



MEET THE MEMBERS

This month we meet Wessex Strut co-ordinator Vic Southan, who flies out of Henstridge

Current job/past career?
 In the days when Britain had an aircraft industry, I started my career as a Hawker apprentice at Kingston which culminated in working on final assembly of Hunters, Gnats and exciting early days of the P1127/Kestrel/Harrier at Dunsfold.

I joined BEA in 1965 on Trident major checks and modifications at Heathrow and immediately then joined the BA flying club at White Waltham and Booker, gaining a PPL a year later on Beagle Terriers.

After a few years I caught the travel bug, signing on to work only outside the UK as an Overseas Station Engineer. I was an expat then for most of the following 40 years, living in many countries as BA's Station Maintenance Manager, looking after and certifying BA and many other customer airline's operations. My longest contract postings were Zagreb, Vienna, Stuttgart, Nice, Helsinki and Milan, with periods in a pool of flying engineers covering thousands of services mostly in Eastern Europe. In the last few years with BA I did many long assignments in places like Mombasa, Nairobi, Dubai, and Bangalore.

Although I retired four years ago, I am still a current EASA Part 66 B1 Licensed Aircraft Engineer, so if you have an A320(IAE/CFM), B737, B757, B777 (RR/GE), B767(RR/PW/GE) you want looking after... please let me know!

My light aircraft cover is a group multiple piston metal structure under 5,700kg, part 66 B1.

Regretfully, I don't hold a reciprocating engine licence, being a jet man from birth!

How did you get interested in Aviation?

My dad was a WWII Flt Lt Pilot in Coastal Command on anti U-boat B24 Liberators and Whitleys. From my earliest memories I recall he used to take me to Heathrow and Farnborough in our Ford 8. I even remember seeing the Brabazon and the Comet 1. We lived in Twickenham and when LHR was on easterlies we used to get Super Connies and DC-7s rattling our windows on their night departures. What a wonderful noise they made, plus the amazing exhaust flames – they would probably be banned now! Yes, I definitely caught aviation from my father during the 1950s.

First flight – in what, where and when?

Auster (Aiglet I think) G-AIGU from Fairoaks in 1957. It cost 7/6 (that's seven shillings and six pence, 37½p for you youngsters!). I had saved up for weeks!

How long in the LAA/PFA?

I've been a member for 30 years, and Wessex Strut co-ordinator for three years. And before you ask, I have 510 hours and have flown 22 different types.

Favourite and worst type flown?

My favourite is the Piper Cub. Back in late 1960s I used to moonlight doing light aircraft maintenance at Blackbushe, and the owner used to pay me in flying hours on his J-3 Cub,

G-AXHR. I remember it had a dead fly in the oil pressure gauge – great fun! Also the BA Club had a Jodel DR1050 for a while at that time, a joy to fly (at £3.50 per hour, amazing!). I wasn't too keen on the Tri-Pacer and Colt, but would not mind trying them again one day.

Do you have a current aeroplane?

A few years ago I sold my share in an Archer at White Waltham and we moved down to the West Country. I now live near Henstridge, where the airfield owner has formed a group around a Rallye and a TB-10 and, thanks to him and the NPPL, I am current again.

Do you have a best aviation moment?

Whilst based in Nairobi I got a Kenyan endorsement to my PPL and did some great flying from Wilson Airport. Then, upon transferring to Mombasa, I was able to hire an old Cherokee 180. Initially I flew up and down the coast, then I got braver and started to venture inland. My best flight ever has to be about 130nm (no GPS or Nav aids) into Tsavo West Park to a gravel strip on the side of Lake Jipe, on the Tanzanian Border where my wife and I had been invited to a tented safari camp for a weekend. It was a fabulous place with Kilimanjaro as a constant backdrop. I found it difficult to relax at times, as I was concerned that elephants might be scratching their bums on the Cherokee, which was the only aircraft there for the two nights! Before the 40°C take-off with no wind, we had to clear the strip of their monstrous droppings, plus some termite mounds. What then followed was a >



MEET THE MEMBERS - CEO THOUGHTS

very 'interesting' departure – the old Hershey Bar wing Cherokee not being a great climber at the best of times.

Another memorable flight was taking my then 87 year old and over 10,000 hour dad to Old Warden... without frightening him! Well, if I did, he was too polite to say so!

Any aviation heroes – if so who and why?

Neville Duke had just retired as chief test pilot when I joined Hawkers but he was still around as he had joined the sales department. He kept his Comanche at Dunsfold and we apprentices were allowed to fuel/oil it – a great honour indeed! Then one day he said, "Jump in," and he took two of us for a quick ride. He was a real gentleman and our hero. Many years later I had the privilege to meet his widow, Gwen, at a Compton Abbas event held in his memory. She was kind enough to sign my copy of his famous book, Test Pilot.

Any 'hairy' aviation moments and if so, lessons learnt?

My wife and I were attempting to fly to Key West in an AA5 Tiger. We landed at Marathon with about 50 miles to go as the sky ahead to the south became very black with flashes of lightning. After a quick coffee, the advice from the weather man in the FSO was, "Get your arse north pretty damn quick." It then became incredibly humid, about 35°C with dew point about 32°C as we departed (in a hurry) – long taxi, quick power check and away, just as we were airborne the engine began vibrating and losing RPM... we were not climbing and there were two choices: road or ditch in the sea! After a couple of applications of carb heat and a further minute or so of anxiety, what must have been carb icing cleared, and we started to gain altitude and safely returned to Fort Lauderdale.

The lesson learned? On **EVERY** pre-departure power check, select heat for at least ten seconds, not just to check for RPM drop but to actually heat the carb. Never be rushed and remember, carb icing can happen in a warm climate!

Back in the mid 1990s when living in Nice, I arranged to take some friends for a quick flight from Cannes Mandelieu to Frejus with their very keen 13 year old son. I then had to cancel when they all arrived at the airport due winds gusting 35kt. I made arrangements for same day following week. When they arrived a week later the weather was again marginal with very strong winds, but I stupidly took them up anyway, as they were so keen, then wished I had said no! It was incredibly rough with the couple soon sick (but their son loved it of course!) and I very nearly had to divert due to crosswinds, but landed OK in the end. The parents will probably never go in a light aircraft ever again, a real shame.

Lesson #2: **NEVER** allow the decision to fly be affected by your passengers' disappointment.

Aircraft wish list – to fly or own?

I would love to fly a Falco; it has to be the most beautiful single-engine aircraft ever. I would love to own a Cub, and please may I have a go in a Silence Twister, Tiger Moth, Comanche and a Bonanza?

Any advice you'd like to offer?

Yes. Steer clear of the Cardiology Department at the CAA Medical Centre at Gatwick – they never seem to let go! ■