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

AOPA UK

February/March 2026

Plug and Play
How electric aircraft will change GA P.28

Electric aircraft in general aviation are no longer just experimental – these pioneers are already changing the landscape and reshaping the market

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INNOVATION: AVIATION'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

AVIATION PIONEERS have always been pushing the envelope, from the Montgolfier Brothers in 1783 to those at NASA who landed rovers on Mars, Innovation and the quest to go further that has always benefited aviation.

This issue goes some way to celebrate innovators past and present. In our opening feature, we celebrate the life and times of Thomas Kenneth Mattingly II. Ken Mattingly was a NASA astronaut who was destined to go to the moon on the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission, but a health check flagged up German Measles, so he was grounded. But this turn of events meant that the grounded Mattingly was on hand to help bring the stranded Apollo 13 crew safely home. He continued to work tirelessly to help pioneer American spaceflight and exploration throughout his life, and was later played on screen by Gary Sinise in Ron Howard's Oscar-winning *Apollo 13*.

Elsewhere in this issue we take a deep dive into the world of electric aircraft, what they've achieved so far and they're heading in future.

David Burns is also in the hot seat in our latest 'The Interview'. David is the creator of *Helping Dreams Take Flight*, of helping people of all ages with an interest in flying to begin their piloting journey.

We visit Sherwood Flying Club for Hangarchat this month. After 68 years, the club was forced to move when Nottingham City Airport was closed down, but successfully relocated to Tatenhill. I chewed the fat with club chairman Martin Olley, about the upheaval of moving, and how the club has stayed active and retained its members.

"We visit Sherwood Flying Club for Hangarchat this month. Last year the club was forced to move when it's home of 68 years closed"

ARTICLE CORRECTION

In the previous issue there was an article regarding General Aviation aircraft and the need for carrying a fire extinguisher (AOPA DEC25/JAN26 page 17).

Some of the information was outdated. You can find all the correct information on AOPA's website here: www.aopa.co.uk/news-articles/halon-free-hand-fire-extinguishers.

Blue skies ■

David Rawlings
Editor

AOPA UK

EDITOR
David Rawlings
editor@aopa.co.uk

ART EDITOR
Dan Payne
dan.payne@aopa.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS
Martin Robinson, NASA, David Burns, Janine Canillas

PUBLISHED BY
AOPA UK
Lakeside Pavilion,
Chaucer Business Park,
Watery Lane,
Kemsing, TN15 6QY
+44 (0)20 7834 5631

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTIONS
AOPA UK
Lakeside Pavilion,
Chaucer Business Park,
Watery Lane,
Kemsing, TN15 6QY

HEAD OF ADVERTISING
David Impey
+44 (0)7742 605338

PRINTING
Ruddocks
56 Great Northern Terrace,
Lincoln LN5 8HL
+44 (0)1522 529591
www.ruddocks.co.uk

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Material for consideration for the Apr-May 2026 issue should be received no later than 1st Mar 2026.

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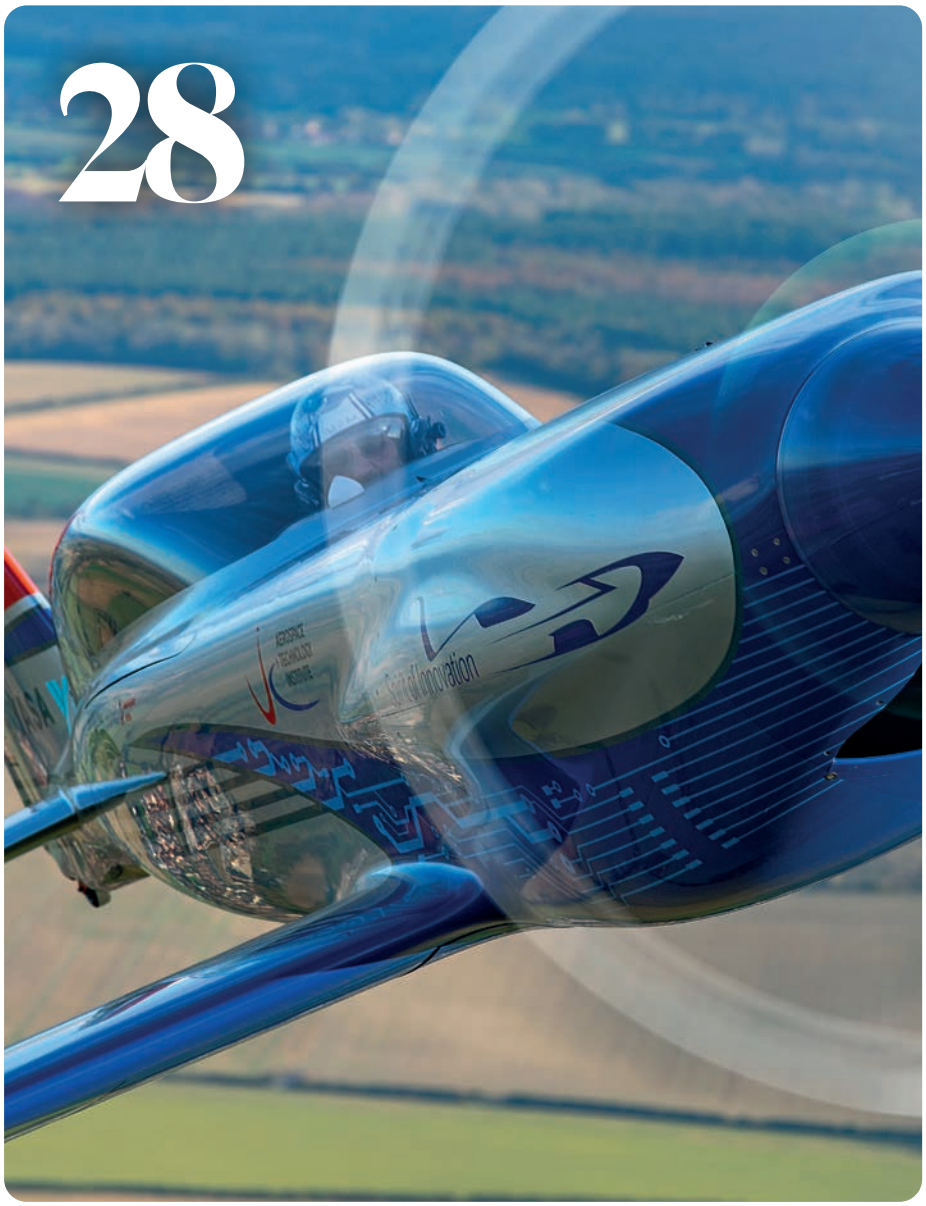
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WORDS Martin Robinson **IMAGES** Adobe

A DECADE OF CHANGE - OR MANAGED DECLINE?

This month AOPA's CEO **Martin Robinson** takes an analytical look at the Civil Aviation Authority's approach to certified General Aviation

AMONG UK General Aviation (GA) pilots, a persistent and increasingly pointed question is being asked: is the regulatory system still actively supporting certified GA, or is it quietly allowing it to wither on the vine?

This is not a rhetorical flourish. It reflects a genuine anxiety within parts of the GA community that the long-term direction of travel is away from sustaining conventional GA and towards managing its gradual decline.

Over the last decade, the relationship between GA and its regulator, the UK Civil Aviation Authority, has undoubtedly changed. The CAA has made explicit commitments to proportionate regulation, risk-based safety oversight and improved engagement. Many of those commitments have delivered real benefits.

Yet alongside that progress sits an uncomfortable counter-narrative that certified GA, in particular, is no longer central to the regulator's future-facing priorities.

This article takes a more analytical look at the CAA's approach, asking what has improved, and what may be being deprioritised – and why that perception has taken root.

FROM NEGLECT TO STRATEGY

It is important to start with balance. A decade ago, GA genuinely was an afterthought in a regulatory system optimised for commercial air transport. Certified light aircraft were regulated through frameworks that bore little relationship to their actual risk profile or economic reality.

The CAA's 2018–2023 General Aviation Strategy marked a significant course correction. For the first time, the regulator publicly acknowledged GA as a diverse sector and committed to proportionality, delegation and risk-based oversight. That shift in tone was real, and it mattered.

The refreshed 2025 GA Strategy goes further, explicitly recognising GA's social and economic value and positioning it as a legitimate aviation activity rather than a regulatory inconvenience. On paper, this looks like steady progress. But strategy alone does not guarantee sustainability.

PROPORTIONATE REGULATION

There is no doubt that regulation of GA is more proportionate today than it was ten years ago. Licensing simplification streamlined medical processes and greater use of recognised organisations all represent genuine improvements.

However, a critical distinction must be made between reducing regulatory friction and actively sustaining a sector.

Much of the proportionality agenda has focused on making it easier to comply with a shrinking activity base, rather than on ensuring that certified GA remains economically and operationally viable over the long term. For many operators, the issue is no longer excessive regulation, but marginal viability: certified aircraft maintenance costs remain high; parts availability and approval pathways remain complex; training pipelines struggle with cost and instructor supply and aerodrome infrastructure is under constant financial pressure. From this perspective, proportionality can feel less like enablement and more like managed containment: making decline less painful rather than reversing it.

