

Ladies, start your engines!



The International Ladies Cup calls for pinpoint navigation accuracy and exceptional flying skills – and men are kept in their proper place, as Andrew Sinclair reports

Well, I may be writing this article in winter, and I may be spending more time than is financially healthy descending on different ILS approaches, but my mind easily drifts back to those heady days of summer and the International Ladies Cup (ILC). The ILC (www.ladiescup.nl) is held biennially at Teuge airfield (EHTE) approximately sixty nautical miles east-north-east of Rotterdam. In 2005, the 6th International Ladies Cup saw forty-six aircraft enter from nine different countries, including civilian and military entrants, the furthest flung being the team from Mexico. The competition is open to female pilots who may be accompanied by male participants acting as navigators and spotters only – men are not permitted to command the aircraft during the competition. My pilot, Paula Carter, is a member of the British Women Pilots

Association and is part of our Redhill-based Tango Golf Flying Group. She holds a PPL with night and IMC ratings and has been flying for 18 years, with two short breaks to give birth to children. She has logged 560hrs covering recreational flying and private business travel.

Comprising a series of practical skills and theoretical knowledge tests, the ILC is broken down into different stages.

The 3 x 2m square

The arrival stage this year culminated in an overhead pass of three defined checkpoints at specified times. The checkpoints this time, as before, were termed X-Ray (N51°55' 22.4" E005°29' 55.5"), Yankee (N51°53' 27.8" E006°01' 35.8") and Zulu (N52°09' 38.7" E006°10' 54.5"). Each team is given an exact time to arrive, and penalties were 'awarded' for each second of deviation from the specified

time that the aircraft arrives in the overhead – and your height is specified as 1000ft and measured by laser sighting the underside of each aircraft. Bearing in mind that each tenth of a second in latitude is approximately three metres and each tenth of a second of longitude is approximately two metres (at this latitude on the oblate spheroid) this means that the objective is to position the aircraft directly overhead a 3m x 2m square. At this point one begins to get the feeling that accuracy in height, position and timing are everything in this game. After X-Ray, Yankee and Zulu, approach to the airfield is via the standard visual reporting point Sierra arriving with a spot landing, where again penalties are awarded for landing in zones other than that prescribed. Each zone, including the landing zone, is ten metres in length and the aircraft must land on both main wheels unless the judges declare crosswind conditions, in which case it is conceded that the windward wheel may land first. On arrival, safety equipment, paperwork and documentation are checked. How often do you travel with flares and an escape hammer? Not doing so will cost you more penalties.

Our plan was to fly EGKR DCT EHHV, stop for lunch, draw breath and make sure we arrived at the 3 x 2 that is X-Ray bang on the nail. We departed Redhill at 0905Z and after completing thorough cruise checks and some prolonged and careful monitoring of G-TG's single engine's vitals we coasted out east abeam Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey. An uneventful 120 nautical mile sea crossing saw us coasting in sixteen miles south west of Rotterdam much to the surprise of Dutch Military, who had serviced our fellow competitors who – some may argue, more sensibly – crossed Dover to Cap Gris Nez prior to turning north. Cleared painlessly through the Class C Rotterdam CTR directly overhead the airfield and onwards, we arrived at the lovely grass airfield of Hilversum (EHHV) after covering 206 nautical miles in 122 minutes. On arrival we headed for refreshments, only to realise that between us our crew had precisely 7 euros and 50 cents; escape hammers, first aid kits, flight plans, fuel plans, passports, oil, maintenance kit, plenty of this, but cash – very little of that!

*Top: our 172 with an elegant Chipmunk at Hilversum airfield en route to Teuge
Left: Teuge airfield, a perfect destination for a Sunday outing – only two hours from the UK*





Left: Teuge is a thriving airfield operated by the local council and welcomes all forms of general aviation

Our stop-off was rewarded when we met G-AOJR, a delightful de Havilland DHC-1 Chipmunk 22, the eventual winner of the concours d'elegance stage of the competition. It is owned by the equally delightful Gerard and Nicole, a Belgian couple who operate the aircraft on the G register out of Spa-La-Sauveniere (EBSP), a small airfield pitched at 1542 ft AMSL in eastern Belgium. Paula, our commander, and I had lunched at Spa on our return from the last ILC event in 2003. I was sure I recognised them from last time, and I am sure it was they who recommended Spa to us – we visited and loved it.

Teuge (EHTE) <http://www.teuge-airport.nl/> is a thriving airfield, which harmoniously combines parachuting, gliding (winch launch and aerotow) and other non-powered air sports alongside the more usual rotary and fixed wing powered aircraft activities. Operated by the local council, it welcomes GA aircraft from all over, so if you are looking for a venue for a Sunday outing or perhaps a fly-in, this airfield, only two hours distant from the south-east, may be a good alternative to the usual honey pots along the French coast. After our safe arrival we jumped on the transport and checked in to the hotel. Hotel bookings and costs are included in the competition entry fee, so this makes life nice and simple. The evening fare consisted of a barbecue, a bar and meeting up with old and new friends.

