that consists of, say, basically any mechanic in the country? For these reasons, there has been a Baron in the lineup at Beechcraft for five decades. And for these reasons, customers keep buying them.

The Beechcraft Baron is a pilot favourite. One onwer, Larry Weitzman said: "We bought our Baron 58 a little over three years ago and it has performed admirably during that period. The plane is our family hauler, comfortably carrying six people across the country several times a year, along with regional trips for hockey games and such."

And that's why the Baron is our hero. ■

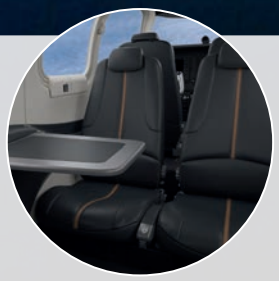
Send Your Hero to **editor@aopa.co.uk.** It doesn't have to be your own aircraft... own it or admire it from afar, either way we want to know what's Your Hero and why. Just send us around 100 words, your top 6 'fast facts' and we'll do the rest to show off your favourite aircraft. ■

IMAGES: Textron Aviation



HANDLING

It has light control pressures and is highly responsive, but there's a slight price to pay in turbulence when in IMC.



COMFORT

Visibility is good from all seats. From a passenger standpoint, the middle seats, with club seating, are the most comfortable.

UPKEEP

A Baron can be expensive to keep airworthy. But, with preventive upkeep, maintenance costs should be average.

LUXURY

The front seat of a Baron has to qualify as one of the world's greatest places to be with lots of headroom and good visibility.

BIG LOADS

As twins go, the 55 Baron has decent if not exceptional payload. A typically equipped Baron can carry about 1800lbs.

WEATHER READY

The Baron can handle almost all weather, with its onboard radar and de-icing equipment. It is a rock solid IFR platform.

WORDS Malcolm Bird **IMAGES** Various (for illustration purposes only)

KEEPING YOU FLYING

The AOPA Maintenance Working Group has handled many queries over the last couple of years from members regarding their aircraft

IT CAN be tough thinking you don't have anyone out there who can help you with your aircraft, but the AOPA Maintenance Working Group has been helping members with their aircraft issues for a number of years. Here are some more reports showing how the MWG has helped.

AOPA's Maintenance Working Group helped sportscruiser owners with their issues

SPORTCRUISER FORM E18B

Many Sportcruisers are flying in the UK on a Part21-Permit. Each aircraft requires its flight conditions to be approved with a Form E18b. These aircraft had EASA Form E18bs when the UK left EASA and since then the CAA has accepted these as if they are CAA documents. Without an E18b you cannot renew permits or arrange ferry flights.

The CAA suddenly announced that only CAA Form E18bs would be acceptable and asked owners to submit paperwork and pay for the changeover. AOPA took this up with the CAA as an example of GOLD PLATING. The CAA produced new guidance indicating that they will prepare necessary paperwork and that there will be no charges applied.

ROBIN DR400-180

Three new undercarriage legs were fitted in early 2022 and by August 2023 the chrome plating on the sliding section was failing on all three legs. One main leg started leaking oil as a result of seal damage from the defective chrome, and new CAMO advised that the aircraft should not be flown.

"AOPA has provided guidance as parts supplied to customer by UK CAMO so under UK trading standards rules"

Parts had been obtained by previous CAMO from CEAPR in France, Robin's parent company. Warranty claim has been rejected by CEAPR on the basis that in accordance with their Ts and Cs, parts supplied were only guaranteed for one year / 200 hours. But were they fit for purpose?

AOPA has provided guidance as parts supplied to customer by UK CAMO so under UK trading standards rules. Also consider if there is any protection under section 75 due to use of a credit card.

CESSNA 172 OWNERSHIP SYNDICATE

Group use an online web-based service for their booking and flight detail recording. They asked if they need to still maintain a paper copy of the flight log in the aircraft if the details are recorded on the system and a spreadsheet version is provided to their maintenance organisation.

Provided CAA guidance: "The system would need ANO approval and that although several such apps exist, most rely upon manual transfer to an aircraft's log books as a final step ahead of each annual service." Suggested they check with the system authors re status.

ROKO AERO NG4

Trying to find solutions to get a mothballed aircraft back onto a Part21 CAA permit. In particular the aircraft's ballistic chute has expired and there is an approaching 912ULS TBO.