DELEGATION

Delegation is often cited as one of the CAA's major successes in GA regulation; and rightly so. Shifting routine oversight and administration to competent organisations has improved responsiveness and reduced bottlenecks.

But delegation also changes the regulator's relationship with the sector. When functions move outward, strategic stewardship can move outward too.

Some in certified GA perceive that the CAA has become increasingly comfortable stepping back not only from day-to-day oversight, but from advocacy for the sector within government. Delegation, in this view, risks becoming a mechanism by which GA is left to sustain itself in an increasingly hostile economic and policy environment.

The question is not whether delegation improves efficiency but whether it is being accompanied by an equally strong commitment to defending the relevance of certified GA at policy level.

SAFETY: SMARTER OVERSIGHT

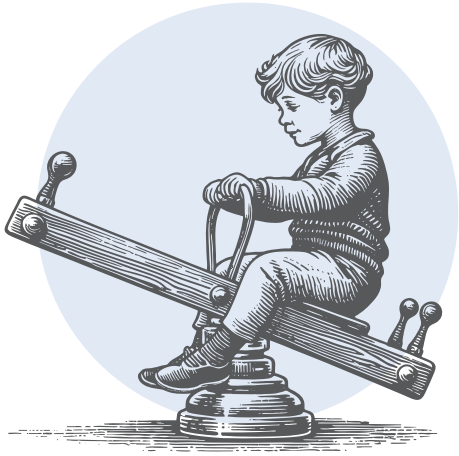
The CAA's evolution towards data-led, risk-based safety oversight deserves recognition. Targeted campaigns, Just Culture principles and accessible guidance such as the Skyway Code represent a far more mature approach to GA safety.

Yet there is an important nuance. Risk-based oversight naturally prioritises where harm is most visible or politically salient, not necessarily where long-term capability is being eroded.

Certified GA's safety record is often used as evidence that heavy regulatory intervention is unnecessary. But that same safety record can also make the sector invisible in policy debates increasingly dominated by high-profile innovation narratives. Safety regulations need improvement, but strategic visibility is lacking. Without clear direction from the DfT, the CAA cannot reverse the decline. When asked about GA safety targets, the CAA simply responds with ALARP (As Low As Reasonably Possible), leaving its meaning and decision-makers unclear.

ENGAGEMENT

The establishment of the General Aviation Partnership has transformed



"It is important to start with balance. A decade ago, GA genuinely was an afterthought in a regulatory system optimised for commercial air transport"

the mechanics of engagement. GA organisations now have structured, continuous access to the regulator, and many technical issues are handled more transparently than ever before. GAP is effective at resolving how things are done. It is less effective at shaping whether certified GA remains a priority when competing with government-backed innovation agendas.

For many stakeholders, engagement feels increasingly like consultation on implementation rather than participation in strategic choice. This distinction matters. A sector can be well listened to, well managed and still slowly marginalised.

THE DRONE AND EVTOL EFFECT

Over the last decade, government focus has shifted decisively towards uncrewed aircraft systems and eVTOLs. These are framed as growth sectors: future-facing, exportable, and politically attractive.

The CAA has been tasked with enabling these technologies at pace. That has required significant organisational focus, specialist capability and regulatory innovation.

The consequence, however, is unavoidable: attention is finite.

Certified GA, by contrast, is often framed as legacy aviation. It delivers real value but not headline-grabbing growth. It consumes airspace and infrastructure but does not align neatly with industrial strategy narratives.

This creates a perception that the regulatory system is optimised for emerging technology acceptance; experimental and non-certified aircraft pathways and scalable, commercially aligned aviation models, while certified GA is expected to persist quietly, efficiently, and without demanding strategic capital.

That may not be deliberate neglect, but it is experienced as such.

LICENSING REFORM

The 2025 licensing reforms were widely welcomed and long overdue. They demonstrated that sustained engagement can eventually lead to meaningful change.

But they also highlight a deeper concern: why did it take so long?

For many, the reforms arrived at a point where flight training pipelines were already fragile, instructor numbers were under pressure, and aircraft utilisation was declining. The reform helped, but it did not reverse underlying trends.

This feeds the perception that certified GA improvements are reactive and incremental, while innovation sectors receive regulatory energy.

CERTIFIED GA STILL AN INFRASTRUCTURE

At the heart of the "wither on the vine" concern lies a simple question: does government still see certified GA as national aviation infrastructure, or merely as a leisure activity?

If GA is infrastructure, then aerodromes are strategic assets; training pipelines are national capability; aircraft ownership and operation matter beyond individual pilots.

If GA is leisure, then gradual contraction is tolerable.

The CAA's strategies contain language that supports the former interpretation. But many operational and policy signals point towards the latter.

A NUANCED VERDICT

So, is the CAA abandoning certified GA? The honest answer is no, but neither is it actively championing it. At the same time, it has operated within a policy environment increasingly focused on drones, eVTOLs and future aviation concepts where certified GA struggles to compete for attention. The result is a form of neglect: competent regulation without strategic urgency.

WHAT GA SHOULD BE ASKING FOR NEXT

If the last decade was about fixing how GA is regulated, the next must be about why GA matters. That is not solely the CAA's responsibility, but the regulator plays a critical role in how government perceives aviation priorities.

Certified GA does not need protection from safety oversight. It needs recognition as capability, not nostalgia.

Until that case is accepted, the fear that certified GA is being left to wither will continue to, not because regulation is hostile, but because it may no longer be essential in the eyes of policymakers.

That is a far more serious challenge than any rulebook. ■

Martin Robinson
CEO, AOPA UK
martin@aopa.co.uk

NEW AIRCRAFT

THE EVOLUTION OF THE HIGH-WING TRAINER

The P2008JC NG combines the latest CS-23 safety standards, state-of-the-art fuel injected powertrain, and Tecnam's unique hybrid construction to deliver the solution Flight Training Organisations have been waiting for

TECNAM HAS launched the P2008JC NG, a major evolution of its popular flight training aircraft. Certified to EASA CS-23 airworthiness standards, the P2008JC NG integrates the Rotax 912 iSc fuel-injected engine with a robust, safety-centric airframe.

Moving to the CS-23 category places the P2008JC NG in the highest safety tier for GA aircraft, offering Flight Training Organisations (FTOs) an asset with superior certification margins, operational flexibility, and long-term value, all while delivering unparalleled economic efficiency.

In a market polarised between hard-to-repair full-composite aircraft and ageing 50+ years old design all-metal fleets, the P2008JC NG stands alone. It retains Tecnam's signature Hybrid Airframe Technology: a sleeker, more aerodynamic carbon-fibre fuselage for superior performance and cabin width, coupled to robust metal wings and stabilator.

The next generation of flight training according to Tecnam

This unique combination addresses the specific pain points of Flight School CEOs and CFIs by offering robustness where it matters. The metal wings are resistant to "hangar rash" and can be repaired quickly and economically. The carbon fuselage allows for a stylish, wide cabin that offers students an automotive-style comfort level, far surpassing legacy metal trainers.

The transition to the Rotax 912 iSc engine is a game-changer for both operational costs and environmental impact. It offers a drastic cost reduction with a fuel consumption of just 14 litres/hour (3.7 USG/h) and the ability to use a wide range of automotive fuels. The P2008JC NG significantly lowers hourly operating costs compared to heritage avgas powered competitors. This efficiency directly translates to sustainability. By burning up to 58% less fuel than legacy trainers, the P2008JC NG drastically cuts CO2 emissions, allowing flight schools to offer a cleaner, more eco-conscious path to a pilot license.

Giovanni Pascale Langer, Managing Director at Tecnam said: "We needed an aircraft that works hard, consumes little, and inspires confidence.

"This is the only trainer on the market that combines superior safety of CS-23, state-of-the-art avionics, and the unbeatable efficiency of modern injection technology." ■

"This unique combination addresses the specific pain points of Flight School CEOs and CFIs"

NHS TO USE DRONES FOR MEDICAL DELIVERIES IN CORNWALL

OPEN SKIES NETWORK and Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust set a new model for drone-enabled healthcare logistics

A new partnership between Open Skies Network and the Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust will introduce routine medical drone deliveries for the NHS in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

The agreement has been described as the first of its kind within the NHS and aims to improve access to healthcare across a region which can suffer due to its size, the weather, and its island geography.

The multi-year partnership was set to begin at the end of last year.

It will support the adoption of cargo drones to move items such as pathology samples and medical supplies. Over time, the partners will also explore the use of piloted electric aircraft for medical transport.

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly present unique challenges for healthcare delivery. Communities are spread across rural areas and islands, with around 30 miles of water separating the Isles of Scilly from the mainland. These factors can slow the movement of samples, medicines, and specialist equipment. ■

CIRRUS DELIVERS 11,000 SR SERIES AIRCRAFT

CIRRUS HAS delivered its 11,000th SR Series aircraft, a testament to the company's innovation, safety, quality and service.

The SR Series product line (SR20, SR22 and SR22T) was first delivered in 1999 and has been the best-selling high-performance single-engine piston aircraft for over two decades.

