

The official magazine of the Aircraft Owner and Pilots Association

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# AOPA UK



## The Soviet star shows its metal

**Simon Tilling** traded in his Bulldog for a Yakovlev Yak-52. He explains to **Charlotte Bailey** why this imposing **Cold War Classic** is "Just His Type"

### WHAT 'HAS' AOPA DONE?

Steve Bridgewater asks "What has AOPA ever done for us?" It turns out the answer is "a lot!"

### LOCHDOWN LOWDOWN

David Chambers takes a flying visit to Scotland (and explains how you can do so too)

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# AND ANOTHER YEAR GOES BY

**T**HIS TIME last year I was comparing the war against Covid with the last two World Wars and the new technologies that often emerge from the necessities of war. As I write this year, over 75% of adults in the UK have been double vaccinated, and some semblance of normal life has returned.

The 55th Annual General Meeting of the British Light Aviation Centre Ltd, which trades as AOPA UK, was held at the West London Aero Club, White Waltham Airfield, more importantly, in person, as well as welcoming members of the executive committee and board using videoconferencing. This allowed some who could not or would not have attended in person, the ability to join in the meeting. It was the first hybrid meeting we have held and there are some lessons and improvements that we've taken away from the experience. The sound quality for those joining remotely needs to be improved and we need to work out how to zoom out the webcam. Once improved we'll roll this out to allow all members to choose whether to attend meetings in person or remotely. There is a fuller report of the AGM later in the magazine but I wanted to personally thank two members of the board who retired this year.

Firstly, thanks go to John Pett who joined the board in 2003 and has managed and run the ever-popular AOPA Flight Instructor Refresher courses ever since. During the period of Covid-19 restrictions alone, over 200 FIs have attended and kept their ratings in preparation for the opening up of GA. Secondly, thanks to Michael Cross who joined the board in 2011 and led the campaign and was largely responsible for saving Lee-on-Solent as a GA airfield, now Solent Airport.

AOPA recently attended the Private Flyer event at Wycombe Air Park. It was a great opportunity to recruit new members (welcome to you all) and catch up with existing ones. Thanks to everyone for dropping by, it was great to see you.

Our new members may not be aware that AOPA gives out awards every other year to recognise exceptional service to UK GA and exceptional achievements in the GA sector. Fortunately, the last occasion for giving the awards was 2019 so we took the opportunity of being at Private Flyer to give three of our awards out: there are more to come. AOPA's most prestigious award is the Lennox-Boyd Trophy which went to the Light Aircraft Association on the occasion of celebrating their 75th year supporting Light Aviation in the UK. The Individual Merit award went to Travis Ludlow for his epic journey around the world in a single engine aircraft. The third award is voted for by you, our members. The Best Aerodrome award went to Sandown Airport, Isle of Wight.

Finally, have you ever wanted to personally ask the CAA a burning question that affects you and your flying? There is now an opportunity to do so. On October 11, I am participating in the CAA's Virtual Voyage programme of 20-minute live Q&A sessions hosted by Sophie-Louise O'Sullivan, Head of the GA and Remotely Piloted Systems unit. What do you want the CAA to fix now and what do you expect from the CAA moving forward? Please send me your questions by October 1 at [pauline@aopa.co.uk](mailto:pauline@aopa.co.uk).

I'm going flying now for the first time in two years so hope to see you around. ■



**Pauline Vahey**  
Chairman, AOPA UK  
[pauline@aopa.co.uk](mailto:pauline@aopa.co.uk)

## AOPA UK

### EDITOR

Steve Bridgewater  
[steve.bridgewater@aopa.co.uk](mailto:steve.bridgewater@aopa.co.uk)

### ART EDITOR

Dan Payne  
[dan.payne@aopa.co.uk](mailto:dan.payne@aopa.co.uk)

### SUB EDITOR

Charlotte Bailey

### PROOFREADING

Gabrielle Chambers

### CONTRIBUTORS

Charlotte Bailey, Malcolm Bird,  
George Capon, David Chambers,  
George Done, John Walker

### PUBLISHED BY

AOPA UK  
c/o 1 Jason Close, Orsett,  
Grays, Essex, RM16 3DY  
+44 (0)20 7834 5631

### ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTIONS

AOPA UK  
c/o 1 Jason Close, Orsett,  
Grays, Essex, RM16 3DY

### HEAD OF ADVERTISING

David Impey  
+44 (0)7742 605338

### PRINTING

Ruddocks  
56 Great Northern Terrace,  
Lincoln LN5 8HL  
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# CONTENTS

## OCTOBER 2021

### 06

**AOPA AFFAIRS** AOPA UK CEO Martin Robinson discusses the change in the level of engagement from the CAA and its support for the GA community.

### 08

**YOUNG AVIATORS DAY** Mick Elborn reports on the 16th annual Young Aviators Day, which saw dozens of youngsters take to the skies from Sywell.

### 09

**AOPA AWARDS 2021** Some winners of the prestigious AOPA awards received their trophies at the Private Flyer show at Wycombe on September 19.

### 10

**"WHAT HAS AOPA EVER DONE FOR US?"** Steve Bridgewater asks: what does AOPA UK actually do and what has it achieved for you? It turns out the answer is "a lot!"

### 14

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** All the news from the 55th Annual General Meeting of the British Light Aviation Centre Limited (trading as AOPA UK).

### 15

**AIRFIELD UPDATE** John Walker offers an update on the planning situation at airfields including Cambridge, Coventry, Fair Oaks, North Luffenham and Retford/Gamston.



### 16

**MAINTENANCE** An estimated 16,000 aircraft in Europe still have no alternative to AVGAS 100LL. If you fly one of those aircraft, then you should read this article more closely.

### 18

**NEWS** The latest news from the GA world, including the new independent body established to hold the CAA to account and a free mental health service for pilots.

### 22

**WATTS NEW** Everything you need to know about electric and hybrid-powered aviation, including hybrid-powered crossings of the English Channel and the Pentland Firth.

### 24

**LAA RALLY 2021** A selection of the highlights from the phenomenally busy Light Aircraft Association Rally at Sywell.

### 26

**LOCH DOWN LOWDOWN** With Europe in lockdown David and Gabrielle Chambers took an aerial holiday to Scotland. David explains how he planned the trip.

### 32

**JUST MY TYPE** Simon's Soviet Star. Charlotte Bailey draws back the Iron Curtain and asks Simon Tilling what makes the Yakovlev Yak-52 'just his type'?





## EDITOR'S COMMENT

AS I WRITE these words the M25 motorway is blocked by climate change activists. This is the latest in a string of protests ahead of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), which is being held in Glasgow in November. It is fair to assume that aviation will come under scrutiny during the conference as it is clearly a significant carbon emitter. It is nowhere near the UK's largest contributor of course, but the projected growth in demand for aviation, coupled with planned reductions in carbon emissions in other areas could make it a very prominent contributor in percentage terms to the UK's carbon budget by mid-century. In the grand scheme of things GA's impact on our carbon footprint is miniscule. However, it remains a relatively large emitter of lead. Whereas unleaded fuel has been available for motor use in the UK since 1985 and leaded 'four-star' petrol was withdrawn from sale in 1999 most light aircraft still rely on 100LL leaded Avgas – often when unleaded is available and would work perfectly well.

As we reported earlier this year, AOPA UK created Project TEL to help address this and is now working with the Department for Transport and other aviation groups to encourage airfields to stock unleaded fuels. The aim is to facilitate this through grants and by making unleaded aviation fuel more attractive through lower taxes. Crucially, the intention is to get the CAA to provide the suitability status of aircraft to run on unleaded fuel on the online G-INFO database. AOPA UK is also encouraging the DfT and the EU to progress the approval of high-octane unleaded fuels including candidates that already exist in Europe. The organisation is taking an increasingly vocal approach to this issue.

You may not think that this issue will affect you but have a

read of our article on page 16 before you decide. In fact, just after that article was written we received news that environment activists in the USA have begun petitioning to issue an 'endangerment finding' on the use of leaded fuel in light aircraft.

Furthermore, campaigning by protesters in California has led one airfield to announce that it will be "switching to unleaded fuel after years of demands." With recent announcements that 94 and 100 octane unleaded Avgas have now been approved for use in some types in the USA it must surely be time for a similar move to take place in the UK and Europe.

In other news, it was so great to be back at events this summer. The Private Flyer shows at Leeds East and Wycombe Air Park and the LAA Rally at Sywell were all well attended. I never made it to Oshkosh (the US embassy approved my trip... but not until after the event had started!) but it didn't matter. Just being back on an airfield with friends was all I needed. I hope you've had an equally enjoyable summer and the impending autumn offers plenty of flying opportunities.

Until our paths cross again, Blue Skies.

**Steve Bridgewater**  
Editor, AOPA Magazine UK  
[steve.bridgewater@aopa.co.uk](mailto:steve.bridgewater@aopa.co.uk)



# POOLEY'S

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# EXPERT, WHAT EXPERT?

**M**ICHAEL GOVE claimed that people in the UK have had enough of experts and organisations that have had things go wrong. Yet all political parties listen to unelected advisers, officials and focus groups, so where is the difference?

Recently we have seen personnel changes within the CAA and the creation of a GA Unit in the Department for Transport (DfT). The GA Unit has now been merged with the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Unit, headed up by the former RPAS leader. I have heard that some of the new people in these organisations feel out of place, as they have no aviation background. One comment was, "I feel like a fraud!"

## LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Over the last six months I have noticed a change in the level of CAA engagement with AOPA and the DfT.

The CAA is trying to develop a new panel (as yet unnamed, the purpose of which is unclear) of 12 individuals who claim to have no voice within the community. How the CAA will use this body and how it will communicate is difficult to understand. The process is not open or transparent and belittles all the excellent work conducted by associations, which are constituted bodies with directors who take legal responsibility for their operations.

The CAA has often pointed to the need for a coordinated voice from the GA community, but I am not sure how these developments improve things. Who does the CAA listen to now and how will this new quango interact with the existing system? Is there a line to the Secretary of State? And is there an overall political agenda? Should the CAA remain an independent regulator? Considering the direct government funding going into GA, the CAA has to deliver what government wants – and so it can no longer be an independent regulator. Can it?

So far, we have seen little support for certified GA, and it would be interesting to know the CAA man-hours on developing certified GA in comparison to non-certified recreational flying.

Remember the CAA is currently legally required to recover its own operating costs from those it regulates. For certain

types of aircraft there is no option other than being regulated by the CAA, so there is an imbalance in charges between the certified and non-certified operator.

## SIMPLIFICATION

The CAA is committed to not gold-plating ICAO standards and has made this statement many times, but what does this mean? States that are signatories to the Chicago Convention have agreed to adopt, as a minimum, the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) that have been agreed through the ICAO system (usually written into national law).

The EU and EASA are not signatories to the Chicago Convention because neither are states. However, the EU tried to create a level playing field through EU regulations (based on ICAO standards), which apply equally in law across the EU.

Now the UK is independent of the EU we will probably end up with an ICAO-compliant and sub-ICAO-based system. Compliance with ICAO standards automatically provides international flight privileges, whereas sub-ICAO aircraft need approval from the state they intend to fly to or over. I wonder if it is now time to look for simplification of all GA rules and regulations? A level of complexity has grown, due to the tailoring of regulations to meet the needs of individual activities. The annual number of fatal GA accidents over the past 30 years has hardly changed. We have gone from the national CAA system through JAA and EASA and now back to the CAA. These changes have incurred huge costs for GA at each stage, but we have seen a reduction in activity levels and fewer pilots qualifying. Other factors also had an impact. Yet all these changes were done for the purpose of improving safety.

