

# Letters to the Editor

## Forgotten reminder

Sir,

In reply to the 'License Reminders' letter from Ben Alcott of the CAA in the last magazine (*General Aviation*, February 2008), can I add my own sad case. 2007 was a bad year for me as a pilot and saw me constantly at sea for eight of the twelve months, as a seafarer. Despite 107 hours dual tuition and 23 check-rides in my first five years as a PPL, (I always take a check ride after a four month spell at sea), I am now the owner of a defunct Pilots License and need a revalidation. I know in the eyes of the law that 'ignorance is no defence', but it was only after the event that I discovered I had to 'revalidate' every five years. Luckily I discovered the fault before I took to the wing. I had observed the bi-annual flight review (as the Americans call it) but was not aware of the need to hand over yet more money to the CAA for them to 'reval' my license every five year period.

Contrary to Ben's statement, I for one received no notification otherwise I would have taken yet another check flight BEFORE going away to sea, when my license apparently expired. I now have plans to do revalidation training when I get back from my next stint at sea, but have meanwhile have missed out on weeks of excellent flying weather because I don't have a license presently.

**Steve Stiglic-Buxton**

PS: This is unlike AOPA who not only sent out a most timely reminder of my renewal date, but also sent out new documents (members card) BEFORE my old one had even expired. Well done AOPA.

## Airprox blame

Sir,

I was slightly alarmed to read in David Ritchie's account of his dealings with the Airprox Board that, having been considered partially to blame, he was told: "no further action would be taken against me as definite blame could not be apportioned".

Whilst appreciating the Board's need to gather evidence and analyse the factors giving rise to the airprox and the degree of risk of collision, I had believed that it did not endeavour to apportion blame as such, the imperative being that pilots and ATC should be encouraged to report near misses in the interest of promoting safety and learning any lessons from such events. Is that not the case? I shudder to think that future airprox might not be reported for fear of repercussions.

On the question of David's minor heart problem, I recommend that he lobby for a Europe-wide introduction of the equivalent to our NPPL, which though you may correct me, is, I believe, actually being considered. Having had a heart attack in 1992 I suffered the indignity of "acting second pilot" for many years before the NPPL appeared, and to my great relief I was able to requalify and once again act as PIC. There are limitations, carriage of passengers being one of them, but I have managed to continue flying without having to change my flying habits too drastically. After all, what potential passenger knowing my medical history would accept my

offer of a free flight without qualms; both he and I are reassured by the presence of a safety pilot, acting as P1 on those occasions when I, a hobby flyer, wish to be sociable.

**David Scrutton**

The story may have become clouded in the telling. Geoffrey Boot, AOPA's plenipotentiary to the Airprox Board, writes: 'To put people's minds at rest, in no way does the Airprox Board at any time apportion blame. We operate to strict Chatham House rules, and all our internal debate is completely confidential. The whole idea of the Airprox Board is to encourage people to make honest and frank statements that they know will not be made public in the hope that the greater aviation community will learn lessons therefrom.'

## 'Self-deception' on language

Sir,

The letter from Bill Fisher (*General Aviation*, December 2007) stated that AOPA had successfully persuaded ICAO to delay the implementation of its language proficiency requirements for three years, as reported on Avweb. This is not correct as the ICAO Council rejected the proposal to change the effective date during its 36th Session last year.

Council resolution A36-11 made provision for a three-year transitional period for those contracting states unable to meet the March 5th deadline, provided they prepare an implementation plan and take measures to mitigate the non-compliance. States were also urged to permit international flights by those using these transitional arrangements if the implementation plan and measures were published. There is no intention for the UK or other JAA states to seek such dispensation, as JAR-FCL requires implementation by the ICAO effective date.

Your response to Mr Fisher's letter is also somewhat misleading in that there is no requirement for all pilots to be proficient in English, only the language used by air traffic control. The effect on GA flying within the state of registry will be negligible.

The UK CAA is currently issuing amended licenses containing an English language proficiency endorsement to all pilots holding a Radio Telephony Operator's licence. This process is at no cost to the pilot and should be complete by implementation date. I would urge your readers not to assume that they do not require the endorsement for another three years, as reported in your magazine, as this is not the case.

**Mike Dobson**  
Head of Standards and Policy  
Personnel Licensing Department  
CAA

John Sheehan, secretary general of IAOPA, replies: IAOPA has been working with ICAO for more than four years to modify the language proficiency requirements that became effective on March 5th. We have advocated a lower level of proficiency for VFR operators operating in non-complex airspace. In May 2007 I made a presentation at the Second ICAO Language Symposium in Montreal stating that, inter alia, many ICAO member states would be incapable of meeting the March 2007 compliance deadline and that ICAO should delay implementation. As always, I also advocated modifying the standard to permit VFR pilots to test to a lower level of English proficiency. My suggestion to delay implementation drew informal agreement from many states present

and served as a catalyst for action to modify the requirements.

