



NO LONGER WITTERING

This month we talk to light aircraft and glider pilot Toni Hausler who we met on the LAA Anniversary Tour

Hello and welcome Toni. Tell us something about your current job and education.

Having studied physical geography and geology at university, until recently I was a teaching assistant, which involved bluffing about geology to students who probably knew far more about rocks than I did. I'm currently taking time off from real work to build flying hours.

What started your interest in flying?

I'm told that I first started "wittering about aeroplanes" after my first trip across the Atlantic as a very small brat. Or possibly it was something to do with the adventures of Dilbert the 747. It was mostly a dormant interest until discovering – in my late teens or so – that actually ordinary people could fly aircraft, and you didn't have to be stupendously rich or in the RAF to do so.

(Above) Toni Hausler in her Fournier RF5B, nicknamed *Maus*, hence the logo.

In what, where and when was your first flight?

Towards the end of secondary school, as a reward for not embarrassing the family with my exam results, I was given a voucher for a couple of trial flights in a glider, so my first flight in a light aircraft was in a Puchacz at Deeside Gliding Club, near Aboyne. It was a ten-minute 'sled ride' on a cold and bumpy day, with only the briefest snatch at the controls, but that was enough of a hook. The very next flight was an hour spent soaring in wave.

Where did you learn to fly and in what (powered and gliders)?

I spent a happy two years learning to glide at Aboyne, then continued with the Scottish

Gliding Centre at Portmoak while at university. There was a Falke syndicate based there which, if you had a BGA glider pilot's licence and enough pennies to buy a share, would train you to NPPL SLMG standard.

A few years later I upgraded that to a PPL in a Cessna 152 at the Moray Flying Club, based at RAF Kinloss. Flying from a huge tarmac runway and having to contend with ATC was a bit of a shock to the system. Now I'm firmly based at Easterton, and have just been converted onto the tiny tug for the local gliding club. So the education is still ongoing and always will be.

How did you hear about the LAA?

I joined the LAA around four years ago, when my then-friend (now partner) John offered me a share in his charismatic Fournier RF5B. The origin of her name, *Maus*, and how she came into and changed my life, is a long story for another day, but that was my introduction to the idea of maintaining your own aircraft.



(Above) In a Eurofox being used as a glider tug.



(Right) Toni started flying gliders at Aboyne.

(Left) Toni and her partner John have just taken on an Aeronca Champ.



How has the LAA helped you?

It's nice to feel part of a community which can provide anything from engineering support and flying advice to fun days out. It also makes owning and looking after an aircraft much more affordable and accessible than it otherwise could be.

I'm not particularly mechanically adept, but being able to assist with a simple fabric repair or mess around with a cantankerous carburettor is very satisfying, and you get to know your aircraft much better that way. On the other hand, any problems become your problem... you can't just hand a broken aeroplane over to the flying school mechanic and ask them to fix it!

What is your total number of types and hours flown?

I have around 130 power hours so far, with about the same again in gliders, and somewhere between nine and twenty types – depending on whether a shot at the controls of somebody else's aircraft counts. The gliding community probably considers me a traitor now I've gone to the dark side of power, and I haven't flown a 'true' glider for three or four years now, of which I am duly ashamed.

Do you have a favourite and worst type flown?

The Fournier RF5B (specifically *Maus* – no other would do) is of course my favourite aeroplane and I love her dearly, quirks and all. She has taken me on many gentle adventures and dispensed a good deal of quiet wisdom.

The Schleicher K8 I had a share in while at Portmoak was a delightful, happy little skydancer which excelled at wafting upwards in the slightest puff of lift, and could turn (and land) on a sixpence. I was also briefly allowed to manhandle the controls of a Stearman at

Little Gransden once. It felt wonderfully agricultural, like flying a tractor.

As for worst type – admitting this will probably be unpopular, but I didn't get on too well with the Cessna 152. There were too many switches and dials, the control layout was awkward and the undercarriage was the wrong way round! They are of course very sturdy, dependable and capable little aircraft – the problem was with me, not with the long-suffering 152. We made our peace though, or at least a wary sort of truce, by the end of my PPL training.

What is your currently owned aeroplane(s)?

Maus is very much part of the family, mostly used for playing in the local thermals but sometimes venturing further afield. She's a great conversation starter at fly-ins, as many folk will come over and reminisce about their gliding experiences. John and I also recently adopted an Aeronca Champ, sadly nameless, which we're looking after with the aim of reuniting her with her previous owner someday.

They both have roughly the same speed range and endurance, but are otherwise sufficiently different in their capabilities to keep my brain active. Next year I hope to take the Champ to visit some of the local airfields that *Maus* can't comfortably get into.

Do you have a favourite flying moment?

One of the most memorable flights was flying back home from a Fournier Rally at Husbands Bosworth with an RF3 (the only other Fournier in Scotland) for company, bobbing gently beside our wingtip most of the way.

More recently John and I spent a happy summer evening chasing another Champ and a Pietenpol around the local area... my formation flying was rubbish but we had fun

anyway. Nearly every flight has some sort of best moment to it, whether it's dipping your wing into a magnificent cloud or looking down the length of Loch Ness on a clear day.

What attracted you to the LAA 70th Tour?

I'd never gone on a serious solo tour before, and felt it was the sort of thing I ought to be doing but wasn't quite sure where to begin. The LAA tour appealed not only because of the sense of purpose it provided, but also for the relatively supportive and friendly environment it afforded a nervous pilot and her fussy aeroplane.