"Delivering 11,000 SR Series aircraft is an incredible milestone for Cirrus," said Zean Nielsen, Chief Executive Officer of Cirrus. "Cirrus is the third largest aircraft manufacturer in the world, and our aircraft feature cutting-edge innovations including the Cirrus Airframe Parachute System (CAPS), Perspective Touch+ avionics and Safe Return Emergency Autoland, which continue to raise the industry benchmark and keep people flying with confidence."

The one-off design of the 11,000th SR Cirrus

The one of a kind, 11,000th SR Series aircraft showcases an exclusive, bold design to commemorate the milestone. Crafted by the Cirrus Xi Design Studio, the inspiration for the 11,000th aircraft draws from forward-looking trends, the art of movement, and elevated luxurious colours and materials. The design combines elegance, and thoughtful details, including the number 11 on the fuselage, tail, and inside the cabin. The dark green 'Monteverde' paint is unmistakable on the ramp, making the number eleven stand out. Premium materials in 'Vision Green', 'Concrete' Alcantara and matte carbon fibre create a sophisticated cabin. ■

Navy drone copter flies

The Royal Navy's first full-size autonomous helicopter completed its maiden flight from Predannack Airfield in Cornwall. This new autonomous aircraft is designed to operate without an onboard crew.

Layoffs at Jeppesen

Jeppesen ForeFlight carried out large-scale layoffs, according to multiple employees and posts from current and former staff. The move comes after the company was sold.

FAA's unleaded plan

The FAA released its draft Transition Plan to Unleaded Aviation Gasoline for public comment, outlining its proposed approach to eliminating leaded avgas from GA.

THE BIG STORY

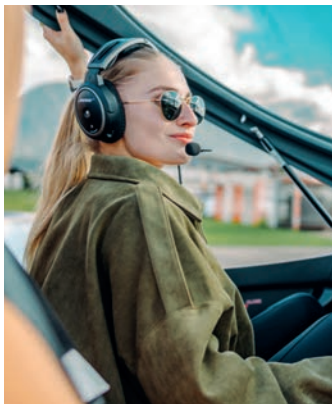
WORLD FIRST

B23 BECOMES THE WORLD'S FIRST EASA CS-23 APPROVED AIRCRAFT WITH ROTAX 916iS

Czech-based BRM AERO has received EASA approval for the Bristell B23 powered by the Rotax 916iS engine in the CS-23 category

BRM AERO has completed the EASA certification process for the Bristell B23-916iS configuration, enabling customers to order the B23 with the Rotax 916iS turbocharged engine under EASA CS-23 approval.

"From the beginning, we designed the B23 as a universal platform that can grow with our customers' needs. The EASA approval of the 916iS configuration is a clear step forward – customers can now choose the exact performance level that fits their operation, from cost-efficient training to demanding towing and high-altitude flying," said Martin Bříštěla, CEO, Bristell Aircraft.



The roomy cockpit is another advantage of the B23

"Customers can now choose the exact performance level that fits their operation,"

The B23 is a proven aircraft platform with approvals from both major aviation authorities. On September 10, 2025, the B23 received Type Certification from the FAA under Part 23, complementing its existing EASA CS-23 approval and reinforcing credibility for flight schools and private pilots worldwide. With over 1,100 Bristell aircraft delivered across four continents since 2009, the Bristell family has established a strong track record in real-world operations – including commercial pilot training environments – where reliability, consistency and support matter most.

The B23 combines proven all-metal construction with advanced avionics and efficient Rotax powerplants. As standard, the B23 features a Garmin glass cockpit and a spacious cabin designed for comfort and day-to-day operational efficiency in flight schools and private ownership alike.

The new B23-916iS is designed for operators who want maximum performance, improved hot-and-high capability, and stronger margins for towing and mission flexibility. The aircraft is built as a flexible platform where operators can choose the power level that best fits their needs. All B23 variants share the same core benefits: certified design, robust metal airframe, a spacious cabin, and modern Garmin avionics – the primary difference is the power and performance envelope.

The Bristell B23-916iS is available to order. ■

The modern cockpit of the newest Britstell B23

The multi-purpose Bristell B23 now has a more cost-effective powerplant option

Funding to inspire young people into aviation has been announced by the government

FUTURE SUPPORT

UK GOVERNMENT BACKS NEXT-GEN AVIATION OUTREACH PROJECTS

The Government wants to entice young people in aviation

THE UK government has announced £750,000 in new funding to support projects designed to inspire young people across the country to explore careers in aviation.

Delivered through the Reach for the Sky programme, the funding will back initiatives ranging from STEM festivals and roadshows to coding and simulator-based activities.

The aim is to raise awareness not only of traditional aviation roles, but also of the technical, creative and emerging career pathways that are often less visible across the sector.

The announcement comes as the government moves forward with airport expansion plans at Gatwick and Luton, alongside proposals for a third runway at Heathrow,

"The UK has a proud history in aviation which we are determined to continue by inspiring more young people"

developments expected to create thousands of highly skilled aviation jobs in the years ahead.

Among the recipients is TEC (Tech, Engineering, Creative) Women, which will receive nearly £100,000 to deliver STEM career festivals in Cornwall, encouraging more girls to consider aviation-related careers.

East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT) will be awarded more than £50,000 to engage young people from deprived communities through employer visits, workshops and clubs, while the Mason Foundation will receive £30,000 to support neurodivergent school children in Manchester.

Aviation, maritime and decarbonisation minister Keir Mather, said: "The UK has a proud history in aviation which we are determined to continue by inspiring more young people to see the sector as a place where they can build their careers.

"Reach for the Sky plays a vital role in that mission, helping to break down barriers to opportunity and encouraging the next generation to aim high.

"Alongside securing the future of the aviation industry, this is about ensuring young people from all backgrounds can see and learn about the varied and often highly skilled jobs and future opportunities that will deliver growth across the country."

Other projects supported include Fantasy Wings, Aerobility and Get with the Programme, while the scheme has also previously backed organisations such as the Air League and Codes4Drones.

The funding announcement follows the recent opening of applications for the next cohort of Aviation Ambassadors and sits alongside wider government investment in sustainable aviation fuel production as part of its net zero strategy. ■

BIGGIN HILL UNVEILS MAJOR RUNWAY ENHANCEMENT

BIGGIN Hill Airport has completed a milestone runway resurfacing project. The work, achieved with the support of an eight-figure funding package from HSBC UK, marks a key phase in the airport's ongoing investment to enhance operational resilience and deliver smoother, more predictable arrivals for business aviation customers.

Following a summer of work, Biggin Hill's runway now boasts a brand-new grooved surface along with advanced LED and centreline lighting to increase the situational awareness for pilots. These improvements ensure the runway continues to meet the needs of modern business aviation and reinforce the airport's role as a resilient port of entry for London.

"This resurfacing project is a significant step in our ongoing investment in the airport..."

Robert Walters, Commercial Director, London Biggin Hill Airport, says: "This resurfacing project is a significant step in our ongoing investment in the airport's core infrastructure."

Alongside the resurfacing, Biggin Hill has introduced a 24/7 AUTO-METAR service, providing continuous live weather data, and an enhanced Instrument Runway Visual Range system offering more precise visibility readings. These updates provide flight crews with clearer operational information to support fully informed decisions ahead of arrival. ■

COVENTRY AIRPORT TO CLOSE IN JUNE 2026

COVENTRY AIRPORT is due to close this year, its operators have confirmed, for the development of a multimillion-pound advanced manufacturing site.

The Rigby Group said the ceasing of runway operations at the Baginton site would enable the next phase of building work to begin for Greenpower Park, the location of a proposed battery gigafactory.

The closure will include the next phase of building work

Greenpower Park is a joint venture between Coventry City Council and Coventry Airport and received a £23m funding boost from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) in January.

A spokesperson from the CAA said: "Coventry Aerodrome has given formal notice to us of its plan to close the airport permanently."

Speaking about the airport's notice to the CAA, the Rigby Group statement said: "This procedural submission, first envisaged when local planning approval for Greenpower Park was granted in 2022, enables the next phase of infrastructure work for the site to proceed."

It said the WMCA funding supported the first phase of development, which will focus on installing a 30 MVA power supply. ■

Pilot sues Boeing

Captain Brandon Fisher alleges that Boeing attempted to shift blame towards the crew following the in-flight blow-out of a cabin panel that created an emergency. These efforts, the lawsuit says, had "life-altering" impacts.

Tariffs will harm Airbus

Airbus Americas CEO Robin Hayes has stated that US tariffs on aircraft parts imported from Mexico and Canada may impede domestic aircraft production in the United States.

RV-15 wings delivered

Van's Aircraft said that it has delivered the first and second RV-15 wing kits to customers, marking a step forward in the company's rollout of its newest model.

David Burns

Trustee of new charity Helping Dreams Take Flight

David Burns

David works in Ryanair's training programme as well as being a co-owner of the Flyer Watch Company – all this inspired him to give back and start his own non-profit 'Helping Dreams Take Flight' which David hopes will give everyone the chance to learn to fly

Q: How did *Helping Dreams Take Flight* begin?

