

MEET THE MEMBERS



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This month we meet Mike Mold, long-time LAA-er and founder member of the Devon Strut

Current job/past career?
I retired five years ago after 34 years in the water industry as a river biologist, microbiologist and latterly, a public health specialist, in the South West of England.

How did you get interested in aviation?

As a young lad I made Airfix kits, spent many a happy hour aeromodelling and was influenced by an elder cousin who had a comprehensive collection of books by W E Johns. So, like many of my contemporaries, I became an avid Biggles fan.

My parental home was under the downwind leg of Runway 09/27 at Barton (Manchester) so during the 1960s it was usual to see the club's Piper Colts and later, Cessnas in the circuit. The airfield drew me like a magnet, to make the half hour bike ride to watch, wash and hitch rides in the club machines whenever I could. The BTN VOR also brought commercial traffic overhead, en-route to Manchester (Ringway) Airport so the airband 'trannie' was always on. In my mid teens, I was fortunate enough

to meet a chap who'd just completed his PPL at Barton and who took me under his wing (literally). Over a period of months he gave me several hours of dual in a C150 to the point where I was confident to land it myself. His wife was concerned about him having a coronary and I was the insurance policy! When he then bought a C172 and subsequently a C206, we enjoyed day trips with a couple of my schoolmates, to other airfields all over the northern UK.

One day at Barton I witnessed the first flight of Mike Bowden's Jodel D9 G-AXOI and I was fascinated by the novelty of this single-seat homebuilt, never suspecting my later years would be so influenced by this experience. It was a sign!

After finishing university in the early '70s, I had a week's gliding holiday at the Lakes Gliding Club (GC) on Walney Island in the Lake District and followed this up, when I worked in SW Wales, by becoming a member, and Secretary, of the Vale of Neath GC. Subsequently moving to Devon in 1976, I joined the Devon & Somerset GC at North Hill

and had a quarter share in a vintage Olympia 2B glider. That summer was an excellent one for thermalling and I still recall my first winch launch which resulted in a climb to cloud-base at about 8,500ft.

Whilst still gliding at North Hill most weekends, I also gained my PPL at Exeter Flying Club in 1980 and made the transition from the C150 and C152 to their C172. When a syndicate partner wrote off the Oly in a field landing, I bought a 1/7 share in Fournier RF5B G-KCIG, based at Exeter and started to enjoy the delights of motorgliding. Whilst 'IG was not the best thermalling machine, it certainly proved its worth as a wave rider, as well as providing relatively cheap touring, with its Limbach VW engine sipping 10 litres of mogas per hour. This was my first experience of operating on a Permit to Fly and the £50 per month standing order plus mogas covered all our costs, and was easily affordable, despite me by then having a hefty mortgage and a young family.

First flight – in what, where and when?

My father had been a radio operator in the



Mike is a regular rally attendee, here in his Jodel D9 at Kemble in 2003



RAF but was de-mobbed with a duodenal ulcer before seeing any wartime service. However, the aviation connection was still there and on a daytrip in the family Morris Minor that took us past Ringway in 1959, he made an impromptu decision to turn into the southside viewing area car park and buy us a pleasure flight in Auster G-AGXN. I still remember the exhilaration and that eureka moment when the wheels left the ground and I knew then that this was something I had to do. Thereafter, my school studies were paralleled by my absorption of everything in the Flight Briefing for Pilots books by Birch and Bramson.

The Auster flight was followed by a trip in DH Foxmoth G-ACEJ from Blackpool Sands. The two remaining Foxmoths 'EJ and G-AOJH were both kept at Barton and it's good to know they are still airworthy in the UK.

How long in the PFA/LAA?

I first joined the PFA in 1976 and, with a couple of friends, travelled from home in Exeter to the Wessex Strut's monthly meetings at Lydford-on-Foss. Eventually, with Dave Silsbury and Richard Webber (the Auster guru), we became founder members of the Devon Strut in 1979. I've been a committee member since 1986, as Co-ordinator and then National Council Rep, and I'm currently the Newsletter and Website Editor.

Without being complacent, the Devon Strut has been a creditable success story. The committee members have been conscious of the need to put aside any self-interest and egos for the sake of the greater good of the members and we've worked well as an enthusiastic team to make things happen. We've seen the membership grow over the years to be in excess of 200 and now includes LAA members from other parts of the UK and Europe as well as ex-pats in NZ and the USA. We've also been fervent supporters of the PFA through its transition to the LAA but without shrinking from constructive criticism, through the auspices of the National Council, whenever we've perceived the need to champion the interests of our members.

Favourite and worst types flown?

I've enjoyed all the aircraft I've owned; the Fournier and four Jodels: DR1050M, D9, D.112



Lovely period shot of DH Fox Moth G-ACEJ in which Mike had a joy ride from Blackpool sands as a youngster over 50 years ago. The aircraft is still operational.



Arriving at the 1985 Cranfield Rally in the Fournier RF5B, an aircraft that taught Mike a salutary lesson.

and now a D.117A but the D.112 was a sweet machine that looked after me on trips into and out of many farm strips and on touring trips throughout the UK and across the Channel.

Having experienced a range of vintage types, as well as more modern Pipers and Cessnas, I was struggling to recall a machine with which I'd been truly uncomfortable until, looking through my logbooks, I found an entry for a local flight from Watchford Farm in an RAF 2000 gyro which brought flashbacks I'd thought I'd deleted from my memory banks. It was an early model 2000, before the modification to incorporate a horizontal stabiliser. Although the P1 was an experienced ex-military helicopter pilot and was reassuring, I found the ultra sensitivity in pitch had us careering around the local countryside with the screen alternately filling with green and blue as I struggled to get ahead of the machine. I still recall the look on the golfer's face as we avoided the second fairway at Taunton golf course!