My effort was pretty low key compared to the others who joined the tour – I only stayed for two of the 'official' night stops, but it still made for a good five-day trip. I joined the tour at Perth and continued via Carlisle to Barton, before heading home via Sutton Bank and Portmoak. *Maus* was a real trouper throughout but made it pretty clear she wanted to be back in her nice dry hangar by the end of it.

Do you feel you learned anything from the trip?

The flying part was fun (and character-building in places), but most of all I enjoyed meeting the folk involved. Most were vastly more experienced pilots than me and yet quite happy to offer anecdotes, advice and even nice remarks about my aeroplane.

At every airfield people seemed to go out of their way to help me move the aircraft around, refuel, defuel (extra gratitude to Allan at Perth, who siphoned out a load of debris which had been in my tank for years) and even show me the best route to the fuel pumps at

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Barton to allow for my wingspan.

I also received the dubious distinction of being the first motorglider to land at Carlisle "without breaking down on the taxiway", according to the nice folk at the reception desk. I'm still pondering that one.

Most of all I learned a new respect for mountain wave on the return journey. It's all very well when you're in a sailplane and free to go hither and yon as required, or in an aircraft with enough spare power to get you out of trouble. But persuading *Maus* to get from A to B in a reasonably straight line over the Cheviots (and later the Cairngorms), in the knowledge that I couldn't out climb the 'down' of the wave, had me thinking very hard about which side of which hill to fly on.

Would you tour again?

On my wall is a low-flying military chart, covering from the Orkneys down to around Linton-on-Ouse, and there are twenty little coloured flags stuck to it so far. There are still many more airfields to 'collect', so many more mini-tours in prospect...and maybe a few bigger ones too. It's always more fun when you have an objective, or somebody to fly with, or both.

Do you have any aviation heroes?

There are many. Mira Slovak, who crossed the Atlantic in a Fournier RF4D with all of 36hp. Margrit Waltz's adventures in ferry flying are worth looking up, not only for her piloting skills but also her professionalism and general character.

Proudly displayed in my bookshelf is *Wings Around the World*, which tells the story of Baron von Koenig-Warthausen and the tiny Klemm

with which he flew around the world at a sedate pace in the late 1920s. Anybody who has done something at least mildly remarkable in a small, low-powered aeroplane counts as a hero in my book.

Most of all, I was lucky enough to meet René Fournier at his 95th birthday party in France this year – it's not often you get to meet the man directly responsible for bringing your aircraft into existence.

Are you hoping to have a career in aviation?

I've told enough people about my intentions to get a CPL that I'll get in trouble if I don't do it! Most of all I would love to fly water-bombers, but there's not much call for that kind of thing in Scotland, so that particular dream is on the shelf for now.

It seems there's a wealth of 'niche' jobs in aviation if you look hard enough. Maritime patrol or survey flying appeals very much. So does instructing – enough instructors have given up their time for me in the past that I figure it's only right to try to give something back. Then again, maybe it wouldn't be fair on my potential students!

Have you had any aviation moments that have taught you lessons?

Hmmm. The one I am least proud of is taking off with what turned out to be a partially jammed rudder in a 152 – I'd assumed it was just me doing something stupid with the nose-wheel steering. Fortunately, the flight itself was uneventful and the problem mysteriously resolved itself upon handing the aircraft over to the next pilot.

Later, after a lengthy search, my instructor

found a rogue fuel tester rolling around the cockpit floor, which may or may not have been the cause. So a super-obvious lesson learned is not to take a problem with you into the air – don't assume it's 'just you'. Stop and check!

A much more entertaining hairy moment was arriving at a fly-in at Longside in the RF5B, turning off to enter the single taxiway and being thwarted by a series of old lighting posts spaced along the edges. Evidently they'd never had a motorglider visit before! A plaintive wail on the radio brought several locals running out to help, whereupon they started to break all the old wooden posts down to the ground so I could pass.

The image of *Maus* sailing slowly and majestically up the taxiway, with her entourage scurrying ahead to remove each set of posts, will stay with me forever. Despite (or maybe because of) the grand entrance, *Maus* was a big hit and the locals were very good-natured about the loss of their posts. As one of them said, at least it's now safe for me to visit again...

Do you have any other hobbies or interests?

Drawing, painting, wrestling the garden into submission... and being shanghaied into helping to strip and repaint my father's wooden yacht on an almost-yearly basis.

And what about your aviation and automotive wish list?

The 'astronomically unlikely to ever happen' list has the magnificent Martin Mars right at the top. Slightly more realistically, I would love to fly a Pawnee, a Rapide, a water-bomber of any sort and any quirky Golden Age type of light aircraft. Mostly I'm a sucker for older taildraggers with lots of personality. But in terms of owning, I would never replace *Maus* with anything... not even a Mars.

And finally, what piece of advice would you pass on?

Get some time in a glider – even if only a handful of flights. It teaches you a great deal about energy management, both in harnessing what the atmosphere has to offer and also in handling your own aircraft more effectively at all stages of flight. Soaring principles apply to any aircraft, with no obligation to turn the engine off. The fuel you can save by throttling back slightly while flying along a good cloud street soon adds up. ■



Partner John airborne in the Fournier RF5B, very much Toni's favourite aircraft.

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