The GA Road Map (GARM) is full of kind words and good intent, but I am left wondering how this will reduce the downturn, which is happening elsewhere in the world too. We are not putting enough effort into encouraging people to start flying; without new blood nothing else can grow.

Coventry Airport could close at the end of 2021 in favour of a Gigafactory – why is the government allowing this to happen, given its commitment in the GARM to aerodromes? I guess with politicians

words can mean whatever they want. Many of our traditional GA aerodromes do not just provide a landing ground, they provide other essential infrastructure such as fuel and maintenance.

## 'HOW' AND 'WHY'?

The government talks of a network of GA airfields, but it gives no idea what that network should look like. This is because it fears criticism if it leaves any aerodrome out of that network. So, what is the point of talking about aerodrome networks?

The GARM refers to focussing on opportunities (after leaving EASA) that will make the UK a great place for GA again. This sounds great, but why? If you do not know 'why', then you cannot know 'how'. Some would argue that the UK has never been a great place for GA compared with the USA, which is why many individuals, including the Secretary of State, operate on the N register.

The CAA needs to focus on doing the right thing and it needs to raise the level of debate about the future of GA. We understand that over time there will be more electric aircraft, we understand and support the need for environmentally sustainable fuel, we understand that there is a need for airspace modernisation that includes traffic management systems for both the lower and upper airspace – but there is also a need for coordination. The CAA needs to have a strategic vision for GA not just sound bites.

History teaches us to learn from the past and one thing I know is that change in aviation is extremely slow. Right now we need greater debate and transparency, but analysis is key to future performance.

In closing, it was great to be at the recent Private Flyer events to meet members and talk with so many pilots. Your voice matters and AOPA works to ensure that you are heard through a coordinated process. If you have views, please send them to [info@aopa.co.uk](mailto:info@aopa.co.uk) ■



*M Robinson*

**Martin Robinson**  
CEO, AOPA UK  
[martin@aopa.co.uk](mailto:martin@aopa.co.uk)



Jason and John get ready to depart with more eager aviators.



Setting off on a flight that could inspire a lifetime in aviation.

# YOUNG AVIATORS REACH FOR THE SKIES

**WORDS AND IMAGES**  
Mick Elborn

AOPA UK sponsored the 2021 Young Aviators Day at Northampton Sywell, inspiring a new generation of pilots, engineers and enthusiasts

**BY THE** start of registration at 9am on September 11 excitement was already building and it looked like a full turnout for the 2021 Annual Young Aviators Day at Sywell Aerodrome.

This was the 16th such event organised by Andre Faehndrich (aka 'The Plane Guy') and his team of willing volunteer helpers along with the support of Sywell Aerodrome and sponsorship by AOPA.

This year, with pent up demand as the event couldn't be held in 2020, there were 131 budding aviators booked to attend: around twice the normal number.

All participation is by invitation and the 'Young Aviators' are mostly from

Scout Groups, some travelling many miles to this unique event. More than 1,000 youngsters so far been flown by the initiative.

## MORE THAN FLYING

While the highlight of the day was a flight, provided free by volunteer pilots in their own aircraft, the day had other educational activities and experiences. These included tours of the resident Sywell Aviation Museum, a quiz, static display, chart reading and basic navigation lessons, the British Microlight Aircraft Association's simulator and fly2help's travelling airport.

Flights were given in a range of permit aircraft, microlights and a Piper Saratoga flown

*"More than 1,000 youngsters have so far been flown by the initiative"*

in by AOPA member Jason Bray, with friend and 'safety pilot' John Beasley. During the day, Jason and John flew 30 passengers on seven flights.

Jason says: "I enjoyed a great day out providing an introduction to General Aviation to an excited and enthusiastic bunch of Scouts and Guides. Yes, it was a busy day, but the excitement and thrill expressed by the kids kept the energy levels of both

myself and John. He is also new to GA but a very welcome additional set of eyes and ears.

"It was great to see how the youngsters handled things no matter what. It was accompanying adults that had the most nerves each time we hit a bit of air or turned onto final. From the children's feedback it seems likely that we have definitely inspired some next generation GA pilots and engineers.

"For John and I it was something we greatly enjoyed supporting Andre and his team with and we're already looking forward to next year's event."

## YOUNG AVIATORS 2022

The next Young Aviators Day at Sywell will be held on Saturday September 10, 2022. Aircraft with four or more seats are a real bonus as this means more flights can be conducted in the time available and friends can fly together or with their parents or guardians. If you can volunteer for next year's event please email Andre Faehndrich: [andre.faehndrich@ntlworld.com](mailto:andre.faehndrich@ntlworld.com) ■

## HOST A YOUNG AVIATORS EVENT

There is no reason why the Young Aviators Day model couldn't be run in other parts of the country, to make it available to a wider audience. It would require a local team to plan and organise it, a willing airfield and interest from local scout groups, schools, Air Cadets, youth groups, etc. If you would be interested

in hosting and running a similar local event, please get in touch at [info@aopa.co.uk](mailto:info@aopa.co.uk) and we will try to help you with your planning and provide some useful contacts. AOPA UK will consider sponsorship for worthy aviation-related events. See [aopa.co.uk/application-for-aopa-sponsorship](http://aopa.co.uk/application-for-aopa-sponsorship) for details and to apply.



**WORDS** Pauline Vahey & Steve Bridgewater **IMAGES** Mick Elborn

# THE AOPA AWARDS 2021

The AOPA Awards were presented at Wycombe Air Park on September 19

**EVERY OTHER year AOPA gives out awards to recognise service to the UK GA community and achievements in the sector.**

Fortunately, the last occasion for giving the awards was 2019 – so for once it was something that was unaffected by Covid-19 – and in 2021 we took the opportunity to hand out the first three of our trophies at the Private Flyer UK event at Wycombe AirPark.

## LENNOX-BOYD TROPHY

AOPA's most prestigious award is the Lennox-Boyd Trophy, awarded to a person, club, group or organisation that has contributed significantly to the furtherance of General Aviation, flight training, club flying or piloting standards. The trophy is a cup in a special presentation box that was originally given to the Association of British Aero Clubs by the late Rt Hon Alan Lennox-Boyd PC CH MP (subsequently Viscount Boyd of Merton) in 1953. Previous winners are Ken Aston (2019), Carol Vorderman (2017), Grant Shapps, MP (2015), Mike

O'Donoghue – GASCo (2013), Alan Cassidy (2011), Gerald Howarth, MP (2009), BBGA (2007), Ron Campbell and Peter Skinner (2005), Tayside Aviation (2002), Cabair (2000) and Richard Gyselynck –Acorne (1997). In 2021, the decision was made to award the Lennox-Boyd Trophy to the Light Aircraft Association for 75 years supporting recreational flying in the UK and acting as a co-regulator to the UK CAA for the issue of Permits to Fly. The trophy was presented to LAA Chairman, Tim Hardy, by AOPA Chairman, Pauline Vahey.

## INDIVIDUAL MERIT

The Individual Merit trophy is awarded to a pilot or individual who has made an outstanding aviation achievement. It is a cup on a granite plinth and this year it was presented to 18-year-old Travis Ludlow in recognition of his record-breaking round-the-world flight. This summer, AOPA member Travis became the youngest person to fly solo round the world in a single-engine aircraft (a diesel-

*“Sandown is number one in the SkyDemon Top Ten Airfield List”*

powered Cessna 172). His flight was an example to other young people around the world, proving that one can do anything with perseverance, hard work and planning. Travis is an ambassador for GA and an inspiration to many.

## BEST AERODROME

The Best Aerodrome award is presented to an airfield that offers outstanding facilities and helpful service to residents and visitors alike. The trophy is a sword that was donated to AOPA by Airtour International Ltd (now Pooley's Flight Equipment Ltd) in 1982. This award is voted for by you, our members, and in 2021 your nominations resulted in a shortlist of Beccles, Coventry, Sandown and Turweston.

When the final votes were counted Sandown was declared the winner and the

sword was presented to airfield manager, Dan Subhani, by Pauline Vahey and Sebastian Pooley. The citation reads as follows: “Sandown Airport, Isle of Wight (EGHN) made outstanding efforts to re-open safely and provide a welcome for visitors as soon as possible after the first Covid 19 lockdown restrictions were eased. The airfield itself has benefited from recent investment. The café was expanded with socially distanced outdoor seating, online pre-ordering and payment for food and drink and excellent service. Sandown is the number one airfield in the SkyDemon Top Ten, based on its data for number of visits.” The Instructor of the Year Award will be presented at a later date as joint recipients Matt Lane and Steve Caryer were both instructing on the day! The award recognises the free online service they provided to pilots who needed to extend their ratings during the lockdown. They helped over 400 pilots and raised around £7,000 from voluntary charitable donations. ■



Pauline Vahey presents the Lennox-Boyd Trophy to the Light Aircraft Association Chairman, Tim Hardy.



Travis Ludlow demonstrates his famous (and infectious grin) as he receives the Individual Merit Award.



Seb Pooley and Pauline Vahey present the Best Aerodrome sword to Sandown airfield manager, Dan Subhani.



The Lennox-Boyd trophy was gifted by the late Rt Hon Alan Lennox-Boyd (subsequently Viscount Boyd of Merton).

WORDS Steve Bridgewater

# "WHAT HAS AOPA EVER DONE FOR US?"

AOPA UK traces its history back decades – but what does the association actually do and what has it achieved for you?

I'VE BEEN involved in GA for the last three decades and aviation journalism for more than 20 years, so when I was asked to take over the editorship of this magazine, I had an idea of what AOPA was about and what it has done over the years.

However, speaking to flying friends since my appointment I have repeatedly met the same two questions... "What does AOPA actually do?" and "Should I join?"

Of course, the simple answers are "a lot" and "yes!" but I thought it would be interesting to look a little deeper at what goes on behind the scenes at the organisation.

*"We answer an average of 800 'Ask AOPA' enquiries each year" – AOPA UK Board Director Mick Elborn.*

## UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

AOPA UK's team of specialists have been 'fighting your corner' for decades but it is probably safe to say that the last 18 months has been among the busiest, and a most important period. Not only has the team been handling the fallout of the UK's exit from Europe, it has also been coming to the aid of pilots and aircraft owners affected by the pandemic.

The latter has involved working with the government and the regulator (the CAA) to enable aircraft and engine maintenance flights during Covid lockdown. Members were also able to get a free

briefing service (provided by Matt Lane and Steve Caryer) to revalidate ratings during the restrictions and around 430 pilots used the service.

The organisation always offers a personal response to queries from its members and according to Mick Elborn "we answer an average of around 800 'Ask AOPA' enquiries each year. Most arrive via the website, but others can be emailed directly. Each gets a personal reply and some of the advice or help given has saved the member money or prosecution."

AOPA has provided personal assistance to hundreds of pilots who have fallen foul



Thanks to AOPA the sun will not set on General Aviation anytime in the foreseeable future.



of the CAA (and some who have fallen foul of European Regulators), saving many a court appearance. It has also successfully campaigned for an appropriate response to regulatory offences including infringements, not automatic prosecution.

## FLIGHT CREW LICENSING

Many members will be familiar with the regular Pilot Information Update e-mails distributed by AOPA Board Director and IAOPA Flight Crew Licensing (FCL) Representative at EASA, Nick Wilcock. Behind the scenes Nick works tirelessly on FCL matters and as a result of this AOPA UK has achieved a large number of 'wins.' These have included persuading EASA to dispense with mandatory PPL ground-school hours and the 'six sittings' requirements for LAPL/PPL exams. According to Nick: "We also 'late reviewed' the original 600 questions for the CAA e-Exam database. In fact, 75% of the industry Exam Working Group (ExWG) review team were AOPA Training & Education Committee (T&EC) members and we are now in discussions with the CAA over PPL e-Exam questions which have since been added but weren't reviewed by the ExWG as the CAA had originally agreed."

