

Briefings



Oban joke wears thin



The Oban saga (see GA *passim*) grinds on, and becomes less comical by the day. The airport's fuel provider Paul Keegan has written to the Scottish Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson pointing out that Argyll and Bute Council's grandiose plans for scheduled commercial services out of Oban are a hugely expensive pipedream.

Keegan has taken up the issue of the

contract awarded to Highland Airways to operate a service from Oban to the islands of Coll and Colonsay, which it is said will be subsidised to the tune of £500,000 by the Scottish government. The islands' airfields have been expensively improved but their runways have not been lengthened, which means only a BN Islander can be used on the routes. While Highland Airways is a reputable airline, Keegan

has written to the council seeking clarification of concerns about the tender. Highland Airways, he says, was the only bidder not to contact him about fuel availability, prices and associated charges. He claims Highland Airways' bid was about one-third the sum submitted by another bidder, which raises questions either about HA costings or the other bidder's sanity. He adds: "HA had no suitable aircraft, no suitably qualified pilots, no suitable engineering and no authority from the CAA to operate the type of aircraft required for the contract." On the face of it, he says, Highland Airways fail to meet the terms of the tender document on half a dozen counts.

None of this would amount to a hill of beans were it not for the fact that the council seems to have little idea of what it's playing at. So far its scheme has cost £9 million in tax money and has driven away half the traffic at Oban, and it will end up with a service it could have run without spending a single penny. Oban airfield has been 'upgraded' to a standard which means it will continue to be a millstone on the taxpayer for all time. Despite its cost, the 'upgrade' has made the airfield less useful, with a cross-runway lost and the main runway reduced to 800m because of 'drainage difficulties'. The airfield is still not licensed, the fire station is not in use, and the council is threatening legal action against the English company contracted to provide the fire engine

Oban airfield - £9 million spent and no solution in sight

– a suit which is reciprocated. Oban airfield now has 12 staff where one used to do. Keegan has been a voice for sanity throughout and has made himself extremely unpopular by pointing out the gaping holes in the plot.

Argyll and Bute councillors have been advised by the council's head of legal services Susan Mair not to comment on contractual matters. – Pat Malone ■

Registrations top 50,000

The Civil Aviation Authority has issued the 50,000th registration to be allocated to a UK aircraft since the system began in 1919. The registration, G-MITC, was given to a Robinson R44 Raven II owned by HeliAir.

The CAA's statistics show that there are 19,281 aircraft in the UK fleet, including 10,342 fixed wing aircraft, 4,360 microlights, 1,868 balloons, 1,467 helicopters, 551 gliders and 273 gyroplanes. How many are active is unknown, but a ballpark figure of something in excess of 10,000 has been postulated.

It's interesting to note how general aviation aircraft massively outnumber commercial aircraft on the register. The most numerous airliner, the Boeing 737, is represented 164 times on the register. On the other hand, the six most popular aircraft types are the Piper PA-28 (1,048 aircraft), Cessna 172 (400), Robinson R44 (330),

Cessna 152 (291), Cessna 150 (276) and Robinson R22 (235).

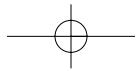
The first UK-registered aircraft – G-EAAA –

was a de Havilland D.H.9, registered in July 1919.

The CAA insists that the 30,000 cancelled registrations cannot be used again for the avoidance of confusion. They have some way to go before they run out of letters – if they use them all, about 450,000 are available. ■



Right: HeliAir's John Michalakis accepts the 50,000th registration from CAA airworthiness surveyors Mike Landry and Paul Johnson



Aviation – it's a woman's world

Great aviation stories from pilots and engineers, all of them women. Clare Walker reports from the Women in Aviation Conference

Baroness Thatcher was the surprise guest of honour at the opening reception at the House of Lords for speakers, delegates and sponsors of the Aviation and Women in Europe Conference – the first to be held in the UK. The former Prime Minister achieved the near impossible when her entry silenced dozens of women who were busy talking aviation and networking.

