

MOTION 2

That the Woodhams Trophy awarded to Tracey Curtis-Taylor in 2014 be reinstated

Proposer: David Mole. Mem No 037969. Seconder: David Millin. Mem No 030437.

Supporting statement by David Mole.

This Motion is put forward by me personally, not in my capacity as Secretary or Board Member and not on behalf of the Board. The reason I put it forward is because I am concerned that the Motion which has been advanced over Stewart Jackson's name is unclearly worded, with a supporting statement expressed in strident terms that mean it might not get the thoughtful consideration that it may deserve.

I would urge members that my Motion does deserve careful consideration, although I am not advocating any particular outcome. I doubt if it is possible to please everybody, but I am trying to be as fair as I can in what I say.

It is true to say that the Woodhams award to Tracey Curtis-Taylor was made by the LAA Awards Group, chaired by Harry Hopkins, on the basis of her flight to South Africa in a Stearman biplane. The citation was, "Award of the Bill Woodhams Trophy for a feat of navigation – Tracey Curtis-Taylor for her flight from Cape Town to Cairo in a Boeing Stearman — a feat of navigation, aviation, tenacity and endurance." The award did not mention and was not based upon the basis that she made the journey, or any particular part of it, solo. It was clear that she had a support team.

Nonetheless, the Awards Group felt that the award was justified. That was the Group's decision. Other independent and experienced flyers have supported it, including those speaking in person at the AGM in 2016.

It is also true that, on at least one occasion, recorded on video, Tracey Curtis-Taylor said that her flight was "solo". Whether or not this was confusion in the heat of speechmaking or simply over-egging an already creditable pudding does not seem to me to make very much difference. Members may think that if it was a sin it wasn't a very great one, although perhaps irritating for her support team.

It is apparent that Tracey Curtis-Taylor and some members of her support have had a serious falling out. I do not imagine that the arguments on either side of that matter will much bother members who were not involved. These things happen, perhaps particularly when strong personalities are involved. I think that it is also fair to say that there was something of a campaign against Tracey Curtis-Taylor on social media and the web, and that it was sometimes expressed in harsh and unpleasant terms. This undoubtedly contributed to an impulse to take away her award. One may reasonably have some sympathy for the view that the process did not reflect well on the LAA.

What is undoubted is that Tracey Curtis-Taylor has felt the removal of the award very keenly. Plainly, she has felt humiliated, embarrassed and wounded by the whole business. It is probably not unfair to say that it has been troubling her obsessively for the last two years. So, whatever the offence held against her, members may feel she has suffered for it more than enough.

I invite members to consider the nature of our Association. We share a love of flying light aircraft. We join together to advance our interest for the benefit of all of us. We probably carry most weight as an Association when we appear united, well informed thoughtful and tolerant. I haven't been flying for nearly as long as most members, but it has been long enough to observe that exceptional flyers, whether involved in astonishing aerobatics, adventurous journeys, meticulous reconstruction, dedicated building or design at the boundaries of new technology, can be very individualistic and sometimes 'difficult' people. We need to be patient and forbearing with each other.

It is in that spirit that I wish to give members the opportunity to think again in a calm and measured way about the reinstatement of this award.