Do you currently own an aeroplane?

I've owned Jodel D.117A G-GFEH for the past two years, based at Watchford Farm in East Devon. The 117 is arguably one of the best of the Jodel marques with a good combination of short field performance, whilst being a very capable touring machine. I'm looking forward to doing more touring with this Jodel than I did with my previous machines.

Do you have a best aviation moment?

It's difficult to choose! My first solo was memorable, in a Ka-4 glider from Drymmau Farm, a stony hill-top strip near Swansea, in

1975 – the sheer exuberance of the increased rate of climb without the instructor on board, the field dropping away below me, getting ridge lift against the backdrop of the stunning view across Swansea Bay from the Port Talbot steel works, past the oil refinery and across to the Gower Peninsula; and the decision to do just one more beat along the ridge before defying the clutching hand on the approach.

Getting to 12,500ft in wave over North Devon in a strong northerly coming off the Brecon Beacons in the Fournier was spectacular. I believe that after the syndicate disbanded, the RF5B was sold oop north and is still operated from Aboyne in Scotland.

Taking my Jodel D9 across the Channel for the first time, to the Jodel Fly-in at St Omer. As I coasted out from Hythe towards Cap Gris Nez, I became aware of a drumming sound that I'd not experienced before. The D9 cockpit was a tight fit but as I shifted my position slightly the resonance changed and only then did I realize that the drumming sound was coming from the plywood sides of the cockpit against which my knees were braced! Once I relaxed, normal service was resumed. The St Omer Fly-in is still a must-do event and is not confined to Jodel fliers. The hospitality from the organisers is second to none and the evening meal in the large hangar is a delicious combination of good food and convivial company.

Trips in my D.112 G-BHNL to Bernay and Quiberon in France were thoroughly enjoyable but going to the Northern Lights Regional Rally at Wick in May 2007 was special and made all the more enjoyable for being in the company of mates with a similar style of humour with which to take you apart! From Devon we routed via Sywell to overnight at Fishburn before heading across the border to Scone and on over the highlands to Wick where Bill McCarthy had organised hotels for all the attendees. Then on to Tommy Sinclair's strip on Lamb Holm for a fresh crab lunch before heading for home via a cold night under canvas at Oban, then Carlisle and Barton.

I've also had a few delightful trips whilst on holiday at Sun 'n Fun in Florida over recent years, including a local sortie doing aros in a Harvard from Kissimmee and flying Piper Cubs on floats at Jack Brown's Seaplane Base. Both thoroughly recommended!

Any aviation heroes? If so, who and why?

Francis Chichester, for his amazing feats of long distance, solo navigation. He developed the Observer's Planisphere of Air Navigation Stars in 1931, which I believe was used by the RAF for teaching astronavigation, and a copy of which I consider to be one of my prized possessions. >



Current mount, Mike's Jodel D.117A in which he hopes to expand his continental touring experience.

MEET THE MEMBERS AND CEO THOUGHTS

Richard Bach, Ernest K Gann and Gordon Baxter all translated their flying experiences into well-crafted writings that inspired me through my early flying years.

Eric 'Winkle' Brown is up there with the gods, for his unrivalled experience as a test pilot and his unassuming manner in describing his exploits. I consider it to have been an honour to meet him when he was guest speaker at a Devon Strut meeting in 2006.

Any hairy aviation moments and if so, lessons learnt?

Local flying in the Fournier and getting a bead on an USAF F1-11 climbing out of the Dartmoor ranges, only to be bounced by his wingman. Lesson learned: watch your 6!

My one prang (so far) was in the Fournier and resulted in my pride, confidence and friendship with my syndicate partners taking a hammering, not to mention a two-year rebuild of the aeroplane. I'd been soaring to the north west of Exeter in scratchy thermals and had been engine-off for nearly four rather demanding hours before the lift began to decay and I decided to turn the engine back on and head for home. But I'd kept the radio on to monitor the Exeter Approach frequency and the battery was as dead as a Dodo. I tried a dive re-start but to no avail. By then I was down to about 1,500ft agl and was looking for fields. One looked useful and a quick turn onto base and then final over the trees as I dropped the wheel resulted in a smooth arrival.

Feeling a bit shaken but relieved to be down in one piece, I then pondered my options. In truth, the field had an incline uphill into wind, the grass was not short and the field length was marginal. I'm sure you know the rest, least said and all that, but the barbed wire fence wrapped itself around the prop and the four 4ft oak posts punched holes in the leading edge of the wing and cracked the main spar. The experience haunts me still.

I enjoyed 14 fantastic years flying my Jodel D9 G-BGFJ but on my first flight in it from Dunkeswell, I did a two hour trip comprising a local cross country with a general handling evaluation and ended with three circuits. I topped up the tank afterwards and it took just over 22 litres. When I asked the previous owner to confirm the tanks capacity, he said 23 litres! Lesson learned: prepare thoroughly before going flying, especially if new to the type.

Aircraft wish list – to fly or own?

Apart from a fascination since boyhood with the DH Mosquito, I love the Miles and Percival creations from the 1930 and 40s. It's great to see that Proctor G-AKIU will be airworthy again after a protracted period of restoration and is to be resident at the Classic Air Force museum at Newquay.

Any advice you'd like to offer?

If you're reading this and are not yet an LAA member, join today! It gives you access to the best value flying there is, a great community of pilots and aviation enthusiasts, an excellent magazine and is a powerful influence on the direction of recreational flying in the UK. Then join your nearest Strut to be part of what's happening at the grass-roots, and use the Pilot Coaching Scheme for your Biennial Flight Reviews and any other training you require. ■