The T&EC also updated the AOPA Ground Instructor Certificate requirements recently and achieved recognition by the regulator for the certificate to be an acceptable alternative for those seeking Ground



There would be fewer (or no) EASA light-aircraft maintainers were it not for AOPA campaigning.

Examiner approval from the CAA. This follows on from the acceptance (over 30 years ago now) of the popular AOPA Aerobatic Certificate as a facilitation course for the EASA Aerobatic Rating.

AOPA was the first to campaign for a poor weather rating, which resulted in the IMC Rating (much opposed at first by some other organisations) and was part of the team that introduced the National Private Pilot's Licence (NPPL) in 2002.

After lobbying the government of the day and following a one and a half hour debate in the House of Commons [Hansard - December 1, 1999] the CAA was directed by parliament to work with AOPA towards the introduction of the new NPPL. Martin Robinson, along with

*"AOPA 'late reviewed' the original 600 questions for the CAA e-Exam database"*

the late Ted Girdler, drafted the original proposal which was based on 20 hours of flying however the CAA saw an opportunity to include other licences (such as microlights) in a national system and this was introduced in 2002. The primary reason for this approach was due to the higher medical standards that were being applied through JAR/FCL and AOPA knew that this would result in the loss a lot of pilots.

Nick says there is lots more work in progress, but he would rather these remained off the record for now "as I don't want to raise false expectations!"

Mick Elborn also emphasises the success Nick has had advising the CAA about the wording of certain draft General Exemptions which otherwise could have caused confusion when published. This has been particularly important during the roll out of new Pilot Medical Declaration (PMD) rulings in recent months.

In the Channel Islands, AOPA CI is also working hard to get PMDs accepted for Part 21 aircraft and also hoping to get this to include permit-to-fly aircraft. AOPA CI's Richard Hawkin comments: "The position of Director of

## THE AOPA UK ETHOS

**AOPA UK** has over 50 years of networking and contact building

**AOPA UK** promotes the whole spectrum of GA, not just a narrow sector to the detriment of others

**AOPA UK** opposes airspace changes that exclude GA

**AOPA UK** promotes proportional and data-based regulation

**AOPA UK** promotes self-handling for GA at airports

**AOPA UK** opposes airfield closures for non-aviation-related development

**AOPA UK** promotes the availability of flight training at unlicensed airfields

**AOPA UK** promotes easier-to-achieve licences and ratings

**AOPA UK** focuses on making GA environmentally friendly to meet future environmental targets

Civil Aviation for the Channel Islands is currently being split with acting directors for each Bailiwick (Guernsey and Jersey). I think it's fair to say that those now in temporary office are very much feeling their way and have had to deal with the complexities caused by Brexit. We have a good rapport with our local authorities and 'positive noises' have been made regarding PMDs. AOPA CI has also recently established a working group in Guernsey to support owners of '2 Reg' aircraft with recently identified problems."

Richard also pointed out that AOPA members visiting the islands receive a 5% discount on Avgas and Jet A1 in Guernsey and Avgas in Jersey.

AOPA UK membership also offers several other 'tangible' benefits. A full list is on the website but highlights include free Saturday and Sunday landings at Henstridge (EGHS), 10% discount on Blackbushe Flying Club membership fees, a 15% discount on selected Jeppesen products and renewals, free trial (and offers) on TopMeteo, discounts on pilot supplies at Pooleys Flight Equipment, access to HRS Hotel Bookings service and discounts at AVIS Car Hire and UK Health Insurance. Members also get this magazine and can also advertise aircraft and other items for free on the website.

### THE HISTORY BIT

AOPA UK can trace its origins back to 1928 when the 'Council of Light Aeroplane Clubs' was formed as a subsidiary of the Royal Aero Club (RAeC). The Council split from the RAeC after World War Two and became the independent Association of British Aero Clubs and Centres.

In 1966, the Association of British Aero Clubs and Centres merged with the Aviation Centre of the Royal Aero Club (which had by now also separated off from RAeC) to form the British Light Aviation Centre Ltd -- as a company limited by guarantee and not for profit.

As a totally independent non-profit organisation, supporting General Aviation (GA), BLAC Ltd was later invited to join the International Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (IAOPA) and trade as AOPA UK. Thus AOPA UK, the trading name of BLAC Ltd, was born.

### MAINTENANCE MATTERS

However, while those tangible benefits are nice to have, it is your continued freedom to fly that is by far the biggest benefit to members. AOPA UK achieves this by protecting GA against strong forces that seek to overregulate you, reduce the airspace in which you can fly and increase costs.

Malcolm Bird, George Done and the Maintenance Working Group (MWG) have been heavily involved in Project TEL: working with the Department for Transport (DfT) and CAA to undertake steps towards getting unleaded fuel more readily available. We revealed in the last issue that the MWG had worked closely with Ofcom to counter onerous requirements for radio licence holders, aircraft and airfield operators. This resulted in Ofcom issuing a simple guide for aviators to make sense of RF emission requirements.

AOPA UK was also fully involved in the campaign to have the Part-M Aircraft Maintenance regulation reviewed by EASA and replace it with a lighter regime for private aircraft.

Perhaps nobody is as evangelical about GA than long-term AOPA CEO, Martin Robinson. Normally to be found lobbying for pilots and their rights, Martin has been instrumental in many of the key successes over the last few

decades. Martin says: "AOPA also worked with the General Aviation Manufacturers & Traders Association (now the British Business and General Aviation Association) to help reduce the tax on fuel by 50% and we were instrumental in achieving only a 1p rise in fuel tax when the EU removed fuel discounts." The latter was a result of getting Avgas treated as a 'special fuel', with a much-reduced duty rate. Combined, these are estimated to save pilots around 35p per litre of Avgas (plus VAT on the duty!). Even if you only hire an aircraft it means that the hourly rate is lower.

On a personal level, Martin was involved in campaigning to stop the European Commission introducing airspace user fees for VFR aircraft up to 2,000kg. This concession is saving you around £20 per hour and AOPA continues to fight to retain it for all pilots. As he emphasises: "Based on an average of 30 hours flying per year the savings on fuel tax and no VFR fees alone account for around £800 per annum."

In later discussions with the CAA's Andrew Haines on the introduction of 8.33 kHz radios it was Martin's influence that convinced the Civil Aviation Authority to organise a 50% rebate scheme. The current rebate scheme in place for electronic conspicuity devices

AOPA UK staff and volunteers answer an average of around 800 'Ask AOPA' enquiries each year; most arrive via the website. Each gets a personal reply and some of the advice or help given has saved the member money or prosecution.



Martin Robinson was heavily involved in campaigning to stop the introduction of airspace user fees for VFR and suggested to the CAA's Andrew Haines that they seek a 50% rebate on 8.33 kHz radios, leading to the electronic conspicuity rebate scheme.





AOPA UK was the first to campaign for a poor weather rating, which resulted in the IMC Rating – which was much opposed at first by some other organisations.

is based on that model.

“We prevented the widespread introduction of Mode S transponders on the basis that not all GA aircraft had power sources and campaigned through IAOPA for the need for lightweight portable devices. It is through our relationship with IAOPA that we share common interest and common solutions” continues Martin. “We fought the FM immunity issues and made the CAA carry out a regulatory impact assessment prior to the intro of JAR FCL.

“During the JAR debates we fought off the proposals that were being made for instructors to have degrees and stopped the requirements about instructors not being allowed to wear glasses!”

“Furthermore, it was AOPA that sort the widespread use of GPS for GA asking the CAA to establish GNSS approaches so that pilots could maintain their skills into aerodromes that serve GA. We recognised then as we do now the difficulty in gaining access to an aerodrome for the purpose of flying approaches. These issues take months and years to resolve not days and weeks.

*“Based on an average of 30 hours flying per year the savings on fuel tax and VFR fees account for a saving of around £800 alone”*

## THE FUTURE

With an eye on the future, AOPA UK is committed to ensuring safe shared access to airspace for GA with the increasing use of ‘drones’ and other unpiloted aircraft. The organisation will continue to lobby for a balanced and proportionate approach, based on demonstrable need, that allows the whole of the GA community to flourish.

In summary, it is fair to describe AOPA UK as ‘not just a GA organisation’. It is totally independent of any external influence (other than its members views), is not a quasi-regulator operating under the auspices of the CAA and it views GA as a whole entity, an ecosystem in which all parts are in some way dependent on the existence of the other parts.

However, much of its success is achieved without fanfare, as a result of building a network of well-placed contacts who can be approached personally on an informal basis, to discuss views and ideas.

To achieve its goals, the organisation regularly engages with contacts within the CAA,

NATS, DfT, the Home Office, local Government and airfield operators as well as pilots.

Further work conducted by working groups and committees goes on to form part of AOPA UK’s consultation work in the UK, Europe and within ICAO.

Without AOPA UK, GA could have been facing a dystopian future where pilots could only fly two-seat aeroplanes weighing less than 1,000 kg from small grass strips or large international airports. Your favourite airfield could now be a housing estate, you would not be able to obtain Avgas, there would be fewer (or perhaps no) EASA light-aircraft maintainers and if you wanted to go flying you would be restricted to low-level and narrow corridors around controlled airspace.

Without AOPA UK pressing for considered and careful rule changes, and UK-only derogations, this could well have been the unintended consequence. No-one achieves more to help you keep flying and protect your investment in GA. **But what has AOPA ever done for us, eh? ■**

WORDS &amp; IMAGES Steve Bridgewater

# NEWS FROM THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The highlights of our AGM, which took place both virtually and at White Waltham on September 16, 2021

**THE RELAXATION OF pandemic restrictions enabled the 55th Annual General Meeting of the British Light Aviation Centre Limited (trading as the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association of UK) to be held at the West London Aero Club at White Waltham.**

A cross-section of the directors, executive committee and members were on hand to discuss the latest developments and hear updates from AOPA UK's CEO and Chairman. AGMs are a statutory requirement to ensure good financial management and governance of an incorporated body and AOPA Chairman, Pauline Vahey, steered the meeting with her usual professionalism. There was a discussion with respect to the accounts and these were duly approved for submission to Companies House. It was also agreed to reappoint auditors Messrs Venthams, which has served AOPA for many years and knows the organisation well.

AOPA UK has a number of elected directors and Malcolm Bird, Mick Elborn, Charles Henry and Nick Wilcock were all due to retire by rotation. John Pett and Mike Cross chose to retire but the others were re-elected.

On behalf of the board, Pauline thanked John and Mike for their hard work and dedication and pointed out that John had served on the board since 2003 and Mike had joined in 2010 – so their departure means AOPA UK is losing around 30 years of experience. John has been instrumental in running the AOPA Flying Instructor (FI) Refresher courses and Mike was instrumental in saving Lee-on-Solent airport. We wish them both well in their well-earned retirement.

After the formalities of the AGM, Pauline reported on the sale of 50a Cambridge Street and purchase of AOPA UK's new headquarters at Lakeside in Kemsing, Kent. The refurbishment is being spearheaded by Mick Elborn,

who has extensive experience looking after Royal Mail's real estate. However, getting tradespeople is proving problematical. The new building will be specially configured for our needs, with a communications suite and break-out meeting rooms etc. AOPA has already begun taking steps to get the building approved by the CAA so that it can host FI Refresher courses. Pauline also confirmed that the remaining proceeds from the sale of 50a Cambridge Street have now been invested via two wealth managers and she thanked Malcolm Bird and Charles Henry for working with her to establish working group to establish how best to invest the money.

