



Gary with his RV-9

MEET THE MEMBERS

This month we meet **Gary Smith**, one of the stalwarts of the LAA ET courses and an enthusiastic pilot and builder

Current job?

I'm an industrial control technician working predominantly in the electricity generating industry. Sounds a bit techy but basically I make sure the machinery works within the limits it was designed to.

What started your interest in aviation?

My dad learned to fly when I was a youngster and took me for a ride, I think from Shoreham; I was about eight years old. Unfortunately he packed up flying quite soon afterwards, probably the age old issue of having a young family to support. I then got into radio control modelling, first boats and then aircraft, which I'm still involved with.

How did you get back into flying?

I was about twenty and by chance drove along a lane and saw an aeroplane taking off from a field. I went in and discovered it was Farthing Corner airstrip. Everybody made me welcome and showed me the aeroplanes and I became a regular weekend visitor. Before long I was flying as a passenger here, there and everywhere, one of my first trips was with our editor to Moulins for the RSA Rally. Naturally I joined the Kent Strut as all the guys at Farthing Corner were, and still are, active members.

I was still at university at the time but I mustered the cash to buy a third share in a non-flying Piper Vagabond, which over the next few years we restored and got flying. During the rebuild I had learned to fly at Manston and my first trip in it was to a Cranfield Rally.

What do you fly now?

After flying the Vagabond for about eight

years, by which time I had bought out the other two shareholders, I wanted something that was twice as fast as the Vagabond, carried twice as much and could travel twice as far.

My shortlist came down to a Europa or an RV, and I plumped for a flat pack RV-9. It took me four years to build and has now been flying for six years.

Hours and types flown?

I have around 1,150 hours and apart from the Vagabond and RV have flown a Luscombe, C152 and PA-28. When you own an aeroplane, I guess you don't get to fly such a variety of types.

What's your involvement with LAA?

I'm now the Kent Strut Co-ordinator and I instruct on the LAA ET metalwork and RV composite training courses.

Favourite and worst aeroplanes?

Though I've never flown one, I think the Turbulent is a great little aeroplane, for me it epitomises what LAA is about – a simple, affordable way for almost anybody to get flying. I have built a one-third scale model with a flat twin four-stroke engine – who knows, maybe one day I'll take the plunge and build the real thing. I do have a hankering to build something else, not that I'd ever part with the RV, it does everything I wanted it to do and more.

I don't have a worst type really, I have limited experience on types and to date anything that flies is good by me.

Best and worst aviation experience?

My best experience was my first solo in

the RV. I didn't do the test flight and I had a proper checkout with a very experienced instructor before doing my first flight but it was an awesome experience compared to the rather sedate Vagabond.

Worst experience was, unsurprisingly, entirely of my own making. The Vagabond was based at a strip near Canterbury (there was no hangar space at FC) and late one January afternoon I left Farthing Corner for the short flight back. It was a clear blue sky day and though the sun had already gone down below the horizon I figured I had enough daylight to get back. I didn't. By the time I got back to the strip it was dark, so dark I couldn't even see the ground let alone the strip so I had to divert into Manston for my first ever night landing. Needless to say, the Vagabond had no panel lights and I couldn't see any of the instruments. It was -3°C outside but I had the window open and was really sweating it but luckily it turned out OK. I won't make that mistake again!

What is on your Wish List?

I'd love to fly around the world but somebody would have to sort out the bureaucracy for me, I couldn't be doing with the hassle Peter Gorman described on his trip to South Africa. Aircraft-wise I've always liked the Miles Gemini and the pretty little Partenavia twin. I'd love to have a go in them both.

Any advice for pilots and members?

If you have a spare seat, offer it to a non-flyer, that's how I got started and I now do that whenever I can. We must encourage the next generation of pilots to get involved.

And if you want to fly you'll not find a better way than to join the LAA. ■