We were able to give extracts from our Maintenance WG minutes to answer questions – not always to answers owners wanted to hear! ■

Are you due for an Instructor Refresher Seminar?

DON'T LOSE YOUR INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATE

You may attend a refresher seminar at any time during the validity of your FI or CRI certificate. The AOPA Instructor Seminar is also open to aspiring flight instructors

2025 DATES FOR AOPA INSTRUCTOR SEMINARS

18/19 March, 7/8 May, 12/13 August and 11/12 November
To be held at the AOPA HQ in Sevenoaks
The cost for two full days seminar for non-members is £325
AOPA members benefit from a £50 DISCOUNT

TOPICS COVERED INCLUDE

• New/current rules/regulations, with emphasis on knowledge of UK-part FCL • • Teaching and learning • Instructional techniques • The role of the instructor • • National regulations • Flight safety, incident and accident prevention • • Teaching instrument flying • Legal aspects and enforcement procedures • • Navigational skills, new/current radio navigation aids • Airmanship • • Weather related topics, methods of distribution • Human factors • • Additional topics selected by the competent authority •

For further details contact the AOPA office on **020 7834 5631** or email **mandy@aopa.co.uk.**
You can also register for the seminar online at **www.aopa.co.uk**

AN AIRPORT THAT'S FOR EVERYONE

On the outskirts of London and surrounded by other, larger airports, Blackbushe is a gem and focuses on the local community as much as its pilots – everyone is welcome

WORDS David Rawlings
IMAGES Various

ARRIVING AT Blackbushe airport you notice how spread out it seems. With plenty of one-storey buildings and low hangars it feels more countryside than aviation hub.

The only building that stands higher is the terminal building and the tower which oversees the entire airport. And although there are plenty of biz jets on the apron, it really is a community airfield that enjoys a fantastic relationship with the locals as well as visiting pilots and passengers.

I headed to Blackbushe to meet Mike Miller Smith, the CEO of Aerobility and Chris Gazzard, the Managing Director of Blackbushe Airport to see why the airport is so popular by visitors travelling by air and by road.

"The café is very popular," said Mike. We were sitting in one of Aerobility's office when he explained why the car park was so full.

Aerobility moved to Blackbushe in 2011 due to the charity growing, and Blackbushe were more than happy to accommodate them.

"Aerobility started out of Lasham Gliding Club, just up the road," explained Mike. "It used to just be gliding, but when the Jordanian Air Force donated a Bulldog trainer to us we were then able to use powered flight. It quickly became apparent that Lasham wasn't ideal for powered aircraft as it was such a busy gliding club. We had spent a lot of time at Blackbushe Airport, visiting the café and using it for students to land at different airfields. We asked and the airport was were very helpful. They allowed us to put up some buildings and a hangar and we've been here ever since."

"We asked and the airport was very helpful. They allowed us to put up some buildings and a hangar and we've been here ever since"

HISTORY

Like many airfields, Blackbushe broke ground in 1941 during WWII. It officially opened in 1942 as RAF Hartford Bridge. The first landing was from an aircraft that had flown all the way from Farnborough – a whopping five miles away.

After the war, it had commercial traffic. Eagle Airways was based out of here and flew to Europe. "It nearly became Gatwick. However, once Gatwick was chosen Blackbushe was sold off," said Chris.

Before the airport was sold everything that was worth any money was ripped out. So in 1960 all that was left was the shell of the terminal building and the concrete runway.

Now this is where the story of Blackbushe gets confusing. When the government first built the airport, it was

The glorious new runway lighting

The community spirit at Blackbushe is there for all to see

common ground. They took the land from private owners and put the airport on it. Afterwards it was always understood that the airport would be demolished, returned to the owners and then returned to common ground. "However, when the land was returned it was clearly still an airport. And that's when Air Vice Marshall Bennett bought the airfield and kept it as such. What did the government expect the owners to do? The government came in, took land off private landowners, built an airport and then handed it back to them with all the concrete still there, so what do you expect the landowners to do when they've been given back an airport? They're not going to pay to remove everything and if someone want to buy it as an airport, of course they're going to sell. It's not the airport's fault," added Chris.