ICAO state representatives subsequently drafted a proposal that would effectively take the pressure off of states unable to comply with the language proficiency standard by providing the option for states to not enforce the standard for a period of up to three years. This was passed as a resolution at the triennial ICAO Assembly in September.

This is clearly a delay in implementation, without embarrassing any state or ICAO itself for not being able to meet the deadline. Further, most English-speaking states (and a number of non-English speaking states) have chosen to grandfather pilots holding licences or R/T certificates since those documents specify that the holder be able to read, write, understand, etc. the English language. This is clearly the easy way out and in no way meets the strict ICAO level 4 English language proficiency requirement. As Mr Bill Fisher's letter pointed out, Georgia or Louisiana English may not meet the definition of 'standard' English, to say nothing of Scots, Nigerian or Australian English.

European States are rushing to implement standard and establish testing organisations that comply with the ICAO standard. The truth is that very few states, if any, will meet the ICAO standard in the near future if by the end of the year. Therefore, many states, including the UK, will report to ICAO that they comply with the new standard when, in fact, they do not. While this seems harmless, there is a safety hazard involved in this self-deception: non-proficient pilots and controllers from 'compliant' states will be navigating the airways and controlling air traffic in complex airspace – just the thing the standard attempted to cure.

Eventually — three to five years, perhaps — states will largely become compliant with ICAO language proficiency standards. In the meantime, be careful out there.

We will continue to seek relief for the VFR operator. A German pilot flying VFR to France for lunch should not have to undergo the extensive and expensive training and testing required to meet the letter of the ICAO standard if those operations are conducted outside complex airspace.

## Federal frolics

Sir,

I am writing with reference to EASA going back on their word and threatening to take away grandfather rights from PPLs with the old-style CAA lifelong licences. I have held my CAA licence Groups A & B for the last 38 years, and an IMC rating since its introduction, which has now expired (what's the point of renewing something we are going to lose anyway?) and I have owned my Piper Apache twin for the last 20 years. I gave in and last year installed a Mode S transponder. Modification fees to EASA and CAA were nearly as much as the unit and installation costs.

If these European bureaucrats are such money grabbers and begrudge our lifelong licences, then why do they not just substitute our old licences with the new JAR FCL ones, giving us the same privileges, charge us the appropriate fee and continue ripping us off, every five years? If it's the money they want (which it is!), then I am quite happy to pay just to be left alone to enjoy my flying. After all, how many of us old timers can there still be left. Why not just let us fizzle out?

I am 58 years old and cannot see myself

flying for many more years. I have always supported AOPA and admired the work you do on our behalf. I wish you could push these bureaucrats at EASA and the antiquated CAA into adopting the most sensible system in the world, and that is the FAA system for GA maintenance and licence bi-annual reviews, without having to do a test every time for each type, as there are more American built aircraft in the world than any others.

I hope you manage to do something, and soon, before more people like me are priced out of the sky and many more PPLs fall by the way side. As much as I love your magazine, it depresses the hell out of me after reading each issue, and I keep wondering how much worse it can possibly get. But then, that's European Federalism for you.

Keep up the good work.

**A. Niedzielski**

## Love my Aztec

Sir,

I read with interest Timothy Nathan's article on the Aztec (*General Aviation*, December 2007). You're a man after my own heart, Timothy! I have been flying and operating Aztecs for over 40 years here in Zambia. There is nothing to touch it in its class. Sure, the Baron and C310 are faster in the cruise, but where do you put the passengers' luggage?



Travel International Air Charter in Zambia still operates the Aztec in Public Transport in the ad hoc air charter mode. It may be old design, but it has six "proper" seats, not the 4+2 as in the Baron, and so reliable, so forgiving.

With regard to the single versus twin safety arguments, there isn't one. A twin wins every time. My wife and I flew our old Aztec from Zambia to UK and back in 1977. Got a few frights with the weather particularly icing, but I learnt a lot from that trip. Great aircraft; its successor, the Seneca, is not in the same league.

Keep up the good work that you do at *General Aviation*.

**Taffy Hughes**

**Managing Director**

**Travel International Air Charter & Hughes**

**Aircraft Services**

**Kasompe Airfield**

**PO Box 10724, Chingola, Zambia**

## Keep your powder dry

Sir,

I read with interest (*General Aviation*, December 2007) the interview with our new Minister for Aviation. He comment that '...MPs writing letters is also a very good litmus test as to what's happening out there, reflecting the depth of feeling in the constituencies.'

So why do so few GA related constituents write to their MPs? There are thousands of us, not just pilots but all the others who depend upon our 'hobby' or to put it better, our industry. As the May elections approach there

is a golden opportunity to collar the canvassers, use the 'surveys' most of us will receive to put the case for GA or simply write to your MP. And if you want a subject, what better than the EASA threat to the IMC rating?