## EXCEPTIONAL TIMES

In summing up the last year, Pauline said: "We have all lived through exceptional times this past twelve months, so I feel proud that AOPA has achieved what it has. The work carried out by Martin [Robinson] and Nick [Wilcock] with the CAA has been invaluable to many of our members. It is testament to the respect that Martin and AOPA have earned with the CAA over the years."

Pauline also praised the good work of the FI Refresher course team which, with CAA approval, moved the events online during lockdown. This meant that instructors were able to maintain their currency and be in a prepared state for when flying restarted after lockdown. She also passed her thanks to Office Manager, Mandy Nelson, who allowed

the organisation to run from her spare room while it has been 'homeless'. Mandy has also agreed to take on the administration of the FI Refresher courses now that John Pett has retired.

In his AGM statement, CEO, Martin emphasised that "the CAA grounded GA on the basis of it being a 'non-essential activity' and AOPA UK argued that while you may consider individual flying to be a luxury the upkeep of aerodromes, maintenance and flight-training organisations – which are businesses – very much relied on individuals taking part.

"We were also successful in convincing the DfT that certain aircraft needed to be flown for at least one hour every 30 days to avoid serious safety and financial implications for the owners. One member recently told me: 'I never realised the value of AOPA until now – and I will never complain about paying my subscription!'" Martin also explained that the team at AOPA had liaised with the CAA regarding its GA Roadmap and continues to liaise with the regulator on a number of issues, not least access to airspace.

Towards the end of the meeting some of the members present raised questions regarding social events, the agenda for future lobbying and issuing a formalised communications strategy. In closing, Pauline thanked the members for their support, saying: "We do it for you, but we can't do it without you." ■



AOPA UK members, directors and executive committee members around the table together at the 2021 AGM.



**WORDS** John Walker

# THE LATEST NEWS ON UK AIRFIELDS

**UPDATED NEWS** on the airfields currently under threat from developers.

## CAMBRIDGE

Marshall Aerospace and Defence Group (MADG) will be vacating the aerodrome by 2030 and has signed an option to lease land at Cranfield, with Wyton being considered as an alternative site. The site has been put forward for a major housing development in the first proposals for the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

## COVENTRY

Site nominated by the West Midlands Combined Authority for a Gigafactory for the production of electric vehicle batteries. Public consultation on proposals ended on June 6 with a planning application submitted on July 15.

## FAIROAKS

Landowner of part of the site has reportedly given notice to some hangar and aerodrome building tenants to vacate by February 2022.

This does not affect the operation of the taxiways and runway which are in separate ownership. Public consultation ended on July 30, 2018 on Surrey Heath Borough Council's draft Local Plan options document which states that development of the airport should be guided by a development brief/masterplan.

## NORTH LUFFENHAM

Rutland County Council has withdrawn the draft Local Plan which included a 2,215-home community for the site, and is drafting a new Plan. The development had been accepted under the Government Garden Village programme.

## RETFORD/GAMSTON

Planning application approved, subject to fulfilment of conditions, by Bassetlaw District Council on August 18, 2021 to convert hangars 6 to 11 into a vehicle-testing facility and for dual use of the runway for autonomous vehicle testing and aircraft. ■



Cambridge Airport has been put forward for a major housing development in the first proposals for the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan.



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WORDS IAOPA &amp; AOPA UK IMAGES GAMI

# THE FUTURE OF 100LL

An estimated 16,000 aircraft in Europe still have no alternative to 100LL Avgas. If you fly one of those aircraft, then you should read this article more closely

AOPA UK has been working with other European AOPAs, through IAOPA Europe, on the issue of finding an acceptable lead-free fuel alternative to 100LL Avgas.

While the UK is no longer a member of the EU or EASA, the consequences of a Europe-wide ban on lead in Avgas will inevitably be felt by the UK aircraft fleet.

You likely haven't heard of the abbreviations ECHA, REACH, PAFI and TEL yet. If you don't depend on 100LL Avgas for fuel, those aren't important to you, but an estimated 16,000 aircraft in Europe still have no alternative to 100LL. If you fly one of those aircraft, then you definitely need to read this article more closely.

*“AOPA has issued a statement aiming to postpone the so-called Sunset Date until an unleaded alternative is available”*

## EU CHEMICALS AGENCY

Like EASA, the Helsinki-based European Union Chemicals Agency (ECHA) is an agency of the European Commission. It is responsible for chemicals and environmental protection.

REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals) is one of the ECHA's central programmes and as part of this environmentalists took a first look at the substance tetraethyl lead (TEL), the lead-containing additive in aviation fuel Avgas 100LL, back in the autumn of 2019. A risk analysis has classified the endangerment of citizens and the environment from TEL as significant.

In the past, TEL was used in all automotive fuels, but it was successfully replaced over 40

years ago. In aviation, however, this has not yet been achieved.

Anyone who thinks that this project is a purely European administrative phenomenon should check up on the Piston Aviation Fuels Initiative (PAFI) project in the USA.

With the help of the PAFI, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the aviation industry have been trying to develop a new unleaded fuel for many years with the aim of removing 100LL from the market.

However, despite years of research and development, the PAFI project has not yet delivered the desired results; the task of finding a successor that can be replaced 1:1 without further effort is evidently not trivial.

## LEAD-FREE

However, at the 2021 EAA AirVenture convention in Oshkosh, US fuel manufacturer General Aviation Modifications Inc (GAMI) received a Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) for a lead-free 100 octane Avgas. This so far only relates to the Cessna 172, but speaking in an AOPA US webinar in September GAMI co-founder George Braly said: the expansion of STCs will include “literally several hundreds of additional makes and models of popular engines” and a “fleetwide expansion” of the list of models approved by the FAA to burn GAMI's G100UL could be accomplished by the first or second quarter of 2022.

During the webinar Mr Braly explained that the FAA needed to complete two more tests on the fuel before the STCs could be issued, but as these were



Amber-coloured G100UL Avgas can be mixed with 100LL in any proportion and is compatible with the existing fuel infrastructure without modification. Mixed with conventional blue Avgas it takes on a green hue.



almost identical to tests that GAMI had already conducted he believed the risk of failure is "extremely low."

### THE EUROPEAN SITUATION

Of course, this is potentially good news for owners of US registered aircraft but what of those 16,000 aircraft in the UK and Europe which also currently rely on leaded 100LL Avgas fuels?

Well, it is currently still unclear whether the aromatics used as additives in the new fuel can or will be approved in Europe.

Only when this question is answered will we know whether the new product will represent the hoped-for breakthrough.

In June of this year, the EU Commission issued a recommendation to require authorisation for the import and use of TEL.

### TWO POSSIBILITIES

What is the end result? Unfortunately, nobody knows that yet, as it is a political as well as a technical process with several procedural stages. However, there is a range of possibilities:

In the best case, this has no consequences for the end customer: the authorisation for TEL takes place and the substance can be imported and processed further. In the meantime, either at PAFL in the USA or in Europe, a long overdue lead-free fuel alternative is developed and launched on the market.

In the worst case, TEL will not be authorised because either the industry has not applied for it or the authorities have not granted it.

A lead-free successor fuel that solves the overall problem is also not being developed in time. In the latter case, after a transitional period, from the so-called 'Sunset Date' in autumn 2024, TEL will no longer be introduced into the EU as a pure substance (only as a one per million dilution in

the Avgas).

This in turn would mean that the European 100LL Avgas would have to be produced in the next available refinery outside the EU - which is currently in the USA - and then transported to Europe. According to initial estimates, this could increase the price of fuel by up to £1 per litre; thus in practice taking it out of the market-place.

### WHAT ARE WE DOING?

What is IAOPA Europe doing now? Together with the GAMA (GA Manufacturers Association), EAS (Europe Air Sports), EBAA (European Business Aviation), EHA (European Helicopter), ERAC (European Regional Airports), ECOGAS (GA support companies) and IAAPS (flight schools) IAOPA has issued a statement aiming to postpone the Sunset Date until an unleaded alternative is ready.

IAOPA agrees that TEL must be removed as quickly as possible; it not only harms us biologically but also politically. Unfortunately, engine and fuel manufacturers have been more or less inactive in this field here for decades.

IAOPA also wants a European research project from EASA and there is already a European manufacturer who has applied for a patent but does not yet have an aviation certification.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

You should check whether your engine can be operated with unleaded Avgas UL 91/96. Before purchasing a new aircraft, you should consider whether you are taking the unknown risk of the failure of the 100LL Avgas supply chain or using an aircraft that does not require 100LL.

AOPA UK and IAOPA Europe will continue to make our voices heard, together with the other associations, and keep members informed. As ever, we would welcome your thoughts and opinions. ■

# AOPA INSTRUCTOR REFRESHER COURSES

For revalidation of an FI certificate, the holder shall fulfil two of the following three requirements:

- 1 At least 50 hours of flight instruction during certificate validity as FI, TRI, CTI, IRI, MI or Examiner;**
- 2 Attend a Flight Instructor Refresher Seminar within the validity of the certificate; and**
- 3 Pass an Assessment of Competence within the 12 months preceding the expiry of the certificate.**

For at least each alternate subsequent revalidation, an assessment of competence must be undertaken. In the case of a renewal you should, within 12 months before renewal, attend a Flight Instructor Refresher Course and pass an assessment of competence.

## NEXT DATES

The next dates for the course are

**November 23-24, 2021**

Approval has now been obtained from the CAA to run these courses using Zoom during the current pandemic.

It is therefore imperative that any candidate is up to speed on using Zoom prior to commencing the course.

Further information can be obtained from the Course

Administrator, Mandy Nelson, on 020 7834 5631.

Please book the course online at [www.aopa.co.uk](http://www.aopa.co.uk)



**To register for a place on any of the seminars please call the AOPA office on 020 7834 5631 or join online at [WWW.AOPA.CO.UK](http://WWW.AOPA.CO.UK).**

**The courses start at 0930 and end at 1700 each day.**

# AOPA NEWS

## NEW PANEL TO HOLD THE CAA TO ACCOUNT

Independent panel created by the DfT to investigate CAA complaints

THE DEPARTMENT for Transport (DfT) announced on September 13 that an independent panel was to be created to review complaints against the CAA's decision process. According to a statement from the DfT the new initiative is to "strengthen transparency around decision-making and drive forward best practice regulatory processes at the CAA."

The panel will sit outside of the CAA and will be available to review complaints made by individuals about the process by which the CAA has made decisions that affect them. It will be open to individuals whose cases meet a certain

threshold if they remain unsatisfied following the CAA's internal two-stage complaints processes and procedures.

Eligible complaints will cover licensing and certification decisions, such as those following an airspace infringement or the decision to suspend a licence or endorsement to an instructor or examiner.

The panel will consider whether the CAA correctly followed its processes and procedures in arriving at a decision. It will have the power to remit the case back to the CAA, where it investigates and considers the CAA has not done this.

The British government's Aviation Minister, Robert Courts, said: "To ensure it is considered truly independent, panel members will not be expected to be aviation experts and will need to be independent of both the

*"The panel will review complaints made about the process by which the CAA has made decisions"*

CAA and those individuals or sectors that have an interest in the decision."

The DfT clarified that: "An important aspect of the UK and international aviation safety system is that the regulatory authority has the responsibility for safety-related decisions.