As it's still technically common land it's not allowed to be developed, but the airport has acquired some ground and is hoping to do a land swap so they can develop Blackbushe properly. "The process is currently ongoing, but I think we could have a decision as early as Christmas," said Chris.

KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE

There is currently a charity honouring the history of Blackbushe by rebuilding a Vickers Viking – one of the commercial airliners that used to fly out of the airport. A group of Blackbushe-based aviation enthusiasts and professionals set up the Blackbushe Heritage Trust (BHT). With generous support from various companies, BHT was able to rescue the 1946

THE ESSENTIALS BLACKBUSHE

DETAILS

A: Terminal Building, Blackbushe Airport, Camberley, Surrey, GU17 9LQ
T: 01252 471 300
W: blackbusheairport.co.uk

BOOK IN

Blackbushe ask that you help them manage the workload in the tower by using its PPR form in advance of your flight. You'll get an automated acknowledgement, followed by a confirmation from the tower team later.

ENTERING THE ATZ

If you're coming from the North or West, please call us with 3-4 miles to run to get your first traffic information. As part of our ATZ is a Local Flying Area (LFA) within the Farnborough CTR, there are sometimes limitations on numbers of aircraft, so the earlier you call, the easier it is to manage this.
Remember to set your squawk to 7010 on entering the ATZ ready for the circuit.

JOINING

There are two standard VFR / SVFR joins:
From Outside Controlled Airspace (North and West) - YELLOW
Joins from the north and west shall descend to circuit height on the "Deadside" (to the north of the Aerodrome. Care must be taken not to overfly Yateley or Eversley to the north (see Diagram in 4.1), and aircraft arriving from a north east should ensure they are positioned sufficiently west to avoid them.
From Within Controlled Airspace (South and East) - RED
Aircraft coming from within the Farnborough CTR shall join overhead at 1,600ft aal to ensure they are within the LFA. They shall descend on the Deadside and integrate with the visual circuit. Care should be exercised not to overfly the noise abatement area of Yateley except in an emergency.
TIP: If you're coming from within the CTR from the south or east, ensure you're aware of our noise abatement areas (shaded red in the map). If you're coming from the SE via M3 Junction 4 VRP, ensure you are set for an overhead join over the centre of the runway, and keep south-west of the disused runway 14/32 when descending on the dead-side. If you're not confident with this, then the best practice is to head north from the motorway, around the outside of the ATZ and rejoin from the north, through the gap between Eversley and Yateley.

built Vickers Viking G-AGRW from Bad Voslau airfield in Austria where it had been languishing in a poor state for a number of years. It was a former BAE and Eagle aircraft before heading to Austria. The volunteers have been very busy restoring the aircraft to its former glory and when complete will form the centrepiece of a new heritage centre telling the important story Blackbushe Airport has played in the story of British Aviation.

"The Viking was part of a McDonalds in Austria where they had kids parties inside, and when the team was pulling it apart they found really old McDonalds wrappers," said Chris.

LOOKING AHEAD

Surrounded by other airports, Blackbushe knows that the local community is almost as essential as the pilots and aircraft that arrive there. Chris explains that they're setting up the infrastructure first before developing the site itself. "We could manage with less staff and less fire crew, but we've always had this image of where we're going and what we want to achieve. So in terms of staffing and procedures we've already geared ourselves up for that. We might have been spending a bit much on outgoings, but it means we're ready," said Chris.

"The reality is if you only have one or two FISOs in your tower and one of them goes it's a big deal. We have six and even then, if one goes it's still a big deal, but we can manage to still provide the service. And it's the same for the fire service. We don't want to turn people away because the moment you do, they go somewhere else," added Chris.

The airport has over 42,000 movements a year, but Chris believes that the people arriving by road are as important as those flying in. "I love it when I come in and the car park is full," said Chris. "The café is the biggest pull, it's always full with locals and pilots and there is a really good community spirit," said Chris. Mike added: "The rule is if you're taxiing past the café, you have to wave to the kids."