Lady Thatcher, whose attendance was kept a closely guarded secret, was introduced to as many of those present as possible at the reception, sponsored by executive recruitment company Odgers Ray & Berndston. Jane Middleton, chairman of the Conference Organising Committee, said she was delighted to note that Lady Thatcher was as sharp-witted as ever.

"There is no doubt that Lady Thatcher's presence at our reception provided a huge inspiration to our conference," she said. "Although our delegates came from countries as far afield as India, America, Canada, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, there wasn't a person there who wasn't thrilled to meet one of the world's most renowned and most successful women."

The conference, which was the third such event to be organised by the European chapter of Women in Aviation International, attracted sponsorship from a number of well-known companies ranging from Boeing, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, J P Morgan, Towers Perrin and Rockwell Collins to Pooleys Flight Instructor School, SEI and Marlborough Aviation Executive Search.

The three-day event began with aviation visits to the Air Accident Investigation Branch and Flight Safety International at Farnborough. The following day, keynote speaker Judith Moreton, managing director of Bombardier Skystar International, told delegates she was very excited to be addressing a conference almost exclusively made up of women – a comment echoed by other speakers. The theme of her talk was the importance of understanding different cultures to enable aviation companies to win business in an increasingly competitive world.

Gretchen Burrett, the first female Director of

Safety at National Air Traffic Services, said she had initially wanted to become an ice skater but her father, fed up with paying the fees, suggested she went to the Air Force Academy which was free! She recalled being left in charge of a Minuteman inter-continental ballistic missile centre when she was "a baby second lieutenant" with the job of designing the human interface. From that point onwards, she became fascinated with the human aspects of aviation.

Squadron Leader Sue Freeman, who is in charge of ensuring all RAF Tornado F3 pilots are adhering to the correct standards, described how she took part in a "quick reaction alert" at RAF Leuchars when some Russian aircraft recently appeared on the scene.

"The Russians seem dreadfully interested in what we are doing. I looked at them and they looked at me and we flew alongside them until they departed," she said.

Deanna Amos, an engineer on the Boeing 777 at Heathrow, amused the conference by describing what it was like working in a predominantly male environment. She soon got used to having broken nails and oil in her hair as well as having "vanity case" written on her tool box. She advised delegates never to give up, never to show weakness, adding that women relied on men to give them their break.

Girls' flying scholarship

Applications are invited from women for the Amy Johnson Memorial Trust Scholarship, which provides up to £2,000 to help a woman aspiring to a career in aviation.

Those eligible include PPLs wishing to obtain a CPL/ATPL, and holders of a CPL or frozen ATPL who are working towards an instructor rating, instrument rating or CRM/MCC rating. Helicopter pilots are eligible. Candidates must be British citizens living permanently in the UK. Closing date for applications is February 29, 2008.

For an application form, send an SAE (C5 size) to Mrs ME Tucker, Hon Sec, Amy Johnson Memorial Trust, 12, Church Lane, Merton Park, London SW19 3PD.

Bristow Helicopter search and rescue pilot Marjolijn de Geer from Holland told how she herself had to be rescued from the North Sea after an hour in the water without a life jacket when the cyclic controls of her Puma helicopter jammed.

Although as duty captain, she had had to ditch on a cold winter's night with the temperature of the water at 9°, everyone on board – including the 17 passengers they had airlifted off an oil rig during a black-out – were rescued. After she and her co-pilot were cleared of any suspicion of reckless flying, she returned to duty with no ill effects from the trauma she had endured.

Jo Salter, the first woman to fly a fast jet in

Left: Jane Middleton and Susan Thompson flank Lady Thatcher

Below: delegates enjoy the relaxed atmosphere at the Women in Aviation Conference

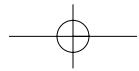


the RAF and now a successful motivational speaker and author, amused delegates with the story of how she solved the problem of flying for eight hours across the Atlantic in a Tornado without any toilet facilities. The solution was a package of incontinence pads and plastic underpants! She advised delegates wanting to succeed in aviation to "practice the law of abundance" by having a "glass half-full" approach to life, being positive and having fun.