"Therefore, the CAA will remain the ultimate decision-maker. However, in the exceptional event that the CAA chooses not to reconsider a case process in light of a recommendation to do so from the panel, it will need to explain its rationale to the complainant, the panel and the Minister for Aviation." ■

## PROJECT ABLE

UK-CHARITY Aerobility showed its new Grob G.109B Able at this summer's Private Flyer shows and the LAA Rally. Aerobility will be operating the aircraft within its fleet, as well as marketing and selling this enhanced model commercially, in collaboration with Grob Aircraft SE and Southern Sailplanes in the UK.

The charity acquired 52 Grob G.109 Vigilant T.1 motorgliders from the RAF in 2020 and launched Project Able as a not-for-profit venture. Funds raised through sales of the surplus

refurbished aircraft (i.e. ones not being operated by Aerobility itself) will help fund its operations providing flight training for disabled people. The upgrades to the aircraft are extensive and include a 100 hp FADEC-controlled Rotax 912iS engine that can operate on Mogas or UL Avgas, a fully-feathering constant-speed MTV-21 propeller with composite blades, and Garmin avionics. The aircraft can be built to individual specification and are certified to EASA CS-22 and approved by the US FAA.



The first Grob G.109B Able was flown from the factory in Germany for appearances at UK trade shows this summer.

The 2021 Aviators Ball takes place at Sofitel, Heathrow Terminal 5, on November 20. The black-tie ball is organised by

Aerobility and funds raised go towards the charity. Individual tickets are £150 and a 5% discount is available for a table of ten. ■



# NEW 600 kg MICROLIGHT CLASS

THE CAA announced the revision to the definition of a microlight on August 19.

The new 600 kg microlight classification has been incorporated into law and reforms the market by raising the weight limit from 450 kg to 600 kg (650 kg for amphibians or floatplanes) and increasing the stalling speed requirements to 45 kts.

This decision comes after a three-year review and implementation process in partnership with pilots, associations and key manufacturers. The CAA consultation returned 1,379 responses, which it describes as "the largest response rate to a general aviation consultation in recent years, of which an overwhelming 91% supported this endeavour."

As well as increasing the weight and stall speed limits the new legislation includes a revision of BCAR Section S to improve compatibility with other



The Kitplanes for Africa (KFA) Safari was one of the 600 kg microlights debuting at the 2021 LAA Rally at Sywell. The type is being imported by Sprite Aviation, which claims the two-seater can be built and flown for just £40,000 inc VAT.

certification bases and maximise commonality with major manufacturing states such as Germany and the Czech Republic. It has been created to have commonality with the EASA Certification Standard for Light Sport Aeroplanes.

There are also some minor licensing and training changes which the CAA says are "to allow as seamless as possible

a transition for pilots/owners". Differences training is now required for pilots who have no experience in the larger aircraft, who are changing from three-axis to weight-shift (and vice versa) or want to fly aircraft with a tailwheel, EFIS glass cockpits, variable pitch propeller, autopilot, electric engine or a cruise speed in excess of 140 kts. ■

Steve Bridgwater

## AOPA NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

### Bodmin Airfield in

Cornwall has been recognised as having the largest natural traditional hay meadow in the whole of the southwest of England. The area includes 150 species of wildflowers, grass and ferns and an estimated 3,000 orchids of three distinct species.

### NATS replaced the AIS

Internet Briefing System/website (IBS) in August and the service is now available at [www.nats.aero/ais](http://www.nats.aero/ais). This replaces the familiar [www.ais.org.uk](http://www.ais.org.uk) site but NATS has attempted to minimise the impact by retaining a similar look and feel to the system.

**The CAA has launched a** series of new and updated General Aviation Safety Sense Leaflets with the first, covering flying with passengers, now available online. The leaflet contains a wealth of advice to make these flights safe and comfortable.

### Congratulations to

David Edwards who has been appointed as the Chief Executive of the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS). He took up his new position on September 20 and replaces Sir Brian Burridge who recently stepped down.

### AOPA Associate

membership is to be expanded, making it available to non-flyers. This also includes AOPA members who may have stopped flying, but who wish to continue to support AOPA. Details are available at [aopa.co.uk](http://aopa.co.uk).

# DIESEL-POWERED YAK FLIES

GERMAN COMPANY RED Aircraft GmbH has test flown a Yakovlev Yak-18T aircraft

fitted with its 500 hp RED AO3 aero-diesel engine.

The Yak-18T was developed



Red Aircraft GmbH

in the 1960s as a basic trainer for Aeroflot pilots and was originally powered by a 360hp Vedeneyev M14P radial engine. The diesel-powered variant was developed in Moscow and in addition to the new powerplant also has a fully digital cockpit with Full Authority Digital Engine Control (FADEC). The new engine, which features two-cylinder bank redundancy to increase safety, doubles the Yak-18T climb rate and gives a 50% increase in useful load, a 40% fuel saving and increases the maximum speed from 141 kts to around 215 kts. ■

LY-BID has shed its 360 hp radial for a 500 hp aero diesel and its conventional cockpit for glass screens.

# CESSNA vs DRONE MIDAIR

Mid-air collision with a police drone at 500 feet on final approach

A CANADIAN Cessna 172 was involved in a mid-air collision with a drone on August 10 but miraculously the student and instructor managed to land safely and initially thought they had struck a bird.

The incident was all the more concerning because it occurred just one mile from Buttonville airfield near Toronto while on approach to land. Furthermore, the drone flying at 500 ft was being operated by the local police force. The aircraft was substantially damaged in the

collision and needed an engine teardown because the lower arc of the propeller went through the drone.

Transport Canada's Civil Aviation Daily Occurrence Reporting System (CADORS) classified the accident as "unauthorised entry" to controlled airspace as the air traffic controller was not aware of drone activity in the area.

In Canada, drones are banned within 3 miles of uncontrolled airports and restricted to 400 feet AGL without special authorisation. ■



This is what happens when a drone hits a Cessna. Imagine what would have happened if it had been a few feet higher.

## VAN'S AND SONEX PROMISE HIGH-WING DESIGNS

AT THE 2021 EAA AirVenture show at Oshkosh both Van's Aircraft and Sonex Aircraft announced plans to debut new high-wing kitplanes in 2023. Neither company has yet to produce aircraft in such a configuration.

The Van's RV-15 is reported to be an all metal 'backcountry-capable' machine which will combine the characteristic high cruise speed that Dick Van Grunsfen's designs are famous for with slow speed handling to enable short field operations.

In common with other RV models it will be available with a tailwheel or a nosewheel and will have a stick, not a yoke.

Meanwhile, Sonex launched a range of four high-wing designs at the show. Resembling an all-metal version of the



The Sonex design will be aerobatic (+6/-3G) when flown solo under 1,050 lb.

Wittman Tailwind, the design will be available with a conventional tail or Sonex's familiar Y-tail configuration. Both variants will be available with either nosewheel or tailwheel undercarriage.

In a statement Sonex said: "While many kit manufacturers today offer high-wing aircraft with a backcountry mission in mind, we are making our cantilevered wing aircraft in our tradition of efficient aerobatic and cross-country performance." ■

## BRITAIN'S FIRST DIAMOND DA50 RG

THE UK'S first Diamond DA50 RG aircraft arrived in the UK in August and debuted at the Private Flyer event at Leeds East Airport. The DA50 RG was delivered to the UK agent, Gemstone Aviation, which is based at Gamston Airport, and features a stylish blue scheme complete with a cashmere beige leather interior. The first DA50 RG was delivered to North America in July, flying from Austria to Canada in three days. The

flight was completed in ten legs, the longest of which was 770 miles, with a total time in the air of 29.4 hours. ■



The five-seat DA50 RG has a maximum take-off weight just under 2,000 kg.

## A PROBLEM SHARED

THE KNOCK-ON mental health effects of lockdown are only just starting to be recognised, with many struggling with the transition to the 'new normal'. For many commercial pilots or instructors the pandemic has meant severe disruption to lives and livelihoods. For this reason the 'Shout

85258' charity has teamed up with support group PilotsTogether to offer a 24/7 text-based crisis service. Pilots, regardless of employment status, can text #WePilots to 85258 and they will be put in touch with a trained volunteer by text who will support and guide them as required. ■



# FIVE DECADES OF THE A109

Steve Bridgwater

ITALY-BASED Leonardo Helicopters has marked the 50th anniversary of its A109 light twin-engined helicopter. Then known as Agusta, the company flew the A109 prototype for the first time on August 4, 1971, and it entered service around the world in 1976.

Agusta and its various later incarnations subsequently developed versions designed specifically for missions including ambulance services, police duties, mountain rescue and surveillance – both with civilian and military operators across the globe. The type has remained in production for the last four decades and according to Leonardo Helicopters more than 1,600 have so far been delivered.



More than 1,600 Agusta/Leonardo A109 helicopters have been delivered since the type was introduced in 1976.

Initially, the A109 was marketed under the name of Hirundo (Latin for the swallow), but this was dropped within a few years. “Thanks to the A109, the company switched from the production of licensed products to its own helicopters,” a Leonardo

Helicopters spokesperson said. The most recent addition to the family is the eight-seat AW109 Trekker. It is powered by a pair of Pratt & Whitney Canada PW207C engines, has a top cruise speed of 152 kts, a range in excess of 500 miles and a MTOW of 7,000 lbs. ■

## COVENTRY PLANNING OBJECTIONS MOUNTING

AMONG THE latest voices to speak out against the potential closure of Coventry Airport to create an electric vehicle battery ‘Gigafactory’ is the owner of resident Sky Harbour UK Ltd, which moved to the site on February 1.

CEO Steve Ford said he was not told about the plans to dispose of the airport despite them being publicised in the press a fortnight later. The company, which specialises in aviation consultancy, supporting owner operators and business aircraft, said it was dependent on the airport being operational for it to trade. It moved to the site for the good access to airspace so it could carry out its flight test, research and development and focus on emerging technologies.

Mr Ford has lodged formal complaints with both Warwick District Council and Coventry City Council and said: “Speculative property development, often with no defined end user is not limited to Coventry but is evident across the entire country.

Peter Jones, the chairman of the Coventry Airport Tenants and Users Association also confirmed that neither he nor any of the members were aware of the airport’s proposed disposal until it was revealed on February 15.

Charlotte Bailey, who regularly writes for this magazine, has strong links to Coventry Airport and was recently interviewed by local media following the news that actor Tom Cruise was forced to land

his helicopter in a residential garden because the airport was shut. Miss Bailey pointed out that the development plan had fundamental flaws that had been given little media representation. “Although it may well suit the Rigby Group to perpetuate the portrayal of the airfield as ‘disused’, it remains very much a viable asset” she told the Coventry Observer. “It is home to many businesses (including one of the busiest General Aviation maintenance companies in the country), the air ambulance and the last airworthy RAF Vampire jet in the world. The viability of a Gigafactory has already been called into question earlier this year, when Britishvolt rejected the site as having ‘insufficient power’ for a similar scheme.” ■

## AOPA NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

**Llanbedr remains open** despite confusion created by a new Danger Area. It comprises segments which are temporarily activated by NOTAM but it is currently showing as a solid outline (rather than dotted) when pilots plan their flights. The issue should be resolved in the next AIRAC update.

### The Junior British

Gliding Team swept the board at the recent Junior European Gliding Championships in Lithuania. The team took Gold in the Club class, Silver and Bronze in the Standard class, and Gold as the overall winning team. The Junior team members are all under 25.

### The 65 hp two-stroke,

two-cylinder Rotax 582 is to go out of production later this year. The engine was the mainstay of the microlight movement for many years but the increasing shift towards four-stroke engines means the Rotax 582 has reached the end of the line after selling more than 30,000 units.

### The CAA says it received

a number of reports this summer about tablets and smartphones overheating and shutting down while operating a moving map navigation app. It recommends that pilots have a back-up plan in place in case they lose their moving map in flight. It also reminded pilots to carry an up-to-date chart (that is marked-up with your route), use a printed PLOG and be prepared to orbit to avoid controlled airspace.