"We could manage with less staff and less fire crew, but we've always had this image of where we're going and what we want to achieve"

Visit AOPA .co.uk for more **airfield help and info**

Even with development in mind, Chris wants Blackbushe remain a community airport. "We also do a lot of fundraising. We have the 'Run The Runways' event where people run for the charity of their choice. We raised more than £50,000 for various charities this year. We also have an open day for the community as well. We want to remain accessible and provide more facilities for the local community." ■

The Blackbushe Heritage Trust on another fund raising mission

Aerobility has been based at Blackbushe since 2011


One of Aerobility's aircraft helping disabled pilots

Even if you don't fly, the café is well wrth a trip by road

"When the team were pulling it apart they found really old McDonalds wrappers"

WORDS & IMAGES Matt Dearden

Flying from Shangri-La

Bored of life and suffering from anxiety, **Matt Dearden** gave it all up and followed his dream of bush flying in Papua. His book *Flying From Shangri-La* is now out in the wild, and here he offers a few of the stories that fill this boy's-own adventure of a book

I WAS working in computer programming in the UK and was bored of life, and fun was being replaced with anxiety. So I decided I'd had enough and managed to get a job with Susi Air in Indonesia and flying over Papua in a Pilatus Porter.

I had never seen a Pilatus Porter before but had heard of them. The day after I arrived into Sentani I would be hitching a lift in one heading for Nabire, which is where I was to be based for the start of my tour in Papua. The date was the 18th of April 2010 and it was love at first sight. This massive tailwheel aircraft looked purposeful sitting on the apron in Sentani the morning of our departure – tailwheel meaning the third wheel was at the rear of the aircraft rather than the front like the Caravan. I couldn't wait to see how it flew as I'd heard about its legendary STOL (Short Take-off and Landing) performance.

The Porter has a bit of a reputation as a widowmaker thanks to its large size, powerful engine and tailwheel configuration so, rightly, I needed to get used to that design in something a little less intimidating. Whilst I was still flying the Cessna Caravan in Kupang, I headed back to the UK and signed up for a tailwheel conversion course in a Piper PA-18 Super Cub based at Clacton-on-Sea, registration G-BIMM.

Having now logged some 1,200 hours on the 4.1 tonne turboprop-powered Cessna Caravan, the little 400-kilogram piston engine powered Super Cub felt ridiculously tiny. It's also made of metal tubes covered in fabric rather than the sheets of aluminium the Caravan is, so it felt rather flimsy in comparison. However, the moment I was barrelling down Clacton's 600-metre grass runway with my instructor

FAST FACTS

7
YEARS IN THE JUNGLE

6,500
RUNWAY HEIGHT (FT)

1,444
PORTER'S T/O DISTANCE

Bangga, the steepest airstrip in Papua, is a mind-blowing 30% upslope!

sat behind me, all this was forgotten and I was revelling in both the simplicity of this machine and the delightful way in which it flew. Compared to the Caravan, the little Cub danced around the sky, requiring only the lightest control inputs to affect any change of direction. I was also getting used to using my feet again as the Cub, like most tailwheel aircraft, requires constant rudder inputs along with the ailerons to keep any turns balanced. I was in heaven. I knew two things: I couldn't wait to get flying the Porter and I needed to own a Cub at some point in my life.

So; some stories from my time living my dream...

THIS IS IT THEN

Well, this is how I die. I'd never imagined I'd be killed in a plane crash. I was crying and all alone in the cockpit of my Pilatus PC-6 Turbo Porter bush plane. Despite numerous people telling me how dangerous my job was, I thought I was better than that. But I was struggling to keep the wings level at 15,000 feet and fighting off waves of nausea that came and went. Flying inside a cloud with zero outside visibility and a mountain range not far below me was terrifying. I was breathing in pure oxygen from the aircraft's bottled supply and vomiting uncontrollably into my own lap.

I had figured out that by resting my right elbow on the ledge below the instrument panel and my head on my right hand, I could stave off the more extreme waves of nausea and thus stop the need to vomit constantly. I kept my left hand on the control stick between my legs. The Pilatus Porter does not have an autopilot and so required me to continuously manipulate the controls to keep the aircraft straight and level.

I was piloting my last flight of the day from a little mountain airstrip called Sinak back to my home base of Timika, both in the Indonesian province of Papua. My cargo for the trip was four empty 55-gallon fuel drums that were, as normal, leaking petrol fumes into the cabin. I wasn't sure if it was this or the aircraft's onboard oxygen system that was poisoning me but, either way, I was becoming weaker and weaker as the minutes ticked by. I needed to do something before I passed out.