Jenny Payne, Director of Product Marketing and Product Analysis at Boeing Commercial Airplanes, explained how Boeing's new 787 aircraft was more environmentally friendly because of its use of composites which weigh less than aluminium, resulting in less fuel burn. Its Rolls Royce engineers were also more efficient. Boeing had been working hard to overcome passenger problems such as dry eyes, headaches, fatigue and nausea, she told the audience. Commander Trish Beckman, formerly with the US Navy and now a navigator with Boeing, described her role in the 777's round-the-world flight, which took her to dozens of countries, while triple round-the-world pilot Jennifer Murray showed a series of stunning slides from her record dual helicopter flight from Pole to Pole.

She paid tribute to her co-pilot Colin Bodill, who, despite a broken back and other severe injuries, had saved their lives after they crashed in a whiteout in Antarctica on their first attempt in 2003. "Heroes don't come bigger than Colin Bodill," she said. "Practically his first words to me afterwards were 'We have to get another helicopter'!"

The Conference was closed by Dr Peggy Chabrian, founder and president of Women in Aviation International, which has 14,000 members. The final day of the conference was a visit to the RAFA Shoreham Air Show where delegates were delighted to see Carolyn Grace begin the programme with a beautiful aerobatic display to music in her Grace Spitfire. ■



All at sea with Jamie

Jamie Furnell has become the first Class Rating Instructor qualified to teach on both land aeroplanes and seaplanes. His course was run and designed by On-Track Aviation, the only Flying Training Organisation in the UK offering seaplane instructor courses.

Training was carried out by Alan Newton, head of training for On-Track, on Loch Earn in Scotland using an Aviat Husky A1 Amphibious Seaplane. The course was conducted in two sessions of four days training, which included both ground and air tuition. There was 12 hours of flying training and 33 hours of ground tuition which included Teaching and Learning as well as seaplane operations. When asked why Loch Earn, Alan said: "Seaplane flying in England is restricted to a couple of locations which involve long transit flights. Loch Earn and the surrounding water are only a few minutes flying apart and give the student a variety of water conditions to use."

Jamie, a PPL holder, has been flying seaplanes since 1997 in the UK and USA. ■

From left, Alan Newton, Jamie Furnell, CAA FE Iain McLellan



An aeronautical festival organised by Salford University's Islamic Society and Students' Union with the anti-racism charity Heartstone aims to challenge stereotypes of black and minority ethnic students and introducing them to aviation.

The 'Festival of Flight' was launched by Mildred Carter, the first African American to obtain a pilot's licence in the Southern US, and her husband Herbert who was a member of the first black combat air squadron in World War II, the Tuskegee Airmen.

Backing from the government agency Sportmatch, the RAF, Rolls Royce and other organisations will allow 80 students to experience gliding flight next year, and two of them, Salford students Asad Shah and Rozaidah Haji Abd Rahman, will be able to train on powered aircraft later in the year.

Student Activities Officer Usman Ali says: "By bringing the aviation industry together with people from ethnic minorities, we can really open up new opportunities in careers as diverse as engineering or piloting. The support we've had from pioneers like Herbert and Mildred, and from organisations like the RAF just goes to show how important an issue we're addressing." ■

Top cadet

Thomas Stratton, an 18-year old air cadet from Kent, has capped a year of impressive personal achievement with the award of the elite John Cunningham Trophy as the nation-wide top air cadet for 2007.

Thomas was one of a small group selected for a flying scholarship from 125 young cadets from across the UK aspiring to a career in aviation. He trained during the summer holidays at Tayside Aviation (Dundee) where his intensive course of flying and ground training was sponsored by the Geoffrey de Havilland Flying Foundation. He qualified for his NPPL, his overall assessments securing top level points to enable him to clinch the Trophy.

The trophy was presented to Thomas by Air Marshal Ian Macfadyen, Chairman of the Foundation's Trustees, at a special award ceremony at RAF Bentley Priory.

"Thomas Stratton is an outstanding young cadet" said Air Marshal Macfadyen. "He is destined to join the RAF and aspires eventually to serve as a Eurofighter Typhoon pilot. We wish him good fortune in his future career."

