

# Letters to the Editor

## That Newcastle diversion Sir,

Your August 2005 issue contains Mr Strasser's long account of an occasion when Samson Aviation staff were called in by Newcastle ATC to handle an unscheduled, 'out of hours' movement involving a C152 from Teesside. Contrary to Mr Strasser's account, the handling agent had not been called out to handle any other aircraft, nor was he on site to attend to a based aircraft. Mr Strasser might also be interested to know that, to our very clear recollection, the pilot paid by cheque the following morning and departed with not a word of complaint. Only later did we hear that the cheque was 'stopped'. At the date of this letter (24 August) it has still not been paid.

Mr Strasser might have asked the pilot at what time he took off from Teesside with an intention of reaching Fife, which field closed at 2100 local. Mr Strasser would probably be right that the pilot would not have made it back to Teesside before 'official night'. But if the pilot had made it back to Teesside that airport had the right to impose its standard £300/hour airport hours extension after 2200 local (the pilot landed at Newcastle at about 2200). Mr Strasser might like to tell us the time and content of the weather forecasts deemed satisfactory by the pilot to attempt to fly VFR over the Cheviot Hills into a field with few navigation aids at that time of the evening, with that field due to close. Mr Strasser might reflect on what kind of message he is sending about flight planning to our PPL world by his Scheme.

Whatever. For the sake of clarity, *weather diversion or no*, during 0800-2000 local, Samson will charge the pilot of a C152 a 'normal' handling fee of £15. But outside those hours, if Samson is called out to handle an inbound flight, an out of hours fee and a call out fee will be charged, independent of the type of aircraft initiating that call-out.

Yours faithfully

**Martin S A Ballinger**

**Director**

**Samson Aviation Limited**

*\*While the pilot involved disputes Mr Ballinger's claims, it is of no consequence when weighed against the intent of the scheme, which is to ensure that pilots in trouble – through whatever cause – should not be discouraged from getting their aircraft on the ground at the first opportunity by fears about the cost. This is not just AOPA's position, or Charles Strasser's – the CAA is of the same mind.*

*For those who missed the original story, the pilot involved was charged £150 in compulsory handling fees for a light single at Newcastle after making an emergency weather diversion. If just one pilot is discouraged from landing at Newcastle by the knowledge that Samson Aviation is standing at the end of the runway with its hand out – for "services" which, it must be said, the pilot neither wants nor needs – then the risk of accident and death is increased.*

*The morality of "compulsory handling" for light singles is another matter entirely.*

**Sir:**

I read open mouthed CAA head of safety regulation Mike Bell's comments in the "Great Regulation Robbery" article equating a cost increase of £1,000 to an hour's flying. He is clearly confusing some of the wealthier people that fly with people trying to make a living in this industry. If a company sells £1,000 worth of flying or engineering, they are likely making on average a 5-10% margin net of direct expenses (ie not including CAA fees). Therefore they need to sell £10 – £20,000 worth of flying/engineering to cover the cost of the CAA's £1,000 bill. No wonder the CAA are so cavalier with our money since they clearly haven't got a business bone in their corporate body.

**Chris Wray**

**Sir:**

As usual, I read with much interest the August issue of General Aviation – especially as on the front cover there was a fulsome illustration of a Percival Prentice with the subtitle 'Fun for the ham-fisted' – a description which might well be associated with the Royal Air Force students who learned to fly thereon, of whom I was one. The description of stalling and spinning being particularly evocative, it reminded me of a sortie I flew in such an aircraft under the tutelage of one Flight Lieutenant Patrick when we were to explore the dreaded "second phase spinning" characteristics of the beast. To do this involved clambering up to some 8,000 feet so the descent would illustrate how the spin flattened as it continued downward, and the recovery requirements when that occurred. On the way up we passed through an adequately sized hole in the stratus through which we were to descend on the way down. We started at somewhere around 11,000 feet. I got it into and held the spin, encouraged by the instructor who excitedly pointed out that the nose was coming up and the spin was flattening. "Recover," he exclaimed. With self-preservation in mind I rapidly went through the appropriate motions but nothing happened. The command was repeated with the added words: "Full rudder." Still nothing happened. He took over and found that indeed, full rudder was on, although he pushed it somewhat

harder. His next instruction was more disturbing. "Abandon!" I'm not sure whether I actually said it but I certainly thought it: "You what?" My pause invoked a further comment: "Get on with it." I unstrapped my harness and moved forward and upward to leave the seat. Fortunately the canopy had not been jettisoned as the aircraft then gave something of a shudder. "Sit down," was the next command, which I did with alacrity, and she recovered. By now we were down to about 5 or 6 and feeling somewhat chastened so in silence we made our way home. After landing he went into the Instructors Crew Room and I to that for the students. About five minutes later Flight

Lieutenant Patrick appeared in the students' room without his right shoe. He lifted his leg to place his right foot on the table revealing a row of toes pushed through his sock, and exclaimed: "That's what I mean by full rudder, laddie!"

**Peter Skinner**

*Letter sent to CAA chairman Sir Roy McNulty and copied to AOPA*

**Dear Sir,**

As the owner of both a French and British registered aircraft, I would have expected the costs associated with operating these aircraft and the cost of the paperwork to be similar. However, to renew my British recreational light aircraft permit in Britain costs considerably more. Whereas I appreciate that the cost of fuel and maintenance will vary between the various states of Europe, my recent permit renewal, required each year for the paperwork alone, adds up to a greater amount than a fully certified ICAO recreational aircraft. This does not include any costs for the safety maintenance, but the paperwork only, and the question is why?

I contacted the body now responsible for European aviation safety, EASA, who inform me that charges for my aircraft are currently the responsibility of the British government but would hope that eventually charges and costs for recertification would be universal within Europe to keep a level playing field. They comment that the British Civil Aviation Authority has far too many employees considering the number of aircraft it covers, and whereas they would have expected the British CAA to have reduced their staffing levels and overheads following the transferring of most of their safety responsibilities to EASA, this has not happened.

It was also pointed out that many CAA requirements are home grown and not a European requirement – perhaps to justify these staffing levels. The delegating of permit renewal activities to other bodies, together with their associated added charges, is a case in point. They commented that delegation is perfectly sensible if it does not increase the overall head count, as in the case of Britain, which is the main reason for the difference. It was suggested that internal empires within the British CAA continually introduce local rules to justify departments and cost centres. I was

***the British Civil Aviation Authority has far too many employees considering the number of aircraft it covers***

told to look at the numerous publications and departments supported by the safety people, most of which are not an EASA requirement.

During the conversation it was

also pointed out that whereas much of the regulatory responsibilities have been removed from the CAA to EASA, that duplication within the CAA is the main reason that the British CAA has to raise its charges. They implied that staffing levels in the UK are higher than any other similar body within the union, and recent suggestions of price increases are to enable the CAA to keep their empires and staff in these altered times, when in many cases they are not strictly necessary.

Your comments would be appreciated.

**G. Barber ■**