"I was struggling to keep the wings level at 15,000 feet and fighting off waves of nausea that came and went"

I desperately wanted to drop below 10,000 feet so I could stop breathing the bottled oxygen. In my mind this was what was causing me to feel so nauseous, but that unseen mountain range was still there, in the clouds below, preventing a descent. My only hope was to continue southbound over the Ilaga Pass to the flatter grounds of southern Papua and start descending, relying on the aircraft's onboard GPS navigation system to tell me when I was clear of the mountains. This, however,

1. Local children playing up to the camera
2. Eyeing up the approach onto a ridge-top landing at Idedua, 6,500ft
3. Matt's first love and most trusted friend in Papua

Villagers at Liligan celebrate the first landing of an aircraft on their new airstrip

meant straying off the safe GPS track I was following. If I stayed on it, I would have to remain at this high altitude for longer than I was going to be able to remain conscious. I needed to get down and off this bottled oxygen NOW!

"Caution terrain! Caution terrain!" screamed the aircraft's terrain awareness system (TAWS) as I began my descent through the clouds. I was, by now, relying on this system to guide me down and away from the mountains below me. As any pilot will tell you, this is an incredibly dangerous way to fly and not to be relied on because navigation databases are often incorrect, displaying mountains where there aren't any and, much more fatally, low ground when in fact the terrain is much higher. I was running out of options and consciousness so it was a gamble I was willing to take. The minutes ticked by and steadily I kept descending, levelling off slightly every time the TAWS warned me of an impending crash into the mountains. My shirt was soaked in sweat now and the vomit was seeping into my boots as I grew more and more tired with the ordeal. Every blink seemed to keep my eyes closed for longer and longer and the overwhelming desire to just go to sleep, to make all this pain go away, was becoming harder and harder to resist. I was still nearly 30 minutes away from Timika

"As I began my descent through the clouds. I was, by now, relying on this system to guide me down and away from the mountains below me"

airport and a safe landing. But if I just closed my eyes now, I could make it all go away. I obviously made it back to terra firma, but that was just one mission you'll have to read the book to find out the ending

DIFFICULTIES OF THE JUNGLE

Of course, it's all very well being able to fly in a cloud to get to your destination but you need to be able to see the airstrip when you get there in order to land on it. None of the airstrips in Papua had an instrument approach to allow a landing during bad weather, so if you couldn't see the runway you returned back to where you came from or diverted somewhere to wait for the weather to improve.

The morning I flew to Mulia was a perfect day, however, and we were able to enjoy the scenery, which felt like something out of the movie Jurassic Park.

Mulia was something else and as we approached the bowl it was located in, Claire positioned us at the key point for the landing. As we descended beyond this my heart was racing, as I knew we were committed to land now and being surrounded by all this terrain gave such a feeling of vulnerability. Parked up on the right side of the valley were the remains of a crashed aircraft that tried to do a 180-degree turn. I was getting used to seeing wrecked aircraft now,

"I knew we were committed to land now and being surrounded by all this terrain gave such a feeling of vulnerability"

The stunning Lake Paniai at 5500ft in the centre of the Papua highlands

The lightweight PT6 engine requires the long nose get the C of G forwards

as almost all the airstrips we went to seemed to have one somewhere. We touched down perfectly and taxied up to the top of the runway, which was also marked by a rather foreboding 20 foot-high crucifix.

I was hooked. This mountain flying was the most incredible thing I had ever seen and I wanted more. I wanted to be allowed to perform these landings myself but for that I would need much more experience and would also need to make captain. I also wanted to fly the Pilatus Porter and for that you needed both passion and experience. I now had the former but the latter was going to take time.

A SMALL ACCIDENT

I increased the power to full on the engine and released the brakes, easing the aircraft off the edge of the parking area and down the really steep part of the airstrip. This surge of power from the engine pulled the aircraft off centre much more than I was expecting and I was now barrelling down a very steep airstrip but skidding off to the left. Instinctively, I pushed full right rudder and the right wheel brake along with banking the ailerons over to the right to try and push some weight onto the right wheel and pull the aircraft straight. By now the aircraft was completely off the centre and about to end up in the ditch going at a fair rate of knots.

