

Letters to the Editor

The Lucky Country

Sir,
Your article in the June 2011 edition of *General Aviation* poses the question 'How can GA's decline be reversed?' I think that you partially answer that question with your article on Lee on Solent on page 24 of the same edition. Just take a look at the stupid, mind-boggling and destructive landing fees imposed on aircraft at that airport. It is symptomatic of a 'silver spoon' view that pervades those who think that every aircraft owner and user is a millionaire who can afford to have his or her bank account pillaged at will.

Aviation is expensive enough without the stupidity of this type of artificial cost being imposed on an industry that is clearly struggling to survive.

These artificial costs have a debilitating effect here in Australia and we seem hell bent in following the foolish path adopted by the British and European aviation industry. It is only a matter of time before Lee on SOLVENT is not, if it continues its foolish policy.

I suggest that if the management of that airport thinks that it can survive by charging such ridiculous fees – or fees to land of any sort for that matter, then it should simply save itself the embarrassment of driving aircraft away and going broke by closing the airfield and turning it into housing!

There has not been one GA airport in Australia that has prospered by the introduction of landing fees. In fact, one of the most successful airports in Australia is at Temora in New South Wales which has developed itself on the basis of free access and a programme of air shows, with all manner of beautiful aircraft and warbirds.

The Temora Council has taken a proactive view, and the result has been a great boon for that NSW country town.

There is not one shred of reality or truth in the argument that landing fees imposed by councils and airport operators make airports viable. The contrary is, however, true.

Tony Taggart
Moorabbin, Victoria,
Australia

**Landing fees at Lee are £7.50 up to 750 kgs, £15 to 1500 kgs, and £20 above two tonnes. Robert Hill, AOPA's representative at Lee, wrote the article mentioned above. This is his reply:*

"While I would love to see free landing and no handling fees, this is simply not commercially viable in the UK. Like a boat visiting a marina we have to pay for upkeep of facilities. The fees at Lee on Solent are comparable with those at other airfields I have visited recently, Shoreham, Kemble, Tatenhill. I was planning to land at Bristol and East Midlands recently. They were both around £150 for landing, ATC and handling. They obviously don't care about GA and don't deserve our patronage. Fees in France range from €32 at Le Touquet, €12 at Dinard and €0 at Saumur and Joigny. However, the key difference is that in France the airfields are often owned by the local Chambers of Commerce who, as with their marinas, take the view that a visitor is likely to spend up to €1,000 over a weekend in the town on hotels and dining. Successive UK governments don't seem to understand this logic and have progressively forced councils to sell off such assets as local airports, Shoreham being an example.

Lee on Solent is certainly not full of wealthy owners. The field ranges from gliders, microlights, powered aircraft to SAR and charter helicopters. The leisure users choose to spend their money flying rather than say on golf or sailing, but has anyone checked the price of golf club membership and green fees? In the Hamble a berth for a 36 foot yacht is around £7,000 per annum. A car park in Fareham, near Lee on Solent, is a staggering £30 for only a few hours.

For good or ill, the culture of landing fees has been long entrenched in British aviation. It's something we live with, and generally the GA service offered at our fields is very welcoming. I am not defending fees, just putting the reality of flying in the UK into perspective. If Australia can hold on to free landing, then I wish them all the best – perhaps they can come and give us a masterclass."

The unlucky country

Sir,
Congratulations to Nick Wilcock for his clear explanation of the EASA licence conversion process. He mentions 'the

inevitable fee', but I am hoping AOPA will fight any such proposal on the grounds that EASA has been imposed on the UK and that therefore the changes should be funded by the EU.

I realise that holders of JAR licences will no longer have to pay a quinquennial fee, but for holders of lifetime CAA licences like myself, I cannot see any justification for further charges. Perhaps we should all vote for UKIP next time round!

David A. Horton
Slough
Berkshire

Penitent stool

Sir,
Reading the AOPA August, most excellent, magazine, ref the SMAC article on pages 21-23. You mention the Ercoupe, but it should be the Aircoupe. The Ercoupe was quite a different beast with connected aileron and rudder controls. I instructed many a happy hour on the Aircoupe at the Ulster Flying Club – we had three of them in the early 60's and a private owner still has one, G-AROO.

Mike Woodgate

Yet another gap in my knowledge cruelly exposed – my apologies for the error. Pat Malone

Not proper

Sir,
Once again *General Aviation* features a photograph of a pilot leaning on a propeller. (August 2011, page 23). I wish you wouldn't do this. Live props are killers and we should stay away from them except when it's absolutely necessary to occupy the same space. Using photographs like this implies acceptance of the practice.

Evan Wilkinson
Teesside



**I thought I might get away with it because the chap is only leaning on the spinner; I'm sure he has the keys in his pocket. Nonetheless I accept the censure and will endeavour to avoid repeating the mistake. Pat Malone*



Temora's web site