A: I've been fortunate to have a varied aviation career, with its share of highs and lows. I spent five years bush flying with Susi Air, before moving on to Norwegian Air and later joining Ryanair in a training role. That position gave me the stability and perspective to look beyond day-to-day flying, and *Helping Dreams Take Flight* grew out of that opportunity.

Q: So, how did it progress?

A: It began in 2023, when my father and I launched an aviation-inspired watch brand, *The Flyer Watch Company*. From the outset, we committed to donating a portion of profits to organisations that provide flying and gliding scholarships. While we were open with customers about that commitment, it became important to demonstrate it. That led to the creation of *Helping Dreams Take Flight* earlier this year. A key principle was ensuring the charity was completely independent from the watch brand. To maintain transparency and trust, the charity is overseen by an independent board, with my father and me in the minority. This structure ensures accountability and that funds are used exactly as intended.

Q: Have you received any additional support?

A: Yes. The charity has received strong backing from across the aviation community. SkyDemon has donated a full five-hour flying scholarship for 2026, providing a significant boost in the charity's first year. Pooleys Flight Equipment has also supported the initiative by providing starter packs for scholars, helping to remove some of the initial practical barriers to training.
What matters most is that every pound raised goes directly into flying and gliding scholarships. There are no salaries or overheads. All funds received are redistributed to support flying opportunities. For 2026, this includes four five-hour powered flying scholarships and two gliding scholarships.

Q: Did you receive any advice when starting out?

A: Early on, we were advised to focus on helping more people through smaller, more accessible scholarships rather than concentrating all resources on a single full licence award. That approach aligned closely with our values and shaped the structure of the programme.

Q: When will applications open?

A: Applications opened on Monday 5 January and the response has been very encouraging. Inclusivity is central to what we do. While many scholarships focus on younger applicants, ours are open to people of all ages. Not everyone has had early access to aviation. Careers, family responsibilities and financial pressures can all delay or prevent people from pursuing flying or gliding. If someone later in life wants to start, we want them to feel just as welcome to apply.

Q: How is the application process going so far?

A: The response in the first few days has exceeded expectations and reinforced the need for accessible aviation scholarships. Applications close on 1 March 2026, with interviews planned for the final two weeks of April. The scholarships are open to applicants across the UK, with no upper age limit. Selection focuses on motivation, commitment and potential, particularly for those facing financial, social or physical barriers to aviation. Previous access to flying or gliding is not a prerequisite.
To apply, visit: www.helpingdreamstakeflight.com

Helping Dreams Take Flight **is offering two glider scholarships for 2026**

David Burns, who has also worked with Aerobility to empower greater inclusiveness in aviation

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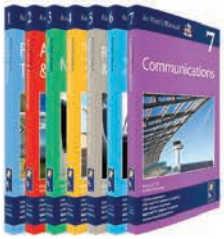

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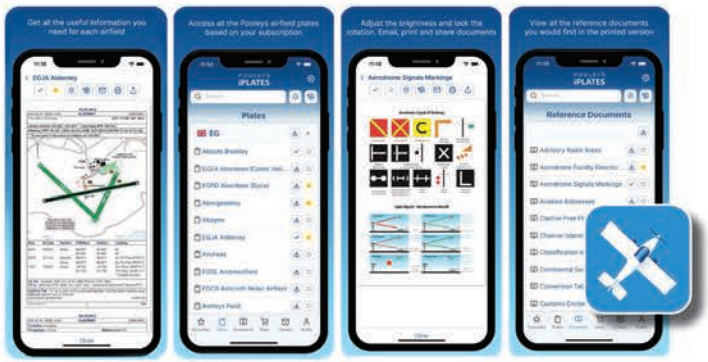

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Welcome to the COMMUNITY section of the magazine. Bringing you help, advice, and other insights from the world of AOPA, in an honest and up front way to help you stay flying. Something to say? Please contact us at ***editor@aopa.co.uk***

WORDS Martin Robinson **IMAGES** Marie Martin

ROUNDING OF US (N) REGISTERED AIRCRAFT HELD IN TRUST

N-Reg aircraft registered in the UK through Southern Aircraft Consultancy have been grounded, **Martin Robinson** explains

AOPA IS aware of an FAA action affecting some US (N)-registered aircraft that are registered using Non-Citizen Trust arrangements administered by Southern Aircraft Consultancy Inc (SACI).

The FAA has informed the CAA that it considers the Certificates of Registration for aircraft registered via SACI under certain trust arrangements to be invalid. As a result, affected aircraft are not permitted to operate, and the CAA has taken steps to enforce this position within the UK.

This action relates solely to aircraft registration eligibility. It does not relate to airworthiness, maintenance standards, or flight safety.

SACI has advised its clients that it disagrees with the FAA's interpretation of the applicable registration and trustee eligibility requirements. SACI characterises the issue as an administrative and regulatory matter, rather than a safety issue, and has stated that it is engaging with the FAA to seek clarification or resolution. However, SACI has also acknowledged that the FAA currently considers the affected registrations invalid and that aircraft should not be flown while this position remains in force.

If your aircraft is:

- N-registered, and
- Registered via Southern Aircraft Consultancy Inc as trustee

you should assume that the aircraft cannot legally fly until the registration issue is resolved.

Owners and operators are strongly advised to:

- Confirm whether their aircraft is affected by checking FAA registration records and trust documentation
- Contact their insurer and any finance or leasing providers
- Seek independent specialist aviation legal advice on available options.

Potential routes to resolution include transferring to a different FAA-eligible trustee or re-registering the aircraft in another state, subject to regulatory requirements.

This development highlights the importance of ensuring that aircraft ownership and registration structures, remain fully compliant with the current interpretations and enforcement practices of the State of Registry.

AOPA continues to monitor the situation and remains engaged with the CAA and international partners to understand any implications for UK-based GA ■

The FAA currently considers the affected registrations invalid

WORDS Janine Canillas (courtesy of AOPA US) **IMAGES** Courtesy of Gus Hawkins

SUPPORTING PILOTS AFTER AN ACCIDENT

Back To The Cockpit is an organisation set up by **Gus Hawkins** who tries to help pilots get back behind the yoke after an aircraft accident

FOR PILOTS, the hardest part of surviving an aircraft accident may come long after. Gus Hawkins knows this firsthand, and his experience inspired him to create a community of pilots who have faced the decision embodied in the group's name: Back to the Cockpit.

In 2009, Hawkins crashed his seaplane. Nothing was wrong with the aircraft; he admits he had "just forged too many links in the failure chain to prevent my crash." His last memory before impact was seeing the tops of trees 150 feet below. What happens after an accident is rarely talked about. Once the report is filed and the headlines fade, pilots often face unresolved questions: What did I do wrong? Could I have prevented this? Should I fly again?

These were questions Hawkins asked himself – and now helps other pilots work through. Founded in 2016, Back to the Cockpit operates with a simple and intentionally discreet approach. Hawkins reviews accident records of nonfatal GA accidents, cross-referencing aircraft registrations, and mailing confidential letters to registered aircraft owners inviting pilots to reach out. To date, he has mailed 6,800 letters and about 200 recipients have contacted him directly.

Hawkins is careful in how he approaches people. "I want people to feel free to call, but I don't put any pressure on them," he said. Many do call, seeking something they didn't realise they needed: a place to be heard. Some begin hesitantly. "I don't even know why I'm calling," while others examine every detail. "What upsets one pilot might not affect the other at all. It's extremely individual." And that individual process takes time. Hawkins knows this personally: After his accident, he spent nearly a year confronting what it meant. "The loss of confidence cannot be overstated." Rebuilding confidence often requires confronting fear. "You keep asking why until you understand everything that happened," he stated. Conversations are always one-on-one. Back to the Cockpit isn't a public forum or formal support group; it doesn't offer medical advice. It offers a space to talk, reflect, and decide what comes next. Not every conversation leads to flying again. "Sometimes it just means helping someone find peace," he said. "Even if it means never flying again."

> *"What upsets one pilot might not affect the other at all. It's extremely individual"*

For many, though, the desire to fly remains. Hawkins often encourages pilots to work with instructors to safely recreate scenarios that shook them, helping rebuild confidence in the cockpit. That help matters, even as pilots age and medical exams become more fraught. Fear of disclosure can keep pilots silent, not just about accident trauma, but also about physical health, stress, and anxiety. Many worry that saying the wrong thing could ground them, so they say nothing at all. Not addressed, that silence compounds. That's where Hawkins comes in, listening as pilots critique a flight, dissect an accident, or circle the same questions. Commercial airlines have structured post-incident programmes. GA does not. The danger isn't admitting that there is fear; it's pretending it doesn't exist. ■

Gus Hawkins founded Back to the Cockpit after surviving his own accident to help fellow pilots

WORDS Martin Robinson

GA, BIZ AV AND REGIONAL AIRLINES BELONG IN THE SAME POLICY FRAME

A recent meeting between the Department for Transport, the British Business and General Aviation Association and AOPA UK highlighted an important, but often overlooked, point of alignment

GENERAL AVIATION, Business Aviation and Regional Airlines are routinely discussed as separate interests in debates about airspace, charging and regulation.