# WATTS NEW

## The Latest in Electric and Hybrid Propulsion Developments

IT HAS been a landmark summer in the history of electric and hybrid-powered flight in the UK.

Perhaps most notably, the headline-grabbing Rolls-Royce *Spirit of Innovation* took to the air for the first time on September 15. This is the first step towards the modified Nemesis NXT air racer establishing the hoped-for electric-powered world speed record-attempt and another milestone on the aviation industry's journey towards decarbonisation.

The all-electric aircraft is powered by a 400 kw (around 500 hp) powertrain with the most power-dense battery pack ever assembled for an aircraft. The 15-minute test flight took place from Boscombe Down in Wiltshire and it is hoped that the aircraft will eventually reach speeds in excess of 300 mph.

Meanwhile, two other important milestones in the history of electric aviation in Britain were passed in the last few months. On August 12 the hybrid-electric Ampaire EEL conducted the UK's first over-water electric flight when the aircraft crossed the Pentland Firth from Kirkwall Airport on the Orkney Isles to Wick John O'Groats Airport in Scotland.

This was the first operational flight on a viable regional airline route in Britain and was the first of a set of demonstration flights in the UK forming part of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd's Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) project. As we have reported previously, the Electric EEL is a modified six-seat Cessna 337 that runs on battery power as well as a conventional combustion engine. Following its time in Orkney the aircraft then flew



The Ampaire EEL flew from Orkney to Wick at 3,500 feet and 120 mph.

down to Exeter, setting an unofficial 418-mile distance record in the process. From Exeter Airport it then conducted trials to and from Newquay in Cornwall.

A month later, on September 13, French-based VoltAero made history when its Cassio 1 demonstrator became the first passenger aircraft to cross the English Channel under electric power.

Like the Electric EEL, the Cassio 1 is based on the Cessna 337 and uses a mix of electric and conventional powerplants. The electric motors enable Cassio to perform almost-silent take-offs and landings, while the internal combustion engine serves as a range extender by recharging batteries once airborne (and providing backup propulsion if needed).

The crossing was made so that the aircraft could visit Biggin Hill's Air Charter Expo (ACE) 21 and call in at Cranfield University. During its stopover at Cranfield the aircraft was inspected by

faculty and students and briefings were provided by VoltAero and its partner KinectAir, which operates on-demand flight services using a smartphone app.

### CHARGING POINTS

Of course, any eventual proliferation of electric-powered aircraft will need investment in infrastructure to charge the machines between each flight.

Deepak Mahajan of Fly About Aviation, the UK distributor for the Pipistrel Velis Electric, comments that the 'electric spiderweb' is growing with charging points at six airfields in the southeast of England. These are Norwich, Great Oakley, Damyns Hall, Redhill, Blackbushe and Popham; and just before this issue went to print we heard that Old Buckenham airfield in Norfolk has installed an electric aircraft charging point powered by solar energy.

The pace is clearly building and the installation of

*"There are now electric-powered aircraft charging points at six different airfields in the southeast of England"*

recharging stations could be set to become easier now that the first independent electric aircraft charger has been approved by EASA. The Skycharge system has been developed by the Swiss-owned Green Motion company and is available either as a fixed unit or as a mobile version. The latter powers both electric aircraft (via GB/T charger plug) and cars (via either CCS or CHAdeMO plug).

Across the Atlantic, California-based Beam Global has set a world record for the longest flight



in a production electric aircraft powered by off-grid, renewable solar energy. The Pipistrel Alpha Electro flew a 261 mile sortie out of Fresno Airport stopping at several airfields where it recharged using Beam's solar-powered charging equipment.

Thanks to Embraer the crop-dusting market will also soon be able to make full use of 'green' power. Its EMB-203 Ipanema spray aircraft recently took to the skies for the first time and is now undergoing testing.

### SCALING UP

Embraer will certainly be eyeing that technology with a view to implementing it in its next generation of airliners, but it won't be the first company to scale up motors for larger aircraft.

On August 10, ZeroAvia began ground testing of the 600 kW hydrogen engine destined for its 19-seat HyFlyer II aircraft.

The HyFlyer II – which is a converted Dornier 228 airliner – is expected to take flight for the first time later this year from ZeroAvia's UK facility in Kemble. The company also recently announced a deal with renewable energy company Octopus, which will supply 250 kg of pressurised hydrogen per day to supplement ZeroAvia's Hydrogen Airport Refuelling Ecosystem (HARE) on-site electrolysis facility at Kemble.

### BIG BOYS

If anybody still doubted that electric, hydrogen and hybrid aircraft were here to stay the decision by 'Big Boys' such as Textron, de Havilland Canada and Pratt & Whitney Canada to dip their toes into the market must surely be a sign of what the future holds.

In July, Surf Air Mobility signed an agreement with Textron for up to 150 Cessna Grand Caravan EX single-engine turboprops as part of a collaboration between the two companies aimed at developing a hybrid electric version of the utility aircraft.

Interestingly, Surf Air Mobility also began negotiations to acquire electric aircraft company Ampaire, which developed the Electric EEL mentioned above.

This summer also saw Pratt & Whitney Canada announce a new partnership with de Havilland Canada to develop a hybrid-electric propulsion system for regional airliners. The Canadian government has invested US\$130 million (approximately £95.3 million) into the project, which will involve modifying a Dash-8-100 turboprop regional airliner for the hybrid system. A turbine engine will be mounted in the fuselage to generate power for electric motors on modified nacelles on the wings. P&WC says the system should use about 30% less fuel with a corresponding drop in carbon emissions.



The Beam Global Pipistrel Alpha Electro is charged using Beam's solar-powered charging equipment.



The Rolls-Royce *Spirit of Innovation* took to the air for the first time at 14.56hrs on September 15. The flight was undertaken from Boscombe Down with Phil O'Dell (PoD) at the controls.

### FUTURE FLIGHT CHALLENGE

Back here in the UK, in August the government's UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) agency set out its ambitious vision for how the future of air travel in Britain could look. The so-called Future Flight Challenge is backed by a £300m investment and includes plans for eVTOL flying taxis and short-haul airliner journeys powered by hydrogen by 2030. It also calls for increased use of eVTOLs and UAVs by emergency services or for delivering goods.

Some concern has been expressed about the noise pollution from eVTOLs operating within inner city areas and US company Joby Aviation has recently collaborated with NASA to study the acoustic signature of its electric aircraft. The data was being analysed as this issue went to print.

Some of the greatest feats in aviation history have been achieved in the pursuit of competition and prizes.

It is therefore exciting to learn that the US National Aeronautic Association plans to hold a cross-country air race for electric aircraft.

The 1,150 mile cross-country Pulitzer Electric Aircraft Air Race will be flown from Omaha, Nebraska, to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina over the week of May 16-19, 2022.

The race is open to any piloted aircraft using "zero-emission electric propulsion" including fixed-wing aeroplanes, helicopters and multi-rotor urban air mobility (UAM) vehicles. The winner will be determined by "the fastest speed calculated from the cumulative flight time, not including time on the ground for maintenance, charging or overnight stays." ■



The VoltAero test pilots having crossed the English Channel from France on September 13.

WORDS &amp; IMAGES Steve Bridgewater

# LIGHT AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION RALLY

The 2021 LAA Rally took place on September 2 - 5 and saw 780 aircraft and around 4,000 visitors descend on Sywell. The Editor presents an overview of some of the highlights



**AFTER A LONG lockdown the GA community eagerly turned out en masse to support the 2021 LAA Rally at Sywell. Here are just a handful of the event's many memorable highlights.**

**1** Among the latest designs on show in the trade area was the Sling 4 TSi. Whereas the original Sling 4 four-seater has a 115 hp Rotax 914UL engine, the new TSi version has an upgraded 142 hp Rotax 915 iS turbo injected Sports powerplant.

**2** The 2021 Rally marked the 75th anniversary of the LAA (and PFA as it was). It was therefore fitting that the Best Vintage trophy winner, Frank Cox's Fairchild Argus, also claimed the HRH Prince Michael of Kent Award for the best in show.

**3** Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, visited the event in his US-registered Piper Saratoga.

**4** In its 75th year, few aircraft sum up the LAA/PFA ethos better than the Isaacs Spitfire. Originally designed and built





by John Isaacs in 1975, it was wonderful to see a pair on display at the Rally.

**5** Among the star attractions was Ivan Shaw's prototype ISA 180 Seeker G-SEKR. Ivan (who designed the Europa kitplane) refers to the Seeker as a 'personal aircraft', which is designed to accommodate a 6 ft 5 in pilot (weighing up to 17 stone) as well as a full-size folding bicycle, a tent and baggage. Using a 100 hp Rotax 912iS powerplant it will cruise at 120 kts or if you want to be more frugal it is claimed to burn just 6 litres of mogas per hour at a cruise speed of 105 kts. The aircraft is part way through its flight test regime.

**6** This very unusual-looking aircraft is Mike Whittaker's prototype MW-9 Plank. Mike is well known in the microlight fraternity for his range of single and two-seat machines; the Plank is designed as a single-seat deregulated (SSDR) machine and is now undergoing flight testing by the vastly experienced test pilot and legendary air display pilot Dan Griffith. The design uses a composite structure built up from 25 mm urethane foam with fibreglass skins and wooden load points. Power comes from a three-cylinder Konig SC430 two-stroke engine which produces 20 hp.

**7** Developed from the earlier Aeroprakt A-22 Foxbat, the

*"780 aircraft and around 4,000 visitors descended on Sywell for the 2021 LAA Rally"*

latest A-32 Vixxen was designed in Ukraine by Yuri Yakovlev. It is an all-metal two-seater with an all-moving tailplane and a slightly shorter wing that results in a 10 kts speed increase on the Foxbat while still using the same 100 hp Rotax 912ULS. The Vixxen is supplied as a kit in the UK but as a ready-to-fly factory-built aircraft in 31 other countries.

**8** One of a number of impressive SSDR microlights at the Rally was the Skycraft SD-1 Minisport. Designed in the Czech Republic, the airframe uses a mix of wood and carbon fibre to reduce weight and produce a machine that is claimed to do a very respectable 60 mpg at 120 mph.



3



4



7



8





Looking south towards Skye Bridge and Isle of Skye with Kyle of Lochalsh on the left.



WORDS AND IMAGES David Chambers

# LOCH DOWN ADVENTURES

With Europe in lockdown David and Gabrielle Chambers took an aerial holiday to Scotland. Here, David explains how he planned and executed this memorable adventure

**I** COME across many private pilots who have settled into a regular routine of short land-away trips to their favourite haunts – the so-called \$100 hamburger flight. However, some are more inclined to seek out new airfields, such as the two Icarus C42 pilots at my base who recently claimed to have flown to every strip within 60 miles. Others travel further afield, even taking a few days to venture abroad and we read enviously of their adventures in the magazine.

I'd encourage more pilots to venture a little further each year and make the most of their hard-won licence privileges. It's true that arranging longer trips takes

time and effort, including hiring or agreeing dates with co-owners, family, work and flying buddies. As if that's not enough, the weather can always play foul and change plans at the last minute.

## PLAN AHEAD

My approach to planning a longer trip often starts months ahead. I find an acceptable time window that pilots and passengers are comfortable with, then book the aircraft and time off work. Then I ensure that the aircraft will have enough hours left before the next scheduled maintenance and that my ratings/licence/medical/passport are up to date.