I was faced with two choices: first, abort the take-off and try and slow down as much as I could before going into the ditch by using reverse power and the brakes, although they had proven to be useless on the wet airstrip. Or I could increase the engine power beyond maximum into what's known as the transient range and hope I could gain enough speed to yank the aircraft off the airstrip before I ended up in the ditch. Then I would need to bank hard over to avoid the trees just beyond the ditch.

"I was hooked. This mountain flying was the most incredible thing I had ever seen and I wanted more. I wanted to be allowed to perform these landings myself but for that I would need much more experience"

The decisions you make in situations like this are no longer confined to the boundaries of normality. In the spilt-second I had to choose, I went with firewalling the power and prayed to whatever god who would listen that I got airborne before crashing. I glanced down very briefly at the engine parameters upon giving it everything it had and a few of the gauges went red, indicating I was exceeding their designed limits. I still had the right rudder and brake applied along with right bank and by some miracle the Porter gained just enough speed to start to lift away from the ground.

"Stall! Stall! Stall!" called the aircraft's on-board warning system in its characteristically calming voice. This was accompanied by the high-pitched shrill from the stall warning alarm. I eased the backpressure on the stick to ensure we didn't stall and

1. Big, low pressure tyres with Matt for reference
2. G1000 glass cockpit enhances safety but pilots still need serious skill for the landings
3. Crashes are a common sight in Papua unfortunately

balanced not stalling with climbing away as steeply as possible from the ground to clear the trees without crashing into them.

I had become almost desensitised to accidents now. They were so frequent and in my mind I never believed it would happen to me. That might sound a bit arrogant but I think if you started to have doubts about your own ability, bush flying probably isn't for you. There were plenty of potential ways to die outside of your control, such as an engine failure or a freak gust of wind on short final approach, but if you let those doubts creep into your mind then they could start to eat away at you.

There was only one option left and so I applied full reverse thrust and accepted the large yaw that it introduced. This pulled the whole aircraft off the centre of the airstrip and I sucked the seat up into my arse in anticipation of the impending crash into the surrounding jungle. Just as I thought we were about to vacate the airstrip completely, the right main wheel caught a very slight dip running parallel to the airstrip that stopped the aircraft going any further off to the right.

It was like hitting the edge of a train track as we continued to slide forwards. I still had full reverse applied which was having some effect on the speed, which was now slowing down, but ahead was a small, wooden post marking the edge of the runway that I was sure was about to meet the propeller in a spectacular bang. However, just before this post was a massive puddle of water. We hit it with full reverse still on and I've never seen such a sight whilst piloting an aircraft. The entire contents of this puddle were sucked up and over the top of the aircraft by the reverse pitch propeller as we came to a complete stop, water raining down. I cancelled the reverse thrust and breathed out. I had been holding my breath since we started sliding down the airstrip.

"There was only one option left and so I applied full reverse thrust and accepted the large yaw that it introduced."

SUMMING IT UP

I was lucky that I had the perfect tool for the job, the Pilatus Porter. It's so much better aircraft than I am a pilot and for that I'm forever thankful. Whilst bush flying does require you to know when to push things and when to back things off, the Porter had the performance to push things to your limits because its own were always much higher. For all the stories of what it can do, you'll have to read the book!

I'm currently flying a Pilatus PC-12 based out of Denham for Jet Exchange and take its owners all over Europe. As a privately operated aircraft, I also handle all the flight planning and operations side of things which gives another dimension to the job. It's a great way to see parts of Europe and have someone else footing the bill! ■

Matt spent a total of seven years flying the dangerous and exotic airspace of Papua and now his book Flying From Shangri-La is available to buy on his website https://mattdearden.co.uk/book/

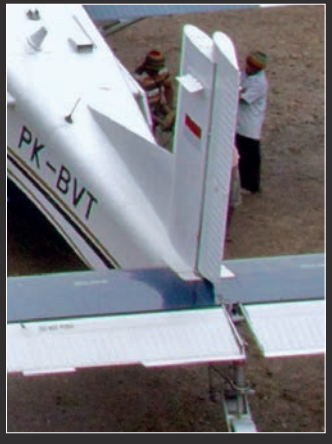
TECH SPEC Pilatus Porter PC-6

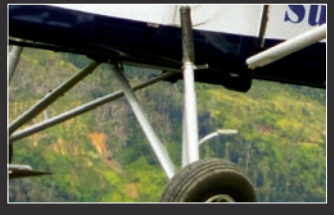
DIMENTIONS AND WEIGHTS
Height: 10.5 ft
Wingspan: O52.07 ft
Length: 35.76 ft
Max T/O Weight: 6,173 lbs
Max Landing Weight: 5,863 lbs
Max payload: 2,646 lbs
Crew: One
Passengers: 10

