

MEET THE MEMBERS

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This month we meet Bob Weaver from Osmington near Weymouth who flies a Tecnam Echo from Pymore, Near Bridport, Dorset.

What is your current/past career? I'm in property management but am semi-retired now. In the past I was a research engineer in underwater acoustics for the MOD, and after that I was in high power radar research at Boscombe Down. I am also a qualified HSE commercial/scientific diver and crane driver! Oh, and I was once the MD of a paramotor manufacturing company.

How did you get into aviation?

I have been into aero-modelling since my teens, still am, and then about 25 years ago got involved with parachute jumping and parascending, which led to free flight and powered paragliding. Whilst I was working at

Boscombe Down the opportunity to get a PPL arose when the flying club there offered me a route to a JAR PPL - apparently I ticked a box at the bottom of the flying club application form saying 'Do you want to be a pilot?'. What normal bloke doesn't tick a box like that?

Two years later, on a Saturday morning, I had a call out of the blue from Sq.Ldr Reay asking if I was still interested. Was I ever! That day was the fastest I have ever driven from Weymouth to Boscombe.

So your first light aircraft flight was at Boscombe?

Well, prior to learning to fly at Boscombe Down I had taken pleasure flights in an Extra 300 out of Dunkeswell but yes, the first 'heavy

metal' I flew myself was the Cessna 172 in which I learned.

How many hours experience do you currently have?

About 750 hours, plus another 150 odd in 'rag wings' - paragliders, powered and free gliding. My life's aim, in flying at least, is to get to 1,000 hours in SEPs.

What are your favourite and worse types flown?

Without doubt my favourite is the Hawker Hunter. It was a 50th birthday treat from my darling wife, out of Exeter - as co-pilot with Brian Grant, a Hunter test pilot. As I remember it we used 1,500kg of fuel in an hour, and



Bob and Gilly Weaver in the cockpit of a Nimrod at Kinloss



The AEG Javelin never went into production but it is the kind of personal jet Bob would love to own if he won the Euro Lottery

Bob's Tecnam Echo, a good all-round touring aircraft with sensible carrying capacity, he says

took about about 12 minutes to get from from Exeter to Land's End!

The worst was probably a Pulsar with a two-stroke 582 Rotax engine. I remember it as uncomfortable, noisy and rattly.

What is your current aeroplane?

Our current aircraft is the fantastic Tecnam Echo. It is safe, easy to fly and economical, a great all round touring aircraft with a sensible payload and very practical space. It will deal with commercial airfields and farm strips with equal ease... We couldn't wish for more.

Do you have a best aviation moment?

After doing barrel rolls and Cuban Eights in the Hunter, its got to be an orbit holding above a block of hi-rise flats in central Berlin whilst 'number two' to a commercial airliner landing at Tempelhof, just before it was closed forever.

Do you have any aviation heroes?

I guess Chuck Yeager and the Richard Branson/Burt Rutan partnership, all of whom I met briefly at Oshkosh a few years ago. But also Peter Twiss, the first man to go supersonic in the UK in a Hunter in a dive. I went out briefly with his daughter Sarah and met him at a lecture at Boscombe not long before he died. I have a personal desire to

go supersonic myself, but that is getting quite difficult now as Concorde and Thunder City in South Africa have gone. The Migs in Moscow wanted a serious security clearance from me because of my background; I hate paperwork, so I gave up. Any suggestions?

Any 'hairy' aviation moments and lessons learned?

Yes, the one that sticks in my mind is flying from Le Touquet to Granville on the West coast. The cloud was low so we flew legal VFR 'on top' for an hour using twin GPS and hoping that the cloud would clear at the coast and we could fly out to sea and drop underneath... It didn't. What made the situation worse was that we were both aware of a slowly dropping fuel pressure gauge. I have a vacuum driven AH, which does not work with the engine stopped, and I am IMC trained but I had about 3,000ft of cloud to get through and as we entered the cloud the fuel pressure was reading near on zero.

Thanks to the two GPS we popped out of the cloud base with 2,200ft to spare with the airfield right below us. The next day I had to fly to a Rotax agent near Paris to diagnose the problem, which we thought at the time was a fuel pump problem. That was fun, constantly looking for fields I might have

to land in! It turned out that the avgas I had picked up at Le Touquet was slowly blocking the fuel filter.

Another 'interesting' moment was flying directly from the West German border to Calais in near torrential rain and a low cloud base for two hours of a three-hour flight after ATC at Dahlemer Binz airport assured us that the weather was much better en route. They were so wrong.

Do you have an aircraft wish list?

Well I suppose a personal fighter type jet would be a lot of fun. I always fancied an ATG Javelin but the company failed before development was completed. All dreams of course, I'd have to win the Euro Lottery first. Failing that an amphibious aircraft that was good for use in salt water... Think of the possibilities living on an island.

What advice would you pass on to fellow pilots?

Never get complacent, no matter how many hours you have. A little bit apprehensive each time you fly is no bad thing. Stretch your limits with each flight, but never exceed your personal level with more than one challenge at a time. It is just so easy to get overloaded in the air, especially when on your own. ■