The next step is to consider where to go. The final decision will be driven by the weather forecast a few days before

*“Weather is highly changeable here – the windsocks at each end of the field often disagree.”*

departure. I've found it best not to get too focussed on a particular destination and so have one or two alternative options previously researched. One planned trip to the Alps ended up in Sweden. Another weekend in Scotland found us in Belgium. Flexibility is key, and the most impromptu alternatives can often be more interesting and exciting than the original.

Some fly purely for the enjoyment of the flight itself, whereas many (especially passengers) are more interested in the attractions after arrival. Determining factors favouring a particular destination include the cost and facilities of the airport, accommodation, beach, restaurants and local transport.

## NORTH OF THE BORDER

In 2020, my wife and I enjoyed a week touring around Northern Ireland by air visiting Derry, Donegal and Belfast. At the time of writing, such trips are again permitted with travel between UK and Ireland not requiring any Covid tests or self-isolation for those who are double vaccinated. Yet earlier this year, travel to Ireland did require self-





isolation so we opted instead for a trip to Scotland. Self-catering accommodation was available from the end of April with hotels open for business on May 17.

My planned route was Stornoway for three days self-catering, three days in a newly refurbished hotel on Mull and then home. I hoped we could drop in at Plockton for a day trip at some stage (it's a village I have been wanting to visit for years, but have always been weathered off in the past). The self-catering booking only offered free cancellation up to seven days before, but I negotiated that we could defer the dates if we couldn't make it. The hotel booking was free cancellation up to the night before. My plan B was therefore to reverse the route, staying at Mull first then on to Stornoway. Plan C might have seen us visit a different part of Scotland, such as Inverness or even Dundee.

The airport at Stornoway is owned and operated by Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and my email for PPR was quickly acknowledged. The airstrip at Mull is owned and operated by Glenforsa Hotel, who confirmed it was open and available for parking. Taxis are fairly difficult to arrange on the island, but I found there was a bus service to get to/ from our hotel, and we could rent a hire car nearby. Plockton was very easy to arrange – I just emailed PDG, which operates the airfield, and got a response the next day.

#### FUELISH THOUGHTS

Fuel was the next consideration as this had become a significant issue in western Scotland when Oban stopped providing it in 2019. The nearest fuel is at Prestwick, Glasgow, Cumbernauld or Stornoway. Popular options en route are to refuel at Kirkbride (just west of Carlisle) or Eshott

*“In retrospect I wish I'd simply slowed down for spacing instead.”*

on the east coast.

This time I heard that the club at Glasgow City airport had installed a fuel bowser and provides free handling for visitors. Although the landing fee is £40, it does include full ATC facilities with instrument approach. Cumbernauld nearby has a self-service fuel dispenser and is a popular option, albeit VFR only, so prices overall probably work out fairly similar. With the large 326-litre capacity of our Socata TB20, I reckoned on refuelling once at Glasgow, which would carry us home to Gloucester. Aircraft with shorter range would have to consider their fuel planning more carefully.

Although I had made some flights to keep current throughout the lockdown, few of these trips were away from base. I therefore familiarised myself with the approaches and airfield layouts on my X-Plane simulator.

Some Covid restrictions remained in place. We took lateral flow tests regularly, wore masks in public areas but generally just kept ourselves to ourselves. By travelling independently in the air and by car, we avoided large crowds at major airports and onboard airliners and were well distanced at the few restaurants, coffee shops and museums visited.

#### OUTBOUND

On this occasion the weather forecast looked favourable from several days out and it appeared that Plan A would work well. We flew airways from Gloucester to Glasgow in two hours, where I was vectored



- 1: The 5,000-year-old Neolithic Standing Stones at Callanish are thought to be a kind of astronomical observatory. They appeared in the 2019 Christmas Special of the BBC series *Call the Midwife*.
- 2: Looking east from the Lochside at Plockton village. Just one of the memorable vistas to be enjoyed in the Scottish Isles.
- 3: The town of Tobermory is perhaps better known to those with youngsters as *Balamory* from BBC Children's TV.





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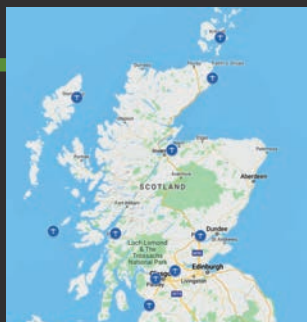
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## TRIP PLANNING

- Identify a timeslot. Book aircraft, agree holidays/time off
- Ensure aircraft fit for purpose: scheduled maintenance, documentation
- Pick a destination and one or two alternatives, with attractions/points of interest
- For foreign trips: plan immigration/customs stops
- Plan fuel stops. Always refuel on arrival to avoid unexpected delays on departure
- Research accommodation: find late-cancellation or last-minute bookings
- Research ground transport (hire car/taxi/buses)
- Check the weather a few days ahead
- Be flexible, avoid get-there-itis, have possible alternatives/delays in mind
- Enjoy (and ensure your passengers do too)!



Visitor parking at Plockton airfield.



down through the cloud layer onto the ILS to land, but weather permitting a visual approach would have been equally easy. The flying club there is located on the north side of the field, well away from the main passenger terminal. Alan, the owner, was waiting to marshal us in and quickly refuelled us. We chatted briefly over lunch and then departed promptly – there was a NOTAM for major military exercises in the area later, and I wanted to complete my journey before any shooting started!

Donning lifejackets for the over-water segment, there was little other traffic on frequency and we glimpsed Loch Lomond below before the gaps in the clouds closed. Nonetheless, when a commercial aircraft was asked to report its ETA we found it exactly matched ours. I was re-directed to STN, a VOR about five miles east of Stornoway airport. The cloudbase was reported to be around 2,000 feet and

I preferred to remain above the cloud layer rather than in or below it – giving more time if there were any problems, and allowing us to enjoy the sunshine and calmer winds.

Stornoway is similar to Gloucester in that it does not have a radar service and relies on verbal position reports from pilots in uncontrolled airspace. IFR traffic is given a procedural service which must be complied with.

I confess the instructions did confuse me – I couldn't quite believe I was being required to fly all the way to a different VOR, then east for 10 miles onto the DME arc to return back to the ILS, adding perhaps 25 miles to my route so as to remain clear of the commercial air traffic. In retrospect I wish I'd simply slowed down for spacing instead.

Once we descended down to 2,000 ft, I became visual with the airport and at the helpful suggestion of another pilot requested a visual approach.

*“We took lateral flow tests regularly. By travelling independently in the air and by car, we avoided large crowds at major airports and onboard airliners.”*

This remains an IFR procedure even though you must be able to see the runway and/or airport. Subsequently, I learned that I should have cancelled IFR and asked for a VFR approach – this would have saved me the cost of the IFR approach fee which is almost 50% more than the landing fee.

In previous visits to the airport I have popped into

the tower building to pay the landing fee. This is now handled over the phone and by email with tower staff.

We spent two days driving around the island, soaking up scenery including the Callanish Standing Stones, which are older than Stonehenge and you can go right up close to them.

The mountains of Harris to the south give way to fairly flat peaty bog in Lewis. There are few villages outside the main town and Sundays are strongly observed – only one small shop was open in the afternoon.

### PLOCKTON

Plockton (on the mainland) is delightful on a sunny day, like an oasis of fertile flatter ground set against a rugged backdrop of mountains and lochs. The 500 m hard strip is easier to use now that several high trees have been cut down from the approach, and after parking up, we met the groundsman cutting the grass. He reported just 68 fixed-wing movements



1: One of the many interesting sculptures that are dotted around the island of Lewis.

2: The sand dunes at Col Beach on Lewis. The weather in Scotland was far better than England during the trip.

3: Gorgeous scenery in glorious weather. This is why people have flocked to Scotland on holiday for generations.

in the past year (it's primarily a helicopter base) – perhaps 10% of their pre-Covid traffic. An enterprising take-away has established a semi-outdoor café nearby but the walk to the village rewards you with stunning views of the protected loch that would have been busy with fishermen for many decades. The village museum explains how the advent of the railway in 1897 opened up access to markets in London for fresh-seafood, resulting in growing prosperity for the region.

### MULL AND IONA

Leaving Lewis behind we flew low level over the Skye Bridge, keeping above the power lines strung across to the mainland, and on down to Mull.

Glenforsa remains a popular destination, where Brendan and Allison Walsh run both the airfield and the adjacent hotel. Weather is highly changeable here – the windsocks at each end of the field often disagree.

Brendan advised us that runway 26 was in use, and spacing myself behind another inbound we landed without much fuss.

Most of the roads on Mull are single-track with passing places; progress is slow, even without many tourists around. On the other hand, there is some amazing scenery. It took two hours to drive the 35 miles to Fionnphort for a 6-minute ferry journey to Iona. The relaxing sunshine and beautiful island made the trip well worthwhile. Staff explained that Iona often had better weather than the 'mainland' (as they call Mull), with less rain than further east where the clouds meet the mountains.

### DELAYED RETURN

I did say earlier that flexibility is key to trips like this and so it was that while we enjoyed some lovely weather in Scotland, the south of England was being hit hard by successive storms.

*“While we enjoyed lovely weather in Scotland, the south of England was hit by storms”*

We considered flying home a day early (going through several different plan versions), but at that point the original plan seemed to just about fit with the weather forecast. When the forecast deteriorated further, there was no viable alternative option. We flew across to Oban anyway because we had wanted to get home for a family celebration, and my wife considered taking the train or coach back from Oban, but there were no seats available southbound from Glasgow. So we settled into a very comfortable hotel in Connel just 500 m away from the

airport and enjoyed a couple of bonus nights of holiday – our room had very scenic views over the river estuary.

Oban airport is owned by Argyll and Bute Council, which also operates Coll and Colonsay airports, and runs a commercial service to both. You can buy out-of-hours permits to use all three airports, and they have recently introduced a tourist permit at lower cost that lasts for a week. More importantly, they have finally managed to sort out Avgas supplies, which opened shortly after we left. The price is quite reasonable, as is the landing fee. We found the staff welcoming and helpful throughout.

With a combination of advanced planning and flexibility, you too could venture further afield. Perhaps you won't make it all the way to Shetland or the Scilly Isles next year, but I would encourage all pilots to stretch themselves to make a slightly longer trip at least once a year. ■



- 1: Final to land on runway 05 at Glasgow. Alan, the flying club owner, was waiting to marshal and quickly refuel the visitors.
- 2: Newly installed Avgas bowser at Oban. The price is reasonable, as is the landing fee, and the staff were welcoming.
- 3: Driving on Mull is slow but scenic. It took David and Gabrielle two hours to drive just 35 miles across the island.



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# The Soviet star shows its metal

**Charlotte Bailey** draws back the Iron Curtain and asks **Simon Tilling** what makes the Yakovlev Yak-52 'just his type'?

**WORDS** Charlotte Bailey **IMAGES** Steve Bridgewater



When it comes to 'ramp presence', the Yak has it in spades.



**F**LYING A warbird-like aircraft – combining power, performance and sheer pedigree – remains a lifelong ambition of many a private pilot. Up until the early 1990s, few had the opportunity to translate this into reality, but the collapse of the Soviet Union was to offer an attractive alternative. Courtesy of the Yakovlev Design Bureau in Russia, a powerful, aerobatic military trainer was suddenly available for Western importation.

#### FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE (AND LICENCE AGREEMENTS)

First flown in 1976, the Yak-52 combines an all-metal monocoque fuselage with a semi-retractable tricycle undercarriage and a two-bladed variable-pitch propeller. A descendant of the 1975 single-seat Yak-50, the Yak-52 features a tandem seating arrangement. Although designed in Russia, most of the 1,800 Yak-52s produced were built by Aerostar in Romania under a royalty-free licence agreement – the aircraft dubbed Iak-52 but generally referred to as Yak-52.

