

Bölkow 209 Monsun

Monsun season

*A sporty two-seater with aerobatic capability, the Bölkow Monsun represents good value for money, says owner **Dr Tony Watson***



It may be 40 years old, but the Bölkow 209 Monsun is still one of the best-value light aircraft available today, providing good performance with economical fuel consumption and excellent range.

I bought this plane following several coincidental happenings. Firstly our group, along with the rest of private GA, were expelled from Southampton. Secondly, there was a general recognition that private airways flying was becoming astronomically expensive – charges could exceed the fuel bill. Thirdly, I had been offered a place at a very convenient grass strip. It was obvious to me that my IR would be unlikely to be used seriously again, so I decided to let it lapse. A year in a fixed-wing microlight group followed; while great fun, it did not provide an adequate mount for two with luggage in uncertain weather conditions.

Along came the Bölkow Monsun, freshly imported from Germany. With a strong undercart, good STOL grass strip performance with 20kt crosswind capability, it seemed to fit the bill for VFR plus IMC use. It is a proper aeroplane with 150 Lycoming power and even a VP prop – helpful for short take-offs. There was a stick – two – and turns required rudder input, unlike the usual yoke found in American light aircraft which are designed to be steered like a car needing little rudder, which as a past glider pilot made me feel at home. Other features of which I approved included the sliding canopy giving easy access and all-round excellent visibility.

The Monsun has its roots in the MHK-101, which was actually designed by three Bölkow engineers in their spare time. They were helped by the company, which gave them materials at cost, and the aeroplane shared a family resemblance and a number of components with the Bo 208 Junior, although it had a new wing and a wider fuselage. The prototype, by then called the Bo 209 Monsun, first flew in 1967 powered by a 115 hp Lycoming, and production began in 1969.

The main variants were the Bo 209-150, with a 150 hp Lycoming driving a McCauley fixed pitch or optional Hartzell constant speed propeller, and the Bo 209-160 which had an injected 160 hp Lycoming and the CS prop as standard. Both models had folding wings to reduce hangar space requirements; they also had retractable nosewheels and fixed main wheels. As the main wheels do not retract, this variation does little to reduce drag but is designed to allow the Monsun to be towed by a car on the public highway.

The Monsun was also available as the Bo 209S two-seat trainer, with non-folding wings and non-retractable landing gear. Some 102 examples of all models were built before production stopped in 1972 when the parent company Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm got out of the loss-making light aircraft business. Several later attempts to restart production of the Monsun came to nothing, but there are still said to be more than 50 Monsuns flying, most of them in Germany, and the type is widely agreed to be one of the best-designed German

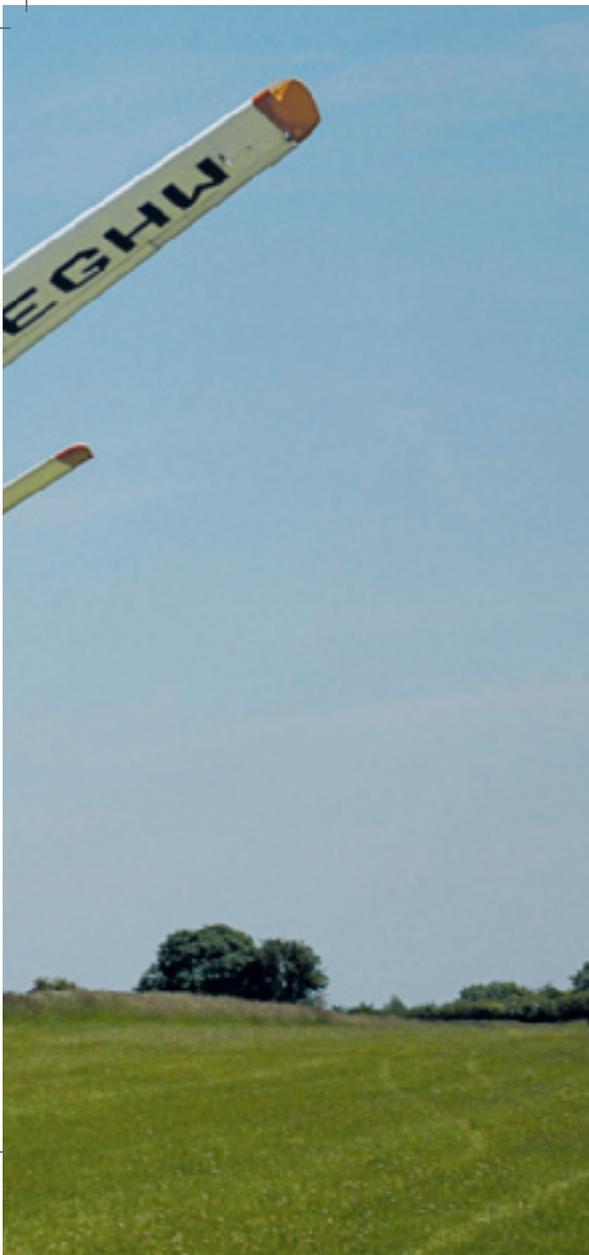
Above: Dr Taylor's Bölkow Monsun has 'good STOL grass strip performance'
Top right: stick and quadrant give the Monsun something of a military feel
Right: Dr Taylor has chosen to leave his aircraft on the German register
Bottom right: flying the Monsun calls for rudder input, unlike American types