RANGE
Max Range: 394 nm
Service Ceiling: 25,000 ft

PERFORMANCE
Take-Off Distance (Over 50 ft Obstacle): 1,444 ft
Landing Distance (Over 50 ft Obstacle: 1,033 ft
Rate Of Climb: 1,010 fpm
Max Speed: 125 knots
Normal Cruise: 115 knots
Stall Speed (Flaps Up): 58 knots

POWERPLANT
Engines: One
Engine Manufacturer: Pratt & Whitney
Engine Model: PT-6A=27 Turboprop





Basking in the morning sunshine at Ninia airstrip, 6,550ft

Igor Sikorsky with a model of one of his helicopters

WORDS & IMAGES Courtesy of Igor I. Sikorsky Historical Archives

IGOR SIKORSKY and the World's First Helicopter: The VS-300

2024 marked the 85th anniversary of the first flight of the VS-300, the pioneering aircraft described as the first helicopter

IGOR SIKORSKY'S name is synonymous with vertical flight. His pioneering work on the VS-300, the world's first practical helicopter, marked a turning point in aviation history. The story of Sikorsky and the VS-300 is not just a tale of innovation and engineering prowess; it is also a testament to the relentless pursuit of vision, overcoming technological challenges, and shaping the future of flight.

Igor was born on May 25, 1889, in Kyiv, then part of the Russian Empire and now Ukraine. His father, Ivan, was a professor of psychology and philosophy, while his mother, Maria, was a pianist and a music teacher. The blend of intellectual rigor and artistic sensibility in his upbringing played a significant role in shaping Sikorsky's creative and analytical capabilities.

Sikorsky showed an early interest in aviation, inspired by the pioneering works of aviation luminaries such as the Wright brothers. He initially studied engineering at Kyiv Polytechnic Institute but soon transferred to the Imperial Kiev University of Saint Vladimir. During his university years, Sikorsky became increasingly fascinated with aerodynamics and aircraft design.

THE RUSSIAN YEARS AND EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS

In 1910, Sikorsky designed his first aircraft, a biplane named the S-1. It was a modest beginning, but it set the stage for his future achievements. By 1913, he had already designed a four-engine bomber, the Sikorsky Ilya Muromets, which demonstrated his capacity for innovation. This bomber became notable for its size and the pioneering features of its design.

However, the outbreak of World War I redirected Sikorsky's focus. He was deeply involved in the development of military aircraft for the Russian Imperial Army. Despite the turmoil of the war, Sikorsky's work laid the foundation for his future endeavours in aviation.

"In 1919, amid the chaos of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent civil war, Sikorsky emigrated to the United States. His arrival in the U.S. marked the beginning of a new chapter in his career"

RELOCATION AND FOCUS ON HELICOPTERS

In 1919, amid the chaos of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent civil war, Sikorsky emigrated to the United States. His arrival in the U.S. marked the beginning of a new chapter in his career. Sikorsky initially struggled to establish himself, facing numerous challenges in securing funding and support for his ventures.

It was during the early 1920s that Sikorsky shifted his focus from fixed-wing to rotary-wing technology. He began working on the concept of the helicopter.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VS-300

The VS-300, Sikorsky's most significant achievement in the realm of rotary-wing aircraft, was a ground-breaking project that revolutionised vertical flight. Sikorsky's work on the VS-300 began in the early 1930s, a period during which he was refining his ideas on helicopter design.

The VS-300 was officially introduced in 1939 and

represented a culmination of Sikorsky's theoretical and practical research. The design of the VS-300 was notable for several key features:

Single Main Rotor with Tail Rotor: The VS-300 employed a single large main rotor for lift and propulsion, and a smaller tail rotor to counteract the torque produced by the main rotor. This configuration, though complex, proved to be a practical solution for the problem of torque, a challenge that had impeded earlier attempts at helicopter flight.

