

MEET THE MEMBERS

PLAYBOY PILOT

WENDY HINCHCLIFFE

This month we talk to Wendy Hinchcliffe, Stits SA3A Playboy pilot and membership secretary of the Historic Aircraft Association

WHAT STARTED YOUR INTEREST IN AVIATION?

My father was a de Havilland apprentice at Stag Lane, so aviation and engineering were regular topics at home. He went on to work at Bristol Siddeley, before becoming an Engineering Instructor at the Technical School at Leavesden. As a family we used to go to the Open Days, which always included an airshow. I remember being aged about five or six and watching the pilots walking out to their aircraft, and wanting to be one of them. Since that time I always dreamed of being able to fly but didn't imagine that I would ever be able to. We would have family trips to airshows and aviation museums, including the de Havilland Aircraft Museum at London Colney, and I would read all of dad's flying books. I took a book called *A Beginners Guide to Flying* by Mary Francis out of the library and kept renewing it. I also made a flight simulator out of a cardboard box, a bamboo cane and string - one up on *Blue Peter*!

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FIRST FLIGHT

My first flight was at a PFA Rally at Sywell in the early 1970s. An Islander was giving joyrides and my parents bought tickets for my brother and me to go up. My next flight was a trial lesson at Denham Flying Training School when I was 16 and had started work. The school agreed that I could have a half-hour lesson a week, which took my entire wages. I went solo just after my 17th birthday and had my PPL by the time I was 18. I went on to complete the club aerobatic rating and entered some standard class aerobatic competitions using their Cessna Aerobat (hard work!).

DO YOU HAVE OTHER, NON-AVIATION, INTERESTS?

I still enjoy gardening even though it has become my job. Between working full-time, flying and my role as the membership secretary for the Historic Aircraft Association (a job I got thanks to Steve Slater, which I have now done for four years), I don't have much time for anything else!

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN AN LAA MEMBER?

Roger (my husband) and I have been members of the LAA for about six years and with their support we have rebuilt two aircraft, an Isaacs Fury and a Stits Playboy. We have found the advice and engineering support very helpful; Francis Donaldson and Matt Boddington have been great, so membership has been very worthwhile.

HOW MANY HOURS AND WHAT TYPES HAVE YOU FLOWN?

I have 350 hours. Having learned to fly on a Cessna 150 Aerobat, I converted to taildraggers on a Chipmunk. Since then I have flown in whatever I have been given the chance to fly - about 15, mainly tailwheel, types.

WAS THE TAILDRAGGER CONVERSION DIFFICULT?

No, I really enjoyed it. I was taught by Brian Lecomber (who sadly has recently passed



Wendy taxis in at this year's Rally in her much cherished Stits Playboy G-BGLZ

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away) when I was 17. I think taildragger aircraft are great fun and they give you so many more options of types to fly; plus many of them are much more affordable to own.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE AND WORSE TYPE FLOWN?

I am very fond of the Chipmunk but my favourite has to be my Stits Playboy. I think that anything that gets you into the air is good but I was never able to get on with the Cessna 172. I found it too heavy on the controