

General Aviation

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Editor and publisher: Pat Malone
 Contributing editor: David Ogilvy

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 The Studio, Kettys Close, Withiel, Bodmin,
 Cornwall PL30 5NR. Tel: 01208 832975.
 Fax: 01208 832995

Advertisements: Michael Downing,
 Advertising Director, 11, Hollyhedge Road,
 Cobham, Surrey KT11 3DQ. Telephone
 01932 868516 and 07951 572301.
 e-mail: mikejdowning@aol.com

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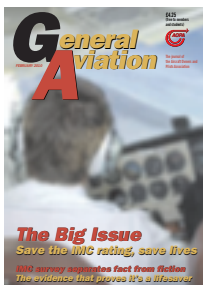
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AOPA office:
 The British Light Aviation Centre
 50a Cambridge Street
 London SW1V 4QQ
 Telephone: 020 7834 5631
 Fax: 020 7834 8623
 E-mail: info@aopa.co.uk
 Web: www.aopa.co.uk



Front cover:
VFR on top
 Photo: Keith Wilson

Chairman's message

New Horizons

The year 2010 ushers out the 'noughties' as the previous ten year period is popularly known, although personally I'm with those who reckon the true end of the decade is still just under a year off! Nevertheless, it is a good stimulus for doing a bit of crystal ball gazing, trying to see what the next decade may hold in store for general aviation. There are certainly going to be some significant changes and undoubtedly EASA will play a large part. However, nearer to home, our own national regulator, the CAA, has already provided the catalyst for change in the recent appointment of Dame Deirdre Hutton as the first woman Chairman, replacing Sir Roy McNulty, and Andrew Haines to the newly created post of Chief Executive. Martin Robinson and I were fortunate enough recently to be asked to discuss with them the more important problems facing general aviation in the UK as viewed through AOPA eyes. Our short list included the IMC Rating, airspace infringements and the level of bureaucracy and associated costs.



We wish both every success in their respective hugely challenging positions. Neither person has had prior knowledge or experience of aviation matters, not necessarily a disadvantage when operating at the highest level within the organisation, as experience from elsewhere can be brought to bear on management and strategy, and fresh pair of eyes can open up new visions and opportunities, whilst still relying upon the great wealth of technical competence embodied within the CAA staff. It was an indication of his determination to get to grips with the strategic issues facing general aviation that Andrew attended a recent meeting of the General Aviation Strategic Forum at which I was also present on behalf of AOPA. Also present was Jonathan Moor, Director General Civil Aviation, another relatively recent appointment. The forum, through these high level officials, is thus capable, theoretically anyway, of seeing through to completion some of the recommendations that emanated from the CAA Strategic and Regulatory Reviews of July 2006. Based on the constructive and forward looking contributions from both, I was able to form an optimistic view of progress. It will be interesting to see, as the year unfolds, if this optimism is sustained.

Change is afoot elsewhere with GASCo, the General Aviation Safety Council, appointing a new Chief Executive, Mike O'Donoghue. AOPA has supported GASCo fully from its inception, and we wish Mike, who comes with an impressive flying and management pedigree, all success in his endeavours in the area of flight safety.

Looking at what may be just over the horizon, it seems at least possible, if not likely, that there will be a change in government by mid-May. General aviation may not be very high up on the future government's list of priorities, and we will no doubt have to work harder initially to make our voice heard effectively enough to have a positive effect on general aviation in the UK. The adverse pressures on GA do not alter with a change of government, they still have to be counteracted, but the political environment dictates the strategy to some extent. The most recent unwelcome missive landed in my in-tray recently in the form of a 163 page document from Ofcom entitled "Applying spectrum pricing to the Aeronautical sector - A second consultation" published on 22nd December 2009. The size of the document dictates a lengthier consideration than can be given here, but the overall result of the proposals, if accepted, would lead to a significant increase in the cost of our flying. Apart from, in my view, the basic premise of insufficient availability of aviation frequencies being inadequately proven, there is a naïve expectancy that aerodromes will opt for an 8.33 kHz radio frequency because it is cheaper in terms of proposed licence fee than one on the 25 kHz frequency spacing. There is a complete absence of realisation that aircraft would have to be refitted with radios having the 8.33 kHz spacing for the whole system to work, which is unlikely unless the requirement were mandated, the cost to GA aircraft owners in the UK being something like £20 - £30 million. A government department, probably the DfT, would have to administer the scheme which would be very costly, also perhaps running into millions of pounds, not a welcome extra burden with severe reductions in government spending immediately in prospect.

One thing is certain - interesting times are ahead!

George Done