Yet when viewed through the lenses of system impact, public value and statutory discretion, they have far more in common than policy discussions typically acknowledge.

This matters, because current approaches to airspace cost recovery risk fragmenting these sectors, despite legislation and Treasury guidance clearly supporting a more nuanced and collective approach.

THE TRANSPORT ACT 2000

At the centre of the discussion sits the Transport Act 2000. The Act provides powers to recover the costs associated with air traffic services and airspace management. Crucially, however, it does not require uniform "user pays" charging across all aviation activity.

Instead, it explicitly allows:

- Differentiation between classes of users
- Selective and proportionate cost recovery
- Discretion in the design of charging mechanisms

The legislation creates flexibility, not prescription. That flexibility applies equally to GA, business aviation and regional airlines. Claims that primary legislation or Treasury rules mandate uniform charging simply do not stand up to scrutiny. Where uniformity is applied, it reflects policy choice rather than legal necessity.

NON-HUB AVIATION

Operationally, the three are clearly distinct. But from a system impact perspective, they share a set of characteristics that differentiate them from high-density hub-and-spoke airline operations.

Across the sectors, activity is typically characterised by:

- Lower traffic density
- Limited contribution to peak-period congestion
- A disproportionately small causal role in major airspace redesign
- Operations driven by safety, connectivity or resilience rather than pure capacity.

These distinctions matter. Many current cost allocation models focus on who uses the system, rather than who drives complexity within it. Treating non-hub aviation as interchangeable with high-volume airline traffic risks allocating costs by access rather than by causation.

That is not an inevitability of the system; it is a methodological and policy choice.

LOW MARGINAL IMPACT, HIGH SENSITIVITY TO COST

GA, business aviation and regional airlines also share a critical economic characteristic: high sensitivity to fixed and per-movement costs.

Unlike major airlines, these sectors cannot easily absorb additional charges through scale. They have limited ability to cross-subsidise activity. Are vulnerable to tipping points, where modest cost increases lead to reductions in activity.

For regional airlines, this can mean route withdrawal and loss of connectivity.
For business aviation, diversion to less regulated airspace or overseas alternatives.
For GA, reduced flying, contraction of training activity and erosion of safety and resilience capability.

TREASURY GUIDANCE ALREADY ALLOWS A BETTER APPROACH

The HM Treasury Green Book provides ample scope to address this imbalance.

It explicitly permits:

- Consideration of non-monetised benefits
- Distributional and regional impact analysis
- Assessment of resilience and strategic capacity

Applied consistently, these principles naturally group GA, business aviation and regional airlines as policy-aligned users of the aviation system, rather than isolating GA as a special or residual case.

Failure to apply these tools is therefore not a constraint imposed by Treasury for guidance. It is a matter of policy interpretation and application.

BOTTOM LINE

The sectors are not marginal or exceptional users of the aviation system. They are policy-aligned sectors, sharing low marginal impact on system complexity, high sensitivity to cost increases and significant public, economic and strategic value.

Both the Transport Act 2000 and Treasury appraisal frameworks already allow this alignment to be reflected in charging and cost-recovery policy. Treating these sectors collectively is not a concession. It is a more accurate reflection of how the aviation system functions in practice. Failure to do so is not driven by legal or economic constraint, but by policy choice. And policy choices, when evidence and objectives no longer align, should be revisited. ■

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To be held at the AOPA HQ in Sevenoaks
The cost for two full days seminar for non-members is £325
AOPA members benefit from a £50 DISCOUNT

TOPICS COVERED INCLUDE

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

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

OUR FIRST HERO OF 2026 IS THE MUCH-LOVED BONANZA

IMAGES: Courtesy of Textron Aviation

Owning a Beechcraft Bonanza means owning a fast, capable, and respected aircraft known for its strong build, roomy cabin (especially the 36 series), and excellent handling. But it comes with higher-than-average maintenance costs, especially for older models, with significant potential for annual expenses around $10k-$15k due to its complex systems and high-quality (and sometimes pricey) components, requiring a budget for care and feeding – though owners praise its performance, speed, and long-term value if maintained well.

The Bonanza was launched in 1947 and more than 18,500 have been built.

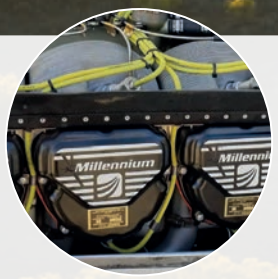
Owning a Bonanza is a rewarding experience for pilots who value speed, comfort, and capability, but it demands a significant budget for upkeep, akin to owning a classic luxury car. It suits those prepared for higher operating and maintenance costs in exchange for a top-tier general aviation aircraft that holds its own in the market.

One owner compares his Bonanza to owning a GT car. "Nothing flies like a Bonanza. Think Porsche 928, fast luxury touring. The P models and later are awesome with a simple fuel system and more power. That said, airplanes of this vintage need care and feeding. It is not at all uncommon to pay 10-15k per year in maintenance." ■

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

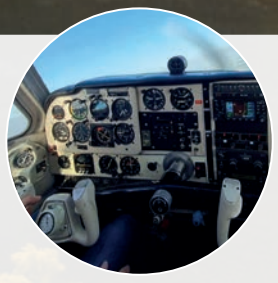
COMFORT

Known for solid construction, comfortable interiors, and a feeling of quality offering good space.



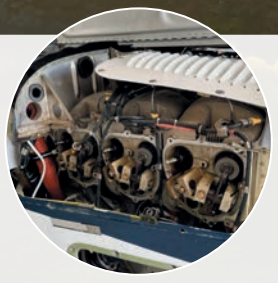
PERFORMANCE

Fast, capable long-range travel, especially with modern upgrades like tip tanks.



SAFETY

When flown within limits by trained pilots, they have a respectable safety record,



MAINTENANCE

Parts (like V-tail reskins) and labour can be expensive; shops expect professional owners.

AIRFRAMES

Older V-tails (Model 35) can become "money pits" if not meticulously maintained.

W & B

Narrow W&B envelope, easy to get out of aft CG limits as fuel burns off, especially in V-tails

WORDS David Rawlings **IMAGES** Courtesy of Sherwood Flying Club

HOW SHERWOOD FLYING CLUB IS STILL GOING STRONG DESPITE A LOCATION MOVE

When Nottingham City Airport closed in June 2025, Sherwood Flying Club either had to close or find a new home. They chose to move. AOPA spoke to Chairman **Martin Olley** about the challenges associated with relocating

AIRPORTS AND flying clubs closing are sadly nothing new in the world of General Aviation, but when Sherwood Flying Club found out their home of 68 years was closing, they were determined not to disappear with it.

So, what can a flying club do when its base of more than half a century is suddenly taken away from them? Sherwood Flying Club had the answer, so I went to their new home at Tatenhill Airfield to speak to Martin Olley, the club's chairman.

Sherwood Flying Club had been based at Nottingham City Airport for 68 years, until 2025. The club enjoyed the benefits of its own clubhouse, and was well established on the airfield. "We were in a really good situation," said Martin. "There had been talk about the airport closing for several years, but when it eventually came to it, we were given just three months' notice that it was closing and would be used for housing."

Determined that the club would prevail despite the closure, the board went to work to see if they could find a new home for its members and aircraft. The club managed to find three potential new homes. After thorough research Tatenhill

"Determined not to go with it, the board went to work to see if they could find a new home for its members and aircraft"

was chosen as the best option for Sherwood to continue its operations. The airfield was built in 1941 as RAF Tatenhill, and was used to train Bomber crews during WWII.

There have been compromises for the club. At their original home there were two briefing rooms, a separate kitchen and a lounge for the members to relax in. The clubhouse at Tatenhill is smaller, but has everything the club needs. "We have student pilots here, but we try not to step on the toes of the schools who have been here for a while," explained Martin.

LONG HISTORY

The club has plenty of history, one of the club's first aircraft in 1957 was a Taylorcraft. That actual aircraft is now exhibited at the RAF museum in Hendon painted in its original Army colours. One of its more notable past members is Hector Taylor (pictured, p.24), a former flying instructor during Sherwood Flying Club's earliest years, who later went on to become a well-known examiner in Midlands GA circles, and the recipient of an MBE for services to aviation.

TEETHING PROBLEMS

With the move still being so fresh, it's hard to tell how Sherwood Flying Club will fare over the coming years. "It's been tough," explained Martin. "We currently have a lot of members, 156 at the moment, but our membership runs from year-to-year, so until we send out renewal notifications, it'll be hard to tell how many we will retain.

"For me, I live six miles from Nottingham Airport and now I live 45-50 miles from where the club is based, so it is difficult, it takes around an hour. I come once or twice a week, but it's definitely more of a chore now."

There were also teething problems when the club first arrived at its new home. "We were offered the use of a hangar, but there were a couple of issues," said Martin. "Firstly the hangar was on the apron between two runways,

THE ESSENTIALS TATENHILL AIRFIELD (EGBM)

A: Sherwood Flying Club
Tatenhill Airfield
Newborough Road
Needwood
Burton-upon-Trent
Staffordshire
DE13 9PD
T: 07359 057848
W: sherwood flyingclub.co.uk

EXACT LOCATION
Latitude – N 5248-80
Longitude – W 00145-63

Tatenhill operates an Air/Ground Radio Service only on 124.080
Elevation 439ft
All circuits left hand at 1000ft QFE.

