



# JON COOKE

This month we talk to Jon Cooke, Chairman of the Association's Pilot Coaching Scheme which offers members a range of low-cost training and conversion courses

## **C**an you tell us about your career?

As a commercial pilot, I'm currently flying the A320 series aircraft for a major UK airline based at London Heathrow, having flown long-haul on the Boeing 777 and Boeing 747-400. Prior to that, I flew the Boeing 737 and the Handley Page Herald for other airlines.

Despite flying for a job, I am one of a number of airline pilots who still enjoy aviation in our spare time. In my role as Head of Training and Pilot Coaching Scheme chairman for the LAA, I have responsibility for flying and theoretical training provided by the LAA, compliance with EASA and CAA regulations, and for evaluation and standardisation of all LAA coaches. LAA

## **Jon in the cockpit of a Classic Wings' DH Dragon Rapide at Duxford**

oversight of the NPPL also keeps me busy with answering member enquiries and assisting Penny at LAA Head Office with NPPL enquiries and applications. I also conduct pilot coaching of LAA members and standardisation training for LAA coaches, including Class Rating Instructor seminars and revalidation, and renewal of instructor certificates. My LAA role occasionally takes me to the CAA, representing LAA members' interests primarily in the licensing and training arena.

Based at Wellesbourne Mountford, on days off from airline flying and LAA work, I'm part of an experienced instructor team at On-Track Aviation where we specialise in providing instructor and examiner training and testing in SEP, MEP, and TMG aircraft. Each day instructing at On-Track Aviation can be very varied, from Class Rating Instructor, Flight Instructor and Instrument Rating Instructor courses, to training instructors how to teach aerobatics, formation flying, instrument flying, training and testing for examiner certificates, instructor and examiner seminars, FAA training, and much more.

When time permits I can also be found occasionally assisting Classic Wings at

(Right) Doing what he loves best, instructing in a light aircraft, here a Christen Eagle



(Below) Jon and his personal Van's RV-6 that was imported from the US



Duxford, conducting experience flights or training pilots in its fleet of vintage aircraft. Flying from Duxford again has been a bit of a return to my roots, as a young commercial pilot I gained much experience instructing and pleasure flying there.

During the winter months, I also assist the General Aviation Safety Council (GASCo) with the development and presentation of Safety Evenings on behalf of the Civil Aviation Authority. This fits in well with my LAA role, encouraging pilot development and providing training in non-technical skills.

### What started your interest in aviation?

Well, I have my father and brother to thank (or blame!) for my interest in aviation. I was taught to fly model aircraft at a young age and watched as both my brother and father learned to fly, which inspired me to pursue a career in aviation. As a cadet in the Combined Cadet Force, I was awarded a RAF Flying Scholarship which I completed at Peterborough Conington on the Cessna 152 at the age of 17. I went on to become a full-time Flight Instructor, then on to airline flying, although I've always continued with light aircraft flying and instructing as a pastime.

Sat in the café at Wellesbourne a few weeks ago, I was pleased to see the aircraft I first went solo in taxi past, evidently still providing new

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pilots with the gift of flight, albeit with a new coat of paint.

### Where, when and in what was your first flight?

As part of the Combined Cadet Force, the shooting team had entered a competition which we went on to win. Part of the prize for us was a pleasure flight in a de Havilland DH.89A Dragon Rapide from Duxford. At the time I was unaware that circumstances, hard work and a bit of luck would mean that less than a decade later I would be sat in the pilot's

seat conducting pleasure flights in the same aircraft type from the same airfield!

### How many hours and types have you now flown?

Rather than disclose a total, I'll normally tell people that I am 'slowly getting the hang of it'. That's primarily because, once you completed a few years of airline flying, the totals start to become a bit irrelevant; it's more about what you've done to broaden your skill base and maintain proficiency flying light aircraft than the grand total. But, since you have asked directly, I have over 18,000 hours with more than 7,000 instructing, many of those on vintage aircraft. As for the number of types flown, I've never really kept count. A typical day instructing at some venues might include jumping in and out of four or five different types. My total number of types is simply 'a lot!'

### Do you have a favourite and worse type flown?

Not really, although there are some I have enjoyed flying more than others. A while back, a pilot I had taught to fly offered me a flight in his recently-purchased Luton Minor on a rather cold and windy day. Having spent the best part of ten minutes flying into wind after take-off, before turning downwind in the circuit, I doubt I will be in a rush to fly one again soon in those conditions.

## Meet the Members

For my hour-building, when that was part of the process to becoming a commercial pilot, we had owned a Piper J3 Cub with a cruise speed of 70mph which offered the opportunity to fly a lot without getting anywhere fast. En route to Skegness in fairly poor visibility, I was navigating by compass whilst broadly following a winding country road. Looking down I had noticed there was a car making much better progress than me – whilst towing a caravan! With also spending a lot of time in the back of Super Cubs whilst instructing, I will probably go back to the delightful handling, reliability and character of the Cub at some stage in the future.