Hunt-the-windmill

Day Two centred on the 100 nm air rally encompassing passage over more 3 x 2 squares at specified times. The exercise started with flight planning. Checkpoints are identified by all manner of criteria – thirty-third wind turbine along from a lighthouse, magnetic track and distance as well as the more traditional lat & long. The idea here is to thwart the best attempts of the GPSers to gain advantage through technology! As with all flight under VFR, one of the most important instrument is the Mk I eyeball, even more so in this competition. Along the route, punctured by changes in airspeed to compensate for wind conditions and different leg timings, the crew must recognise ground features including signal square-sized alphabet letters, which, although including in the briefing, may or may

not actually be there. To complicate matters some of the ground features are buildings – windmills at that. Easy to spot a windmill, but the correct windmill is not so easy; have you seen how many windmills there are in the Netherlands? Our rally went as well as can be expected. I navigated and we found ourselves continuously correcting airspeed against my watch, a radio instrument coupled to the long-wave timing transmitter in Rugby.

After an hour and a half in the air, we lined up on final for our second spot landing. This went well and we taxied, parked and adjourned for well-earned refreshments. At this point, the navigators can put their feet up but the commanders still face the aviation knowledge exam. Twenty-five multi-choice questions covering a variety of aviation topics, from the name of the first person to fly an

aircraft across the Atlantic Ocean to, "If an airplane flies into an updraft, will it most likely pitch up or down?" and my personal favourite, "An airplane (sic) cruising at 5,000 feet MSL has a true airspeed of 200 knots, an indicated airspeed of 175 knots and a calibrated airspeed of 170 knots. The actual speed of air flowing through the pitot tube is...?"

Well, of course you might try to calculate it or with a slightly more common sense approach and a little more knowledge of the pitot system you might conclude that the speed of the airflow must be 0 knots, because air doesn't actually flow through the system at all – rather, flying through the atmosphere creates a pressure in the system which is proportional to the ASI reading; if the air flowed there would be little pressure and little reading!

Winners and losers

On the evening of the second day, a black tie dinner provides the forum to present awards and prizes. Dignitaries included the Dutch Minister of Transport, Director of Breitling, Netherlands, the major event sponsor and the Secretary of the ILC. We tabled up with Nicole and Gerard – secretly I thought they might win the concours d'elegance and it's good to have a winner on your dinner table. The evening went very well, the food was excellent and the crack impeccable. We watched the Dutch Navy and the Royal Dutch Air Force slog it out to see who won more prizes. There was a definite sense of esprit de corps, neither side wanted to return to their unit with the news that they had been beaten by the other service



Right: TG's pilot Paula Carter (front left) with concours d'elegance winners Nicole Marien and Gerard Caubergs and friends

arm. Chipmunk G-JR duly won the concours d'elegance and they were presented with the most exquisite model aircraft which if not the most valuable (two Breitling watches were presented to the overall winners) was definitely a most prized possession.

The long way home...

In our team it has become a custom to fly home the long way and this time was no exception. We planned a route via Luxembourg and after a weather and NOTAM briefing we said our goodbyes and departed to the south. Our route took us initially to Holland's oldest town, Nijmegen, a place I hadn't visited since participating in the Nijmegen 'Vierdaagse' Marches over a decade or so previously. From there, we flew down through Maastricht via VRPs Bravo, Sierra, Golf, India, Papa, Mike and on to the LNO VOR/DME before descending into Luxembourg (ELLX) via DIK VOR/DME. Luxembourg is what one might expect for a country's main international

Right: prizes were awarded by the Dutch Transport Minister and the ILC Secretary. Below: we flew out the short way but came back via Luxembourg



airfield. GA mixes well with the heavies, but the distance from the GA apron to the terminal is a fair hike. This is where we hit a small snag but were ably assisted by AOPA UK, or more accurately my flight crew photo card and AOPA membership card. Having refuelled and taxied to the stand we set out for the big black C. After some confusion and discussion with a security guard, we somehow managed to find ourselves ground-side wandering along the street. Having decided that something was not right, we wandered into the terminal and lined up behind the self-loading freight waiting for

their scheduled air service. A few minutes later at the front of the queue, we explained to the check-in staff we had arrived from Teuge in a private aircraft and would like to clear customs and pay our landing fee. This was met with quizzical looks, and we were introduced to the local police and security staff. They were a little concerned and cross-examined us. At this point, I produced my AOPA UK aircrew and membership cards and the atmosphere warmed. We were shown to the GA office by the (then) very helpful security guard and paid our landing fee, some 12 euros 39 cents; how much is it to land at Bournemouth these days?

Handling, by Luxor, included a bus ride back to our aircraft and filing of our flight plan to Redhill as EBBU DCT EBSU DCT EBFS DCT LYD DCT. Departure was number two to the Boeing 747-400, and with some trepidation we taxied behind this huge bird. With even more trepidation we lined up on the active, waited, waited and waited some more, and then commenced our take-off roll; wake turbulence was certainly in evidence but we were climbing through 1,000 ft before it introduced itself. The return sector was uneventful apart from the transponder failing inside French Class D airspace, but the

controller, while reminding us that we should not transit this class of airspace without a transponder, was satisfied with frequent position reports until we were clear. We coasted in via DVR and on to Redhill; there is something quite satisfying about using your aircraft as a means of transport and transmitting "London Information G-BBTG is a C172 Luxembourg to Redhill VFR..."

ILC 2007

A challenging event, I would recommend the International Ladies Cup to anyone. The whole weekend is extremely well organised from start to finish and the different stages of the competition test all areas of aviation. As to our final position – well, as with my school reports, we finished a "could do better" thirty second out of thirty-eight. But it is not the winning blah blah blah... ■

Andrew Sinclair is an AOPA UK member and member of the Tango Gold Flying Group, which currently operates two privately owned Cessna 172 aircraft based at Redhill, Surrey. He holds a private pilot licence, night qualification and IMC rating and achieved the AOPA Silver Wings award during 2005.

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