LICENSED RUNWAYS
08 1190m X 28m Asphalt threshold displaced by more than 120m, runway lights.
26 1190m X 28m Asphalt threshold displaced by 60m, runway lights.

Runway lights can be switched on by prior request.
Call the Office Manager on 01283 575283 to arrange this.

LANDING FEES
Singles – £15
Twins – £28
(Landings outside hours are by strict arrangement only)
Including free parking for 4 hours.

OPENING HOURS
Tatenhill Airfield is open daily (except for Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day) 9am-5pm.

FUEL
Avgas (100LL) & Jet A1 are available 9am-5pm daily. Outside of these hours by arrangement only.
Call for up-to-date fuel prices.

Tatenhill Airfield, now home to Sherwood Flying Club

which made it so difficult to get to the aircraft. And secondly, there was a lip at the hangar door, which proved difficult to get the actual aircraft out in the first place."

The club's aircraft are living outside for the time being, but with tiedowns and covers – and the fact they're hard-wearing aeroplanes – there shouldn't be an issue.

LONG SERVING MEMBER

Martin is one of the longest serving members at Sherwood. "I joined in 1987 and learned to fly then. I remember it was £1 a minute to fly and we thought that was expensive back then."

Martin said it was just a hobby to begin with and regrets not taking it up sooner but has immersed himself into the club. "I've been a director for 12 years and the Chairman for just over three. It\s very busy at times and it's mainly admin work, which keeps me away from the actual airfield."

"There is plenty of unrestricted airspace at Tatenhill as well, which is something that makes the move worthwhile"

Like running any club, you can't please everyone and the move has probably been the hardest thing a chairman of a flying club will ever encounter. "People get upset about certain things, because certain decisions we make don't suit everybody. But we have to bear in mind we've got 156 members we need to try and keep happy. And a lot of those don't fly, they're sleeping members. We also have several lifetime members. When I joined, it was – if memory serves - £95 a year, but there was also an option to become a lifetime member for £500 and a lot of them took that up."

The apron at Tatenhill

The club's Taylorcraft that is now in the RAF museum in Hendon

Club members at their new home

SETTLING INTO THE NEW HOME

Tatenhill is a busy airfield. Alongside private owners and flying schools, the Midland Air Ambulance has one of its Airbus H145s based there, which helps cover the six-counties in the trust's remit. But the biggest surprise of all is the Blackburn Buccaneer based at the airfield.

The Buccaneer, XX900, following withdrawal from service, was flown to St Athan on the 6th April 1994 for decommissioning, having flown for a mere 3450 hours and 35 minutes, and was subsequently purchased by C Walton Ltd. She was partly disassembled by British Aviation Heritage (BAH) engineers and transported to Bruntingthorpe in Leicestershire by road.

The aircraft was then reassembled by BAH engineers/volunteers and was returned to full ground running condition, with 28-day anti-deterioration runs and full system checks/ progressive inspections being carried out. XX900 has remained a mainstay of the Cold War Jets Collection, an active aviation museum, for the past 26 years, performing for the public at the Cold War Jets open days at Bruntingthorpe.

In Mid-2020, the decision was made to move XX900 to Tatenhill Airfield in Staffordshire. The move was made by road and was successfully completed on the 6 November 2020. It is still a restoration project, but can occasionally be seen completing ground runs.

There is also a popular restaurant that many people visit by air and by road. "It's quite good," said Martin. "It's not the cheapest in the world, but the seating area has been extended and the food is good."

There is plenty of unrestricted airspace at Tatenhill, which is something that makes the move worthwhile. "East Midlands is four miles away and Birmingham is six, apart from that there is a lot of space, we're all just trying to get to know the area. We're learning where all the places are." ■

Chairman Martin with one of the club's trusted aircraft

The Midlands Air Ambulance has a base at Tatenhill

The Restaurant at Tatenhill

WORDS David Rawlings **IMAGES** Various

Plug and Play

How electric aircraft will change GA

Electric aircraft in General Aviation have transitioned from experimental prototypes into a commercially active sector. The market is primarily defined by fully electric light trainers for now, but things are changing. We look at how these aircraft and future programmes are altering the landscape

IT WASN'T too long ago when electric propulsion in aviation was just dream-like concepts and testbeds in labs and universities. Now we have fully electric certified aircraft flying today and a pipeline of designs promising to disrupt how people fly in the coming years.

In the GA sector, the evolution toward electrification is visible not just in experimental prototypes, but in certified aircraft already flying, new models nearing certification, and ambitious concepts that could redefine light aircraft over the next decade.

THE DAWN OF ELECTRIC FLIGHT

The most significant milestone in electric GA so far has been the type certification of the Pipistrel Velis Electro from Slovenia, which was certified by EASA in 2020, marking the first time an electric aircraft achieved full certification anywhere in the world.

This two-seat light sport aircraft has a 57.6 kW electric motor, a flight endurance of about 50 minutes, and typical training speeds around 88 knots. It is optimised for the flight training environment — a use case where short flights and repeated take-offs and landings play to the strengths of electric propulsion. Its zero-emissions operation, quieter noise footprint, and lower operating costs appeal strongly to flight schools and environmentally conscious pilots. The Velis Electro is now certified in more than 30 countries and is actively used in training fleets across Europe and beyond.

In the UK, a growing number of airfields – including Fairoaks, Duxford, and Redhill – have taken delivery of Velis Electros as part of an emerging "electric aviation culture," complete with charging infrastructure and training programmes.

"In the UK, a growing number of airfields – including Fairoaks, Duxford, and Redhill – have taken delivery of Velis Electros as part of an emerging electric aviation culture"

Though primarily still in the flight training role, the Velis Electro proves that electric GA is no longer purely theoretical — it's a reality that can scale in cost-sensitive environments where quick turnarounds and repetitive flights are common.

There are several other aircraft that have changed the way flying schools work, including the Chinese-made Liaoning RX4E. Launched in January 2025, it is the world's first commercially certified four-seat electric aircraft under Part 23 regulations. It is powered by a 70 kWh lithium battery and has a flight endurance of approximately 1.5 hours.

The aircraft features a wingspan of 13.5 metres and a length of 8.4 metres, with a maximum takeoff weight of 1,260 kg. It has an electric propulsion system capable of reaching a maximum output of 140 KW.

1 Eviation's Alice, a significant step in large-scale electric aircraft
2 The Spirit of Innovation looking fast, even when stationary
3 The Liaoning RX4E four-seat electric aircraft, which is now certifiedin China

Pipistrel's Velis Electro, is regarded as the aircraft that gave electric powerplants real world possibilites

Independently developed by the Liaoning General Aviation Academy of Shenyang Aerospace University, the RX4E boasts advantages such as zero emissions, low noise, reduced operational costs, and high safety and reliability.

The RX4E is expected to find diverse applications in pilot training, sightseeing flights, experiential flying, aerial photography and aviation surveying.

There are also aircraft still in development that are planned to launch in 2026. These include platforms such as the Alia by BETA technologies and the Integral E from Aura Aero.

The Alia is entering production this year following its historic crewed flight into JFK in 2024. It is being deployed for regional freight and logistics, with companies like Air New Zealand beginning testing this year.

The Aura Aero Integral E is a two-seater, designed for pilot training, which had its first flight in late 2024 and is expected to be a mainstay in flight schools by this year with a 55-minute endurance.

Quite possibly the most exciting development of electric GA was Rolls-Royce's ACCEL project. The flagship of the project was the *Spirit of Innovation* aircraft, which successfully broke world speed records for electric flight in late 2021, becoming the world's fastest all-electric plane and vehicle. Its technology, developed with partners YASA and Electroflight, is now being applied to future electric aircraft, including eVTOLs (electric vertical take-off and landing), as part of Rolls-Royce's net-zero strategy.

"The ACCEL project won the Royal Academy of Engineering's Colin Campbell Mitchell Award in 2022. The aircraft is now displayed at the Science Museum"

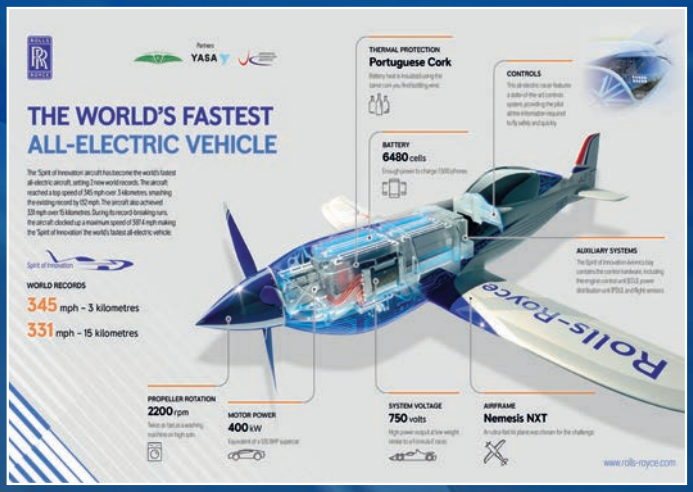
The Spirit of Innovation, the model that put electric sports aviation on the map

The project showcased the world's most power-dense propulsion battery pack and a 600kW electric drive unit for aerospace. The ACCEL project won the Royal Academy of Engineering's Colin Campbell Mitchell Award in 2022. The aircraft is now displayed at The Science Museum.

