

General Aviation

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Front cover:
Tiger Moth
Photo:
Damien Burke

Chairman's message

Looking into the crystal ball

Crystal ball gazing is a task that any association or organisation needs to do periodically, if it is to plan for future developments within its sphere of interest. At AOPA the long term future impacts of EASA and SES on general aviation are major concerns, and the future trends in technology in terms of equipment and versatility of operation, and design and manufacture of new aeroplanes are also of interest.

This edition of *General Aviation* contains a review of some statistics relating to general aviation by AOPA member, Ian Harnett, and the picture painted gives serious pause for thought, if nothing else. It certainly helps stress the importance of trying to see our way ahead, and visualise a future for general aviation that, although possibly very different from what we have now, is viable and developing. Before getting quite as far as the irrecoverable spiral dive potential scenario visualised by Ian, it is worthwhile considering the nature of the inter-relationship between general aviation and civil air transport. At present, the commercial sector is growing at a steady and apparently unstoppable rate, largely due to increasing tourism and low cost airline operations. Questions are: is this growth in any way dependent on general aviation, and is it also responsible for the decline in GA highlighted by Ian's statistics? We know where the main interfaces are, namely, pilot training, use of aerodromes and use of airways and Class 'A' airspace by those GA pilots suitably qualified.

The training of pilots, whether for the PPL or ultimately the CPL and ATPL, is an activity that falls under the classification 'general aviation'. When it comes to training commercial pilots, the UK is in competition with other countries, but because general aviation as such is not recognised (or even noticed) by the Government, as evidenced by absence of any reasonable reference in the recent White Paper on Aviation, there is no incentive to improve the UK's ability to compete, or to create the 'level playing field' the larger schools desire. The result is that the training of commercial pilots as an industry in the UK is contracting, and is dependent on its current survival by doing a substantial amount of the training abroad (good for the US economy?).

The situation regarding aerodromes is familiar to all pilots, with the smaller guys being squeezed out of regional airports, by ridiculous charges that are totally out of proportion to the service provided, even though some of these aerodromes are pretty quiet most of the time. The attraction of these places to a GA pilot who does not wish to be impeded by less than perfect weather conditions, apart from those who simply want to get the destination in the logbook, is the provision of landing aids. This is where technology can help, by developing GPS approaches into the smaller more GA-friendly airfields. CAA Chairman, Sir Roy McNulty promised AOPA (see *General Aviation* for February 2005) some action on this, and we hope to have a progress update soon.

Technology, too, is likely to be of benefit to those pilots who use their aircraft for business purposes, and who make use the huge range of destinations accessible by GA aircraft within Europe, because the amazingly versatile avionics kit that was initially to be found in the larger passenger carrying aircraft is now available for smaller aircraft such as the Cirrus SR20 and 22.

So, yes, there is an inter-relationship, but how this can be used to the benefit of GA is hard to determine. On the airspace issue, the apparent need for GA to literally buy into SESAR with substantial amounts of money, is not going to assist at this particular interface.

I imagine, in the face of this rather sombre discussion, the thing that keeps us in the air at all is a shared passion for flying. It is always a delight to meet up with someone who shares this passion, and so it was when I met up with AOPA's new President, Lord Stevens of Kirkwhelpington for lunch recently, together with Steve Gwilliam, Lord Stevens' flying colleague and AOPA member, and Martin Robinson. Lord Stevens is an experienced aviator (as is Steve), and we were able to brief Lord Stevens on the main issues facing GA. The presence of a GA pilot of his distinction in the upper house is going to add considerable strength to the voice of GA in Westminster.



George Done