

MEET THE MEMBERS

MIKE CLEWS

Bringing GA to youngsters

This month we talk to Mike Clews, enthusiastic Europa pilot and mentor with the Joystick Club, encouraging a new generation into aviation

CURRENT DAY JOB/PAST CAREER?

I've been retired for nearly 15 years from flying for BA. I now spend lots of time organising events for the Joystick Club at White Waltham Airfield. We aim to enjoy ourselves whilst encouraging youngsters into aviation.

I also help with promoting the LAA YES programme. We have eight pedal planes for the really young (SE.5, Cub, Spitfire, Tiger Moth) and a Piper Tomahawk Cockpit (with dummy engine) mounted on a trailer which we take to local schools and events like the RAF families days at Northolt and Benson, and the 'Big Bang' School Stem Science technical engineering and maths day, near Haywards Heath.

We can add a basic simulator inside the Tomahawk so that it can be 'flown'. This makes for a much more interesting exhibit for the kids to try and they learn about flying. With John Michie and our under 65 years old pilot Max Hore, we've been flying the ex-students of Yateley School in the Rans S6 which they built, from White Waltham.

WHAT STARTED YOUR INTEREST IN AVIATION?

Being a Bristolian, aviation was all around in the 50s. My dad (who was a railwayman) took me by train to Filton to see the Brabazon come over the boundary fence. Aircraft pictures in the *Eagle* comic centre-fold, after my friend had finished with it, were eagerly looked forward to. By the time I was at junior school, a balsa and tissue glider was under construction.

WHEN WAS YOUR FIRST FLIGHT AND WHAT WAS IT IN?

In 1961, with another Boys Brigade friend, I took to the air from Blackpool to the IOM aboard a DC3, and a Bristol Freighter on return. I well remember watching all those loose rivets vibrating on the Dak's wing! Soon after, I saw an advert at Grammar School for an RAF Flying Scholarship and that started my flying future. I went to Biggin Hill for pilot selection and was successful, but decided to learn to fly at Bristol. I then went onto the College of Air Training at Hamble.

WHERE DID THAT LEAD?

I went to BEA flying Vickers Vanguards, and then onto Viscount and Trident 3 as a First Officer. The latter aeroplane was a bit of a ground gripper, so you had to be on top of the aircraft. I then got my first command on the Vickers Viscount, which was a lovely aeroplane to fly and was also very popular with passengers as the windows were large and added greatly to the enjoyment of flying around the Scottish Isles and the Channel Islands. I also flew BAC 1-11s based in Berlin during the Cold War. We had to fly below 10,000ft inside narrow corridors; it could be pretty challenging at times. This led onto the Boeings, including 737 around Europe, and the 757 to Moscow. We also took the 767s to places such as Bahrain and Nassau – much warmer and more pleasant!

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN THE LAA?

I joined the LAA in 1992, having bought into a Jodel 120A group, and started flying GA again after 25 years, thanks to a persistent Brian Lewis!



Mike on the wing of his Europa, an aircraft he shares with four other pilots

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HOW HAS THE LAA HELPED YOU?

The LAA obviously gave me the chance and support to start and see through the building of my Europa. A very good friend, Mike Duncombe, was the co-builder. We spent five years building her! Andy Draper has checked all of us out over the years. Permit renewal has become very straightforward with the speedy Permit issue by return post.

WHAT IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF TYPES OF AIRCRAFT AND HOURS YOU HAVE FLOWN?

Just over 17,000 hours, mainly short haul. I flew Chipmunks and the Apache at CAT Hamble, Vanguards and Trident 3s as co-pilot and had Command on the Viscount, BAC 1-11, B737/757/767. Besides the Jodel and Europa, I've tried a Turbulent, Pietenpol, C172 and last year, a Harvard.

IS THERE A FAVOURITE AND WORSE TYPE FLOWN?

The Viscount was brilliant, but the whole scenario of first command, experienced pilots and great cabin crew added immensely to the enjoyment. Maybe the Piper Apache was not that great – 200fpm on one engine if you were lucky, although on my quick ride in a Tiger

Moth (after a beer!) I couldn't hack it at all; it was like stirring treacle!

WHAT AEROPLANES DO YOU OWN?

Still G-OMIK, our Europa, now owned by five of us and the most recent member is only 20 years old. I learnt a lot during the building process about having to be patient!

WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR BEST AVIATION MOMENTS?

Witnessing Lightnings go vertically up at those magic SBAC Farnborough Airshows in the 60s, and flying into Glenforsa late May 2014. Also going to Oban.

Taking the Europa to Lisbon in three stages – Bergerac, Santandar, Lisbon - was great fun. Lovely areas to fly around and see. A Europa may not be the biggest aeroplane around, nor the fastest, but that trip proves it doesn't need to be. Good company, nice weather and good planning makes aviation touring a pleasure, no matter the speed of the aircraft.

DO YOU HAVE OTHER NON-AVIATION HOBBIES/INTERESTS?

I learnt to sail a Laser dinghy nearly 30 years ago and it gave me one of those adrenalin rushes you don't forget. I acquired a small

sailing boat later but have recently stopped throwing money into the briny. Other interests are family, of course, and gardening.

DO YOU HAVE ANY AVIATION HEROES?

Firstly my Engineering Drawing teacher, Mr Salt. He was an ex-Wellington bomber pilot and drove a Singer sports car. Typical pilot – sports jacket and all – a great influence while I was at St George's Grammar School. Also of course... Biggles, Bader, Bill Pegg (Bristol test pilot) and John Farley.

ANY HAIRY MOMENTS?

I couldn't possibly say, but I'm a firm believer in CAVOK flying and trying to fly towards the weather so I can turn and run for home if necessary.

ANY AIRCRAFT OR VEHICLES ON YOUR WISH LIST?

I would've liked a Jodel with a Rotax engine. So reliable and efficient, and easy to work on. An Aston Martin would be nice!

ANY ADVICE FOR FELLOW PILOTS?

Use your own judgement, trust yourself and don't get led astray. ■



A squadron of pedal planes that can be taken to local schools to encourage a new generation into aviation



The days of BEA Viscounts and Tridents, both of which Mike flew during his career

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