But in terms of future development, the technology developed for ACCEL is being adapted for electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) vehicles and future commuter aircraft, as they require similar battery and motor performance. As well as supporting Rolls-Royce's wider net zero goals, the project has also been a contributing factor in the development of hybrid-electric systems for larger-scale aircraft.

EXPANDING THE GA ENVELOPE:

Beyond certified trainers and near-certification GA aircraft, several innovative designs and prototypes are pushing the boundaries of what electric aviation might look like in the next few years. The Eviation Alice is a



The engineering behind Rolls-Royce's ACCEL project, which smashed through some electric aircraft records

Beta's Alia conventional takeoff and landing aircraft. The company is also developing a VTOL version as well

larger commuter-scale aircraft. Though straddling the line between general aviation and regional commuter aircraft, it definitely deserves mention. This all-electric, nine-seat aircraft completed its first flight and has been actively progressing toward certification and entry into service. Alice's design emphasises efficiency and sustainability for short regional hops – a potential game-changer for small commuter routes or air charter services that today rely on fossil fuels.

While Alice sits at the larger end of the GA spectrum and will operate in areas traditionally served by small regional turboprops, its development signals broader industry appetite for zero-emission regional flight, and its technology, certification progress, and operational lessons will have ripple effects across general aviation.

Meanwhile, companies like Ampaire and MagniX are also exploring hybrid conversions. Modifying existing airframes like the Cessna Caravan into partially electric aircraft to balance electric propulsion's benefits with the range and flexibility of traditional engines. These hybrid platforms may serve as important evolutionary stages, particularly for utility roles and flight environments where full electric range remains challenging.

NEW MARKET FRONTIERS

While mainly associated with urban air mobility rather than traditional fixed-wing General Aviation, eVTOL programmes have strong implications for small aviation markets and infrastructure.

Startups like Joby Aviation are nearing certification with multi-rotor eVTOLs designed for short, zero-emission hops over congested city regions and between airports, potentially opening new segments of aerial services.

Horizon Aircraft's Cavorite X7 proposes a hybrid-electric "heli-plane" that combines vertical take-off with efficient, wing-borne cruise performance — a design that, if successful, could blur lines between GA, air taxi services, and personal transport.

"Companies like Ampaire and MagniX are exploring hybrid conversions"

These advanced concepts, while not typical GA aircraft, are shaping infrastructure expectations, battery and propulsion systems, and airspace integration strategies that will influence how all small electric aircraft are regulated and operated.

THERE ARE SEVERAL CHALLENGES AHEAD

For all the optimism, several challenges temper expectations for a rapid electric takeover in General Aviation, including energy density limits and performance constraints.Batteries today simply store far less energy per kilogram than avgas. This limits range, payload, and climb performance for electric

1 Ampaire's hybrid-electric testbed – the EEL is a converted Cessna 337 Skymaster
2 French-based Auro Aero say their Integral E is currently going through the EASA certification process
3 The Spirit of Innovation now resides in London's Science Museum

aircraft, particularly outside the training and short-haul mission profiles where they excel. Until battery technology achieves significantly higher energy density or alternative solutions (like hydrogen-fuel cells) mature, electric flight will remain most viable for short missions.

Certification and infrastructure is another hurdle. Certifying electric aircraft remains a complex, multi-year process. Developers like Bye Aerospace have navigated FAA and EASA frameworks tailored to electric propulsion, but certification timelines still push into the mid- to late-2020s for even relatively simple aircraft. Infrastructure for charging and maintenance, particularly at smaller airports that lack electrical capacity, must grow in parallel if electric aircraft are to become commonplace in flight schools and GA fleets.

Then there's public perception and operating economics to consider. Potential buyers and flight schools need assurance that electric aircraft are economically compelling; not just green. Data on maintenance costs, battery life, resale values, and operational reliability will be essential. Early adopters like flight schools operating Velis Electros and early eFlyer customers are already gathering real-world performance data that will help prospective owners make informed decisions.

WHAT'S NEXT: A DECADE OF TRANSITION

As the 2020s unfold, the general aviation sector finds itself at an inflection point. Electric flight is here now – with certified aircraft flying and training students.

Near-term launches are imminent, as models like the eFlyer series are nearing certification and promise broader use cases.

Innovation pipelines are vast, spanning advanced fixed-wing aircraft, hybrid concepts, and even urban air mobility platforms that will reshape the small aircraft market.

"In an industry historically tied to fossil fuels and mechanical complexity, electric aviation represents both a technological renaissance and a strategic shift toward sustainability and accessibility"

The influence of electric propulsion goes beyond carbon reduction – it is lowering costs, reducing noise, and encouraging new operational concepts (short flights between small airports, quieter community operations, and integration of advanced control systems, to name just a few). In an industry historically tied to fossil fuels and mechanical complexity, electric aviation represents both a technological renaissance and a strategic shift toward sustainability and accessibility.

For pilots, flight schools, aircraft owners, manufacturers, and regulators, this transition promises to redefine what it means to fly in a small General Aviation aircraft. It will change for both hobby flyers and professional pilots alike, as well as the broader aviation ecosystem as it moves toward cleaner, quieter skies. ■

1 Liaoning are planning to develop the RX4E further to offer more applications
2 Beta's Alia VTOL version could also be hitting the market soon
3 The Velis Electro is used as a training aircraft in both the Slovenian and Royal Danish Air Forces

The EEL is primarily a testbed aircraft for the development of high-powered electronics, inverters, motors, and related systems

Ken Mattingly's NASA portrait, taken in 1970

KEN MATTINGLY AT A GLANCE

BORN
March 17, 1936
Chicago, Illinois

DIED
October 31, 2023 (Age 87)

EDUCATION
B.S. Aeronautical Engineering, Auburn University

MILITARY SERVICE
U.S. Navy aviator
Retired as Rear Admiral

NASA SELECTION
Astronaut Group 5 (1966)

SPACE MISSIONS
Apollo 16 (1972)
– Command Module Pilot
STS-4 (1982)
– Shuttle Commander
STS-51-C (1985)
– Shuttle Commander

TIME IN SPACE
504 hours (21+ days)

WORDS Robert Care **IMAGES** Courtesy of NASA

Ken Mattingly: the astronaut who changed space flight forever

March 17th marks the 90th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Kenneth Mattingly II. The man who was pulled from the Apollo 13 mission and went on to become a heroic figure in America's ventures beyond Earth

THERE ARE stories in the history of space exploration defined by triumph, tragedy, and the razor-thin margins where fate hangs in the balance. The life of Thomas Kenneth 'Ken' Mattingly II stands among the most intriguing: a tale of technical brilliance, steadfast professionalism, and contributions that helped define America's ventures beyond Earth. He was a man who – despite being pulled off one of NASA's most dramatic missions – went on to orbit the Moon, command space shuttle flights, and shape the future of human spaceflight.

Born on March 17, 1936, in Chicago, Illinois, Mattingly grew up with aviation in his blood. His father was a pilot for Eastern Airlines, and young Ken's earliest memories were filled with airplanes and flight. His passion for the sky was evident in childhood hobbies: model aircraft, frequent visits to airports, and stories of future journeys into the heavens.

FROM NAVAL AVIATOR TO ASTRONAUT

After graduating from Miami Edison High School in Florida, Mattingly attended Auburn University, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Aeronautical Engineering in 1958. Upon graduation, he joined the United States Navy, where he quickly distinguished himself as an aviator. Over the next several years, Mattingly gained valuable experience flying a range of aircraft – including Douglas A-1H Skyraiders and A-3 Skywarriors – and logged thousands of flight hours, including over 5,000 in jets, before entering NASA's orbit.

Mattingly's exceptional skills and engineering expertise led to his selection in NASA Astronaut Group 5 in 1966,

"He contributed to early Apollo work as part of the support crews for Apollo 8 and Apollo 11, and he was deeply involved in developing the Apollo spacesuit and life-support systems"

a cohort that included future shuttle commanders and space visionaries. He contributed to early Apollo work as part of the support crews for Apollo 8 and Apollo 11, and he was deeply involved in developing the Apollo spacesuit and life-support systems that protected astronauts on the lunar surface.

APOLLO 13: THE MISSION HE NEVER FLEW

By early 1970, Mattingly was designated the Command Module Pilot for Apollo 13, scheduled to orbit the Moon with Commander Jim Lovell and Lunar Module Pilot Fred Haise. But fate intervened just 72 hours before launch.

Mattingly was exposed to German measles (rubella) by fellow astronaut Charlie Duke, and although he never developed the illness, NASA's flight surgeons were unwilling to risk his health – or that of his crewmates. He was replaced by Jack Swigert in a

last-minute decision that would dramatically alter the course of spaceflight history.