Here in London the Mayoral election will take the limelight, but rest assured every London MP and activist will be fighting to maximise votes for the seats on the London Assembly. All hugely sensitive and receptive to influence and reasoned argument.

As AOPA Chairman George Done puts it in his December 2007 column, '...we will lobby our MEPs and MPs.'

But do not forget the lower levels – councillors, assembly members, candidates, activists, canvassers. The 'litmus test' is effective and 'silence' from the constituencies is taken as acquiescence or, in the Minister's phrase, 'the depth of feeling' – we let him think feeling is shallow at our peril.

**John Webb**

John: Letter writing has its place, but you have to pick your subject. In the current IMC debate, for instance, writing to UK MPs merely causes unwelcome work for civil servants because everyone – MPs and civil servants – is already on our side. Martin Robinson writes: 'The aim of writing a letter to an MP should be to get them to do something positive. Currently we are engaged with the DfT who are supportive of our concern over the IMC. Our aim is to see a Europe-wide alternative or the retention of the UK IMCR. We have about four years, if we see no European alternative being delivered by then we will ask MPs to put pressure on the DfT and government of the day to file a difference. Within that time frame we will see a UK general election. Keep your powder dry.'

## Shoreham

Sir,

I am sorry to say that I need to take issue with you with regard to the article 'Money, safety and Shoreham Airport' (*General Aviation*, February 2008).

The saga being generated by AOPA on this subject has got out of hand. The details that you have published are ill-informed and factually incorrect. The CAA have been involved in this subject, which I confirmed during our phone conversation.

The approach that you mention relates to an event that occurred on 7th September 2007 and has little/no relation to the issue, as it involved circumstances that are completely outside of the way in which we are applying the 'circuit and circuit training charges' at Shoreham.

The charges for circuit and touch and go training have been revised following discussion with the CAA and training at Shoreham is PPR to ensure that anyone that could be affected by any charges are fully aware of the scales applied. To ensure that the situation is clear, the charges that are applied have been made available to those who will be carrying out this activity.

It will NOT apply to aircraft using callsign 'Student', and will only be applied to aircraft that have pre-booked circuit and circuit training. Therefore, following discussion with the CAA, safety remains at the top of our agenda and I can confirm that NORMAL flights will remain unaffected by this alteration to our charging mechanism.

I could quote Martin Robinson's comments in another article about the Strasser Scheme,

that Shoreham does sign up to for very good safety reasons (providing that it is a legitimate diversion for safety reason) "and it would acknowledge the debt we owe to small aerodromes and *perhaps help them stay open in tough times*". The need to provide certain services at aerodromes does cost money and to ensure transparency, as well as to not unreasonably delay/restrict operations due to activity that causes normal traffic to be so delayed, charges do at times need to be altered to take account of activity by operators.

I would also like to make comment about the link that you make with this and my involvement with a report on Lee on Solent. I was indeed, through invitation from SEEDA, asked to submit a quotation for a socio-economic study into various aspects of Lee on Solent. This was completed by my owning company Erinaceous, who have the ability to complete this type of work through divisions within the Group that have this expertise.

The detail of the scope of the report and the content are the property of SEEDA and it would be totally inappropriate for me or anyone else involved in the report to comment on what is contained in that report. I would however point out that Shoreham does not have any competitors and in my opinion neither do any airports, especially of our size. We share the same problems as each other and encourage and support each other, indeed we have in the past had many visitors to/from Lee on Solent and, since the "closure" have not had one aircraft relocate and were not expecting that to happen.

I share AOPA's concerns about the closure of any aerodrome as it just removes another location that has the ability to generate potential visiting, however I also understand that any operation must be considered by the aerodrome owner as "SAFE" and therefore it is for that owner to determine how they manage that operation, and to remove any risk that may be identified.

**John Haffenden**

**Airport Manager**

**Shoreham (Brighton City) Airport**

While accepting that Shoreham more than most needs the financial support of pilots – the state of Erinaceous and some of its business arrangements has been widely publicised – AOPA is of the opinion that a 'go-around' charge in any guise will have a negative safety impact and will continue to seek its removal

## No ties

Sir,

Your story of the 17,000 hour pilot who took off with a concrete tie-down block on one wing must have sent shudders through scores of readers. A decade ago, only a few hours after gaining my PPL, for exactly the same reasons (being interrupted in the middle of my walk around checks), I started taxiing with a tow bar still connected to the nose wheel of my aircraft, noted, thankfully, by an eagle eyed controller in a tower. Yes, I know, "idiot"! But I am admitting this gross stupidity to possibly assist readers. Ever since, just before getting into the aircraft, I now do one last 360 degree walk and scan around the aircraft, muttering the memory device I invented that day: "TABAC". Its the name of a commonly used aftershave used two or three decades ago. It stands for "Towbar, Anchors, Baggage door And Chocks" and using it could save you from creating a real 'stink'.

**Julian D'Arcy** ■