### What is your current aeroplane?

I've owned a Van's RV-6 for the last five years which has served me well for getting about the place to various instructing and examining commitments. G-ORVI was imported from the US where she was built. After purchase, she was flown down to Chino, California, for dismantling and shipping, then re-assembled in the UK and a number of the Mandatory Permit Directives complied with before completing the test flying again over here. Van's series aircraft are versatile with a great balance of cruise speed against fuel consumption, coupled with short field performance, aerobatic and soon-to-be IFR approval. It's easy to see why they are so popular.

### Do you have a favourite aviation moment?

When Classic Wings started the de Havilland Dragon Rapide pleasure flights over central London some 20 years ago, the original CAA agreement was that the pilot had to hold a current single pilot Instrument Rating, although at the time the same question was asked by the Chief Pilot as you're probably asking now: why? When these were first flown, ATC used to clear the flight direct from Duxford through Stansted airspace to then pass over London City airport before heading westbound to Vauxhall bridge then south over Crystal Palace and returning via the Lea Valley at an altitude of not above 1,500ft AMSL.

My day job now takes me over central London several times a week when returning to Heathrow on the Instrument Landing System to Runway 27 Left or Right, but the view and experience is just not quite the same. It was a delight to recently be invited to re-fly this experience on a beautiful sunny day, piloting

**“Looking down I had noticed there was a car making much better progress than me – whilst towing a caravan!”**

myself and eight passengers in Classic Wings' Rapide G-AIYR over central London again – with some much taller skyscrapers this time!

Whilst full-time instructing, I enjoyed conducting the Farm Strip Special course at Clacton Aero Club, since it provided pilots with an insight into what LAA flying, for me, is all about – getting out and about and visiting places, meeting people, with some enjoyable and occasionally challenging flying thrown in. Students started the eight-hour course with a tailwheel conversion on the Piper PA-18 Super Cub, and once a safe level of proficiency was attained the extra few hours were spent teaching pilots the techniques required to safely operate into and out of a number of local farm strips. The course offered students a brief insight into 'our world'.

### Do you have non-aviation hobbies or interests?

As for any parent, bringing up a family has been enjoyable, challenging and rewarding. For most kids with a parent who is a pilot, as many other General Aviation pilots will relate to, aviation has been part of their growing up with the occasional fly-to-camp trips or fly-to-somewhere for a day out.

I am keen to get back into cycling which I enjoyed when long haul flying, but I seem to have less time down to rise now that I am flying short haul. A new bike is on my Christmas list. Not sure about the Lycra though...

### Any hairy aviation moments?

It would be very difficult to have got through the amount of instructing I've done without a few interesting moments. Some of the aircraft I have instructed in which are on the LAA fleet require a bit more of a 'leap of faith' than others. There are quite a few which require a more considered approach to how the training

will progress, by having to think through the issues presented to both student and instructor. Many aircraft have no brakes on the instructor's side or limited dual controls, which may provide less scope for taking control if needed. For example, the Long-EZ provides the instructor with just a short control column with no throttle, rudder or brakes in the back. When instructing on the monowheel Europa, an instructor has no differential braking so has limited scope to prevent a developing ground loop. As for training or testing new pilots on the Rapide, this requires even greater consideration with the instructor or examiner being sat in the first row of passenger seats behind the pilot.

As for answering your question about lessons learnt, when converting onto a new type, don't underestimate the challenge that operating a new aircraft type or from a new environment, such as a farm strip, might present. Your instructor will be looking to build your confidence and proficiency gradually, so allow sufficient time to get comfortable with your new environment. Once operating on your own, set yourself sensible personal minimums whilst you gain experience. Then expand your operating envelope by increasing your personal minimums gradually.

### Any aircraft you wish to fly or own?

I've been flying a wide variety of vintage aircraft for many years, and have also enjoyed owning and operating a few. Having flown a number of de Havilland aircraft, I am steered towards choosing a de Havilland type. Seeing the DH.88 *Comet Grosvenor* House fly again recently at Old Warden is an animated reminder of the pioneering spirit and development which was present during the period prior to the Second World War, and captures what was an amazing era for aviation in the UK.

### Any advice for fellow pilots?

Regularly review your own flying skills and proficiency. Consider which skills might need revision as well as areas where you would like to broaden your experience to make you a more competent and confident pilot. The LAA Pilot Coaching Scheme has approximately 50 experienced instructors distributed across the UK who are available to assist LAA members in safely developing their skills and proficiency. Find out more about it on the LAA website under 'Coaching'. ■

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