What happened next became one of NASA's greatest survival stories: an oxygen tank explosion crippled the Apollo 13 spacecraft en route to the Moon, forcing Lovell, Swigert, and Haise to abort their mission and rely on ingenuity to return safely to Earth. From the ground, Mattingly's intimate knowledge of the command module proved invaluable. Working with engineers and mission control, he helped troubleshoot procedures and power-up sequences – providing real-time guidance that helped save the crew. His role was portrayed in the 1995 film Apollo 13, with actor Gary Sinise capturing Mattingly's steady professionalism onscreen.

In the narrative of space exploration, this "mission he never flew" became a defining moment in his legacy – one that showed not all heroism needs to occur among the stars. Sometimes, it happens in simulation rooms and with a slide rule in hand.

APOLLO 16

Mattingly's chance to fly finally came in April 1972, when he served as Command Module Pilot for Apollo 16, alongside Commander John Young and Lunar Module Pilot Charles Duke. This mission was the fifth to successfully land humans on the lunar surface but was also notable for the intense scientific objectives it pursued.

While Young and Duke explored the lunar highlands, Mattingly remained alone aboard the command module. Over 64 lunar orbits, he conducted a suite of experiments, mapped surface features, and captured groundbreaking imaging that would inform lunar science for decades.

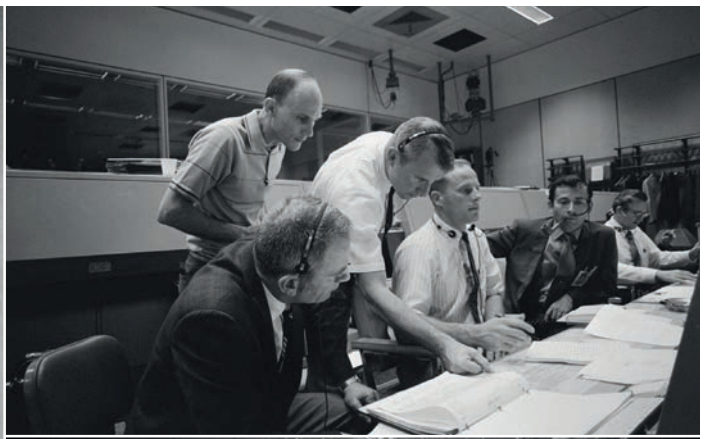
But perhaps his most singular achievement came on the return journey: Mattingly performed one of history's few deep-space extravehicular activities (EVAs). At a point far from any planetary body, he exited the command module to retrieve film cassettes from the module's exterior – a challenging task that took him beyond Earth's gravitational security into the vastness.

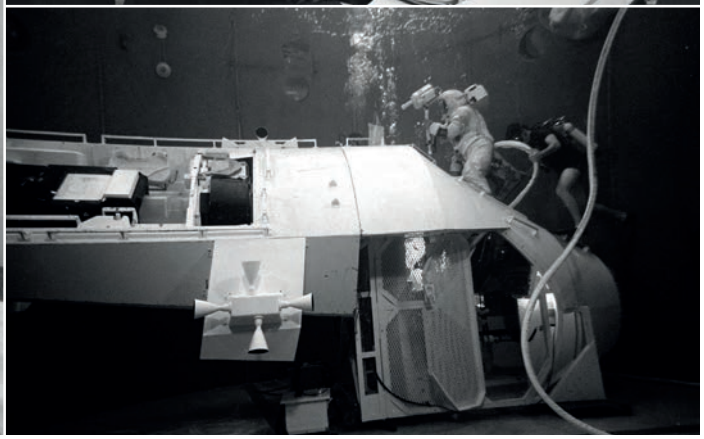
"Mattingly's chance to fly finally came in April 1972, when he served as Command Module Pilot for Apollo 16, alongside Commander John Young and Lunar Module Pilot Charles Duke"

PIONEERING THE SPACE SHUTTLE ERA

After Apollo, Mattingly's career took him into the next era of space exploration: the Space Shuttle programme. From 1973 to 1978, he served in critical management and technical roles supporting the Shuttle's development, including heading the astronaut office for the Shuttle Transportation System.

He would return to space as commander of STS-4, the final test flight of the Space Shuttle Columbia in June–July 1982, and later commanded STS-51-C in January 1985 aboard Discovery, the first dedicated





1. Mattingly taking part in a water egress training for the Apollo 13 mission
2. Mattingly standing over members of the Apollo team in Mission Control
3. For the Apollo 16 mission Mattingly participates in EVA simulation

Department of Defence shuttle mission. These flights helped pave the way for routine shuttle operations, carrying scientific experiments, imaging payloads, and strategic national assets into orbit.

Over his career, Mattingly logged more than 21 days in space, including significant EVA time, and became one of only a few astronauts to have flown both to the Moon and on the Space Shuttle – joining a uniquely elite club alongside mission commander John Young.

LEADERSHIP, HONOURS, AND LATER YEARS

Mattingly's contributions went well beyond his missions. Within NASA, he served in leadership positions shaping astronaut policy and shuttle operations. His technical acumen was respected, and his calm decisiveness under pressure made him a model for crew and ground teams alike.

For his service, Mattingly received numerous awards, including the NASA Distinguished Service Medal, NASA Space Flight Medal, U.S. Navy Astronaut Wings, and the Society of Experimental Test Pilots' Ivan C. Kincheloe Award. He was inducted into both the International Space Hall of Fame and the US Astronaut Hall of Fame, and in 2009 accepted NASA's Ambassador of Exploration award on behalf of his legendary class.

After retiring from NASA in 1985 and leaving the Navy as a Rear Admiral, Mattingly transitioned into the aerospace industry. He worked in senior roles at companies such as Grumman, General Dynamics, and Lockheed Martin, contributing to programmes ranging from space station support to next-generation launch systems.

A LEGACY BEYOND THE STARS

Ken Mattingly's life is a reminder that exploration is not only about distance travelled, but resilience maintained. He experienced the heartbreak of a mission scrubbed at the last moment, only to turn that disappointment into one of his most significant contributions – helping to save the lives of his fellow astronauts during Apollo 13. He went on to orbit the Moon, walked (in a sense) in the void between Earth and lunar gravity, and helped usher in the space shuttle era.

Mattingly passed away on October 31, 2023, at the age of 87. He left behind not just the records of missions flown, but the legacy of a professional who embodied NASA's boldest aspirations.

In the end, Thomas Kenneth Mattingly II's achievements lie not only in miles traversed, but in the ingenuity and courage he brought to space exploration – and the inspiration he has provided for the generations of astronauts and engineers who follow in his wake. ■

THE APOLLO 13 INCIDENT

Ken Mattingly was removed from Apollo 13 just three days before launch due to possible exposure to German measles. Despite this precaution, he never developed symptoms – but he was still able to help his crewmates thanks to his intimate knowledge of the spacecraft. This knowledge became indispensable when an oxygen tank exploded en route to the Moon. Working around the clock in simulators, Mattingly helped engineers develop emergency power-up procedures that ensured the command module could safely re-enter Earth's atmosphere. Without flying the mission, he helped save it.

1. The launch of the Space Shuttle Discovery, with Mattingly onboard
2. The crew of the STS-51C with Mattingly kneeling on the right
3. A Douglas A-1 Skyraider, one of the aircraft Mattingly flew in his days in the US Navy

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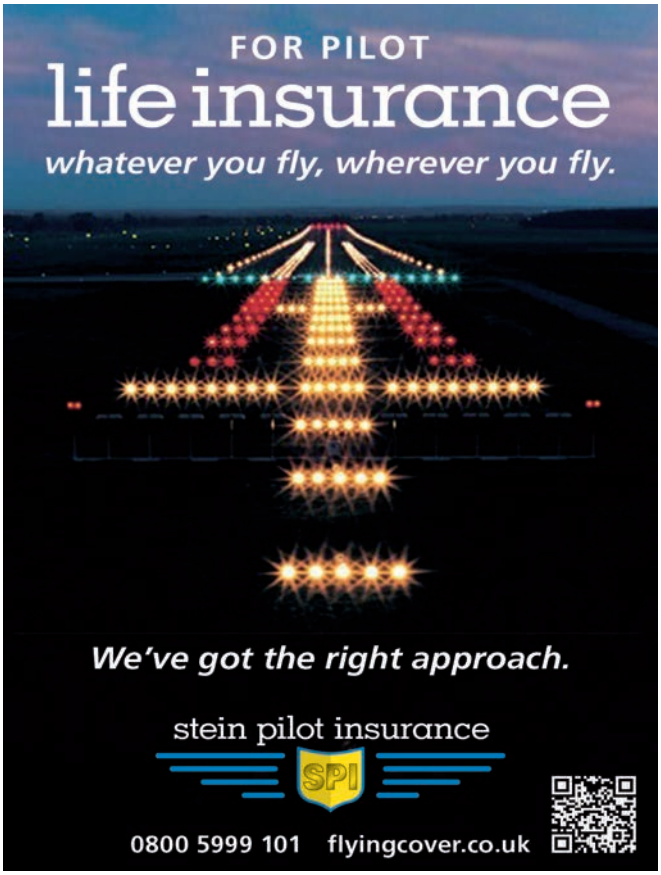

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