*“The fuel gauge is the most accurate I’ve ever seen in an aeroplane”*

Production ran from 1979 to 1998 with the 1,000th aircraft delivered in 1987. After the fall of the USSR, the first Yak-52 arrived in the UK in 1993.

Their aerobatic prowess and relative affordability (aided by the post-glasnost devaluation of

Eastern European currencies) made them an attractive option for private pilots and soon the trickle of imports turned into a deluge. Operated variously on the Lithuanian, Russian and Hungarian registers, the machines eventually migrated to the British G-reg. However, today just 27 remain on the UK register (of which around 20 are currently airworthy) and in 2019 the CAA delegated oversight of the continuing airworthiness of UK-registered examples to the Light Aircraft Association (LAA).





Simon Tilling's aeroplane was built by Aerostar in 1991 and nominally joined the Soviet military as a primary trainer before being 'civilianised' and placed on the Russian register as RA-02090 for onward sale to the West. The aircraft was initially sold to a South African owner – appropriately becoming ZU-IAK – but was imported into the UK in 2007, becoming G-YAKF. It then passed through several owners before being acquired by Simon earlier this year.

#### WHY THE YAK?

It's a challenge that Simon – experienced display pilot and British air racing champion – couldn't resist. Having "always fancied the idea of a big round engine," the Vedeneyev radial of the Yak-52 – combined with its warbird-esque pedigree – was an obvious choice. With plentiful hours under his belt on the Chipmunk and Bulldog – both military trainers – it was time for the next step.

Ironically, Simon had been to look at another Yak-52 some years previously; however, deciding he wasn't quite ready for it, he bought a Bulldog instead. "It taught me a lot," admits Simon, and when the opportunity re-appeared four and a half years later it was a different story.

In fact, it only took a mere two weeks between making his mind up and procuring the magnificent beast. Selling the Bulldog within days of listing it, he purchased the Yak-52 and went to pick it up – sight-unseen – the following week. As Simon explains: "it looks and sounds a bit like a warbird – so why not?"

Why not, indeed. Whereas Simon describes his Chipmunk as something of a "faithful old Labrador" – relatively docile – the Yak is more of a Rottweiler. However, although he's only owned the Yak for a matter of months, it's proving worth the wait. As one of the last airframes produced,

*"I can't help but wish the rivets had been introduced with a little more aesthetic application"*

G-YAKF is in excellent condition overall – and it's certainly a considerable step up from the Chipmunk, which charming though it is, simply can't compare with this "big growly radial". Neither, I suspect, can it compete with Simon's passion to constantly improve his skill set and master ever-more impressive aircraft.

The well-maintained grass at Popham, Hampshire, is a long way from the Siberian wastelands this was designed to operate in; the gentle fields of 'England's green and

pleasant land' a far cry from its utilitarian origins. I'd even read that the undercarriage's height was dictated by the need to operate from unkempt grass strips, although as Simon points out, it's more likely the ground clearance demanded by the massive 96" diameter prop. This is two-bladed and of wood and fibreglass laminate construction and as with all radials it must be pulled through manually before starting – around nine blades' worth – to prevent oil from pooling in the lower cylinders. The Yak-52 uses around a litre of oil an hour and despite a total capacity of 18 lit, seems happiest running with ten for aerobatics or nine for cruising. The engine itself is a ten litre, 360 hp Vedeneyev M14P nine-cylinder radial: with the front cowling removed, the airframe resembles something of a sci-fi creature. "There aren't many pretty big radials," offers Simon, although it's certainly not



Chris Hall/via Simon Tilling

- 1: Whereas Simon describes his Chipmunk as something of a "faithful old Labrador" the Yak is more of a Rottweiler.
- 2: Red Star Racer. Simon rounds a pylon at Leeds East during Round 6 of the British Air Racing Championship.
- 3: The wonky line of rivets running down the wing is indicative that the Soviets prized function over form.



The Yak-52 is an imposing aircraft that exudes a warbird aura.





Red star rising.  
The Yak-52 underwent a  
period of vast popularity  
in the 1990s but today  
fewer than 30 of these  
Cold War relics remain  
airworthy in the UK.





without style. Perhaps more pertinently, this Yak has just had a new engine and prop: it's only possible to refurbish the powerplant three times – giving an absolute life of 2,250 hours – but Simon has a lot of fun left to have yet. It's entirely understandable that a lot of a Yak-52's value is dictated by the life left in its engine. As regards maintenance, parts seem easy enough to come by – helped a great deal by the relative recency of the type – although finding someone to work on them is “slightly less easy”.

Our walkaround reveals one other small problem (at least

*“It looks and sounds a bit like a warbird – so why not?”*

for someone with OCD as disruptive as mine). Although the overall impression is very sleek and stylish – certainly reminiscent of an era far older than its actual age – there's one glaring problem with the Yak. Or rather, a recurring problem as embodied by the wonky line of rivets running down the wing. “They didn't put this thing

together with a lot of love,” explains Simon, and despite understanding that Russian military trainers prized function over form I can't help but wish the rivets had been applied with a little more aesthetic consideration.

#### COCKPIT CONFUSION

Along with information on engine life, G-YAKF was sold with a plethora of documents – always appreciated – but there's just one snag: although plentiful, it's written entirely in Russian. An initial inspection of the cockpit would suggest a thorough knowledge of

cyrillic characters will serve you well here, too. As well as the original Russian radio still in situ, the cockpit instruments are also ... complicated. It's nothing Simon can't get his head around, although he acknowledges it certainly was a challenge at first; especially the confusion between units of measurement. Air speed is shown in km/h rather than knots, and the rate of climb is measured in m/sec rather than feet/min. RPM is shown as a percentage – 100% for takeoff, pull back to around 82% for climb out, and throttle/prop back to 64% to cruise.

## KNOW YOUR YAKS

Alexander Sergeyevich Yakovlev designed and built his first aeroplane (the AIR-1) in 1927 and formed the Yakovlev Design Bureau seven years later.

Although famed for its range of World War Two fighter aircraft the bureau also designed and built bombers, transports, airliners, helicopters and training aircraft.

Post war, Yakovlev set about creating a two-seat trainer to replace the company's UT-2 in service with the Soviet Air Forces and DOSAAF (Voluntary Society for Collaboration with the Army, Air Force and Navy, which sponsored aero clubs throughout the USSR). The resultant Yak-18 entered service in 1946 and was built in vast numbers. It was initially a taildragger with a pneumatically retractable landing gear and a 160 hp Shvetsov M-11 engine. Production later

shifted to the Yak-18A with retractable tricycle gear and a 260 hp engine.

The need for a competitive mount for the Soviet National Aerobatic Team led to the single-seat Yak-18PM (taildragger) and Yak-18PS (tricycle gear) – the former winning the World Championships in Moscow in 1966 and the latter victorious in the 1970 contest at Hullavington, UK.

In 1973, Yakovlev used the -18PM as the basis for the new Yak-50 aerobatic machine. Fitted with a supercharged 360 hp Vedeneyev M14 radial engine it entered service in 1975 and took first place in both the men's competition (Viktor Lestko) and women's competition (Lidia Leonova) at the 1976 World Aerobatic Championships in Ukraine.

The Yak-50 impressed the State and in 1976 DOSAAF ordered a two-seat

version, with tricycle landing gear, for use as a primary trainer for students who would later transition to Soviet jet aircraft. The first examples of the resulting Yak-52 entered service in 1979 and remained the USSR's basic trainer until 1998. A limited number of Yak-52TW taildragger versions were built from 2002 and in 2004 Yakovlev launched a modernised Yak-52M variant with modernised M-14Kh engine, three-blade propeller, a bubble canopy, a redesigned wing and even a rudimentary ejection-seat system.

[NB although sharing nomenclature, the Yak-18T of 1967 has few components in common with the Yak-18, 50 or 52. These were designed as basic trainers for use by Aeroflot flight schools and are fully aerobatic four-seaters].



Yak-18



Yak-18A



Yak-18PS



Yak-18PM



Yak-50



Yak-52



Yak-52TW



Yak-52M

Simon describes the altimeter as the only “normal” thing in here, although ultimately, it doesn’t matter what units the numbers are as much as knowing which number you need to point the needle at. Perhaps the cockpit’s best feature is the fuel gauge, which is “the most accurate [he’s] ever seen in an aeroplane” – praise indeed, and certainly a useful feature bearing in mind the Yak hasn’t got the biggest fuel capacity to start with.

Primarily designed for short training flights, the standard Yak-52 only holds around 27 Imp Gal; the furthest Simon has ventured out has been a cruise of around 1hr 45min, which at 64% RPM will burn around 13 Imp Gal (60 litres) an hour. (At aerobatic power, it’s more like 20 Imp Gal).

Hoping the confusion of the cockpit won’t be lost in translation, it’s time to start up and get going: generally accompanied by a big cloud of smoke while that big radial warms up at 40% power for

*“The Yak-52 is rated for up to two minutes inverted and is stressed to +7 / -5G”*

“what feels like forever”. Having said that, the cylinder head temperature rises quickly, and must be constantly monitored. Eschewing the unnecessary mental gymnastics required to convert the rotate speed of 90 km/h to knots, it’s far easier to simply follow the numbers. The gear comes up at around 170 (never exceeding 200), the circuit speed is 170; flaps are only engaged on finals (at about 150), and she stalls at about 115. “It’s a brick – it doesn’t glide at all,” explains Simon.

An unusual feature is the landing gear, which although retractable, doesn’t quite tuck into the lower surfaces of the wings, leaving the wheels able to revolve (and the brakes still

working). In the event of a gear-up landing, the brakes would offer some assistance and the wheels would protect the underside of the fuselage (although it’s something Simon’s in no hurry to attempt).

Another idiosyncrasy is the reliance on pneumatics, with the engine start, brakes, flaps and gear all dependant on this system. (Don’t leave the air on, or you’ll rely on a recharge from a dive bottle!).

Braking isn’t the easiest – unless you’re used to differential braking, assisted by a handle on the stick – and the drum brakes certainly don’t feel the most effective. However, it’s a small price to pay in view of the Yak’s abilities in the air.

#### **AEROBATIC ABILITY**

No warbird-esque aeroplane would be complete without an aerobatic element, and the Yak-52 certainly delivers in this department, having competed in competitions up to the ‘Advanced’ category. It’s rated for up to two minutes

inverted, has an impressive roll rate, and is stressed to +7 / -5G. Needless to say, the Yak is certainly an airframe to seek formal instruction in before fully exploring the aerobatic possibilities on offer.

Ahead of his own training, Simon read in the manual that should you enter the top of a loop with an airspeed lower than 140km/h (or was it knots?!), you’re liable to enter a spin: without your feet already in the rudder pedal straps, it’s unlikely you’ll recover. Luckily, this is one of the few entries in the manual that are not in Russian, although neither is it in the eye-catching red letters I’d have hoped for!

Simon’s next step is to achieve his aerobatic display authority as well as continuing to enjoy all that air racing has to offer. He became the Royal Aero Club Records, Racing & Rallying British Champion in 2018 in the Bulldog, and we’re looking forward to following his achievements in the Yak-52 next season. ■



- 1: The interior is typical of an ex-military aircraft with little thought given to ergonomics or comfort.
- 2: The large 96 in diameter propeller must be pulled through nine times before the engine is started.
- 3: Everything about the Yak is functional. Access to the large 360 hp Vedeneyev M14 is via hinged cowlings.





Simon's Soviet star. G-YAKF was built in 1991 but has been based in the UK since 2007.





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