sporting aircraft. Build quality is excellent, and even after 40 years most examples show little deterioration.

Notable items on the walk-round include the wing mounting pins, which can be seen beneath a panel in the non-slip surface at the wing roots. Removing the pins allows you to turn the wings through 90 degrees and fold them back along the fuselage. I find no occasion to do this, but the access panel allows one to get a good look at the wing spar.

The seat has only backrest adjustment. At under 5' 8" I found I needed cushions, which is no problem and increases comfort. As the Monsun is semi-aerobatic, there's a four-point harness, and although I don't personally indulge, those who perform aerobatics in the Monsun say it is a very capable and enjoyable aircraft, if a little heavy on the controls. The engine is not fitted with inverted systems so the range of manoeuvres is limited, although some Monsuns have been retrofitted with Christen equipment.

In front of the pilot are the usual six



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instruments plus manifold pressure, together with the EGT and CHT and a list of settings to give optimum engine management. Fuel is contained in two long, narrow tanks in the wings, the contents of which are accurately monitored by the fuel gauges, and total capacity is 146 litres. At 65 percent power, which is '24 squared' – 24 inches MAP and 2,400 RPM – the Monsun cruises at around 115 kt and has an endurance of four and a half hours with reserve, with fuel consumption when leaned running at about 28 litres an hour.

The long thin wing tanks mean that fuel needs to be kept in balance, and there is a convenient fuel switch between the seats. On the quadrant are the usual three levers – throttle, propeller and mixture – and an electric

flap switch; the flaps are electric. Navigation is aided by an accurate DI which has virtually no wander, losing only five degrees per hour. I have fitted a new NAV/COM – as there is only one I thought it had better be reliable. Also fitted are an ADF and an A-mode transponder (to be replaced by the valueless but probably required S-mode.)

Starting calls for one to four strokes of the throttle with fuel pump on. There is no primer, and none is needed as starting is immediate. Unusually, the aircraft has no toe-brakes – the brake lever is between the seats, and taxiing may take a little getting used to if you're new to the arrangement.

Take-off with 15 degrees of flap needs only about half of our 650m strip. Even with two up and a good fuel load the aircraft will climb at 800 fpm. After the climb and flap-raising it settles into the cruise at about 115kt at 65 percent power with the rev and prop settings as detailed in the manual. Fore and aft stability is very good and the ailerons very effective. I am not qualified to further detail the flying characteristics, but would only comment on the approach and landing. This is done firstly with 15 degrees of flap at below 100kt.

Forward trim – good trimmer attached to the all-moving tail – is needed and some revs need to be kept on. If too high on the approach, full flap – 35 degrees – increases drag and sink and gives a really steep angle with excellent forward vis, making higher revs mandatory. Over the hedge at 55 to 60 kt, reduce the revs and you're on the ground, with the Monsun showing no desire to become airborne again. In other words, with full flaps it's a flying brick! Applying brakes will stop the aeroplane in half the length of the strip.

In summary, the Monsun is a strong, controllable two-seater with adequate range and luggage capacity – and then there's the aerobatics, complete with installed G-meter. Finally, why keep her on the D-reg? Well, the change to CAA costs money and will surely become irrelevant as EASA enfolds us all. ■

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*Top: take-off requires less than half of a 650 metre grass strip
Above: in the cruise at 24 squared, the Monsun burns about 28 litres per hour
Below: 'a strong, controllable two-seater with adequate range'*

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