Innovative Rotor Blades: Sikorsky's design included semi-rigid rotor blades, which allowed for greater control and stability. The blades were mounted on a rotor hub that allowed them to tilt and change their angle of attack, contributing to the helicopter's manoeuvrability.

Open Framework Design: The VS-300's open framework design was both functional and symbolic of Sikorsky's commitment to practical engineering. The framework allowed for easy access to the aircraft's components, facilitating maintenance and adjustments.

The first flight of the VS-300 took place on September 14, 1939. This historic flight marked the transition from theoretical concepts to practical implementation. Although the VS-300 initially faced challenges with stability and control, Sikorsky's perseverance led to subsequent refinements that enhanced the helicopter's performance.

The initial test pilots of the VS-300, Sikorsky and Serge Gluhareff, were pioneers, of on-the-job training by learning a little more about the aircraft with each test flight. As the pilots became more comfortable with flying the aircraft, they soon discovered that they could manoeuvre the aircraft in any direction of horizontal flight except forward. Their attempts to fly forward resulted in severe vibration and loss of control. Also, the team did not understand why the VS-300 rolled to the left whenever the cyclic stick was pushed forward. They would later discover that rotor blades spinning around an articulated rotor head exhibit a phenomenon called control precession, which requires a control input of around 90 degrees rotation prior to where the control input is actually required.

"Although the VS-300 initially faced challenges with stability and control, Sikorsky's perseverance led to subsequent refinements that enhanced the helicopter's performance"

At the time however, the team had no idea whether the control problems were caused by the helicopter design or pilot technique.

Following each day of flight testing the VS-300, the team spent the evenings analysing the results, discussing improvements and making adjustments to the aircraft. This was evident from Sikorsky's very detailed design notebooks from the VS-300 development, which include date and timestamps for each entry. Obvious changes to

1. The first flight of the VS-300
2. The second configuration of the VS-300
3. The final configuration with a fabric nose and floats

the VS-300 first configuration aircraft since the first flight were a new outrigger main landing gear with full swiveling wheels, the tail wheel was moved aft, and dampers were added to the flapping hinge on the main rotor to reduce vibration.

Test flights of the VS-300 first configuration continued over the next few months, with each flight lasting a little longer than the last, until December 9, 1939 when it was destroyed in an accident. Serge Gluhareff was making a slow forward flight when a sudden gust of wind flipped it sideways, grinding the rotors into the ground. Gluhareff was unhurt, but the VS-300 first configuration suffered major damage and needed to be rebuilt.

Following the accident, the VS-300 team convened and Sikorsky reminded everyone that the VS-300 was a test bed meant to experiment with rotor systems and flight controls. After analysing the cause of the accident, the team agreed it was caused by the aircraft's full cyclic pitch arrangement only allowing marginal control of the aircraft.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The development of the VS-300 was fraught with challenges. One of the primary obstacles was achieving stable flight. Early test flights revealed issues with rotor stability and control, requiring extensive adjustments and modifications. Sikorsky and his team conducted numerous test flights to address these issues, gradually refining the design to improve performance.

Another challenge was the development of a reliable power source for the helicopter. The VS-300 used a 75-horsepower engine, which was underpowered for its size and weight. The limitations of the engine posed constraints on the helicopter's performance, necessitating further research in propulsion technology.

"One of the primary obstacles was achieving stable flight. Early test flights revealed issues with rotor stability and control, requiring extensive adjustments and modifications"

Despite these challenges, Sikorsky's determination and ingenuity played a crucial role in overcoming the obstacles. The VS-300's successful flights demonstrated the viability of the helicopter as a practical means of vertical flight, paving the way for future advancements in helicopter technology.

Igor Sikorsky's journey from early aviation experiments to the development of the VS-300 represents a remarkable story of vision, perseverance, and innovation. The VS-300's introduction marked a significant milestone in the history of flight, demonstrating the potential of vertical aviation and setting the stage for future advancements.

Sikorsky's achievements have left an enduring impact on the field. The VS-300, as the world's first practical helicopter, stands as a testament to Sikorsky's ingenuity and determination. His contributions continue to inspire and influence the world of aviation. ■

1. In case anyone asks, that is a safety fedora
2. Igor Sikorsky flying his S-1 fixed-wing aircraft
3. The final version of the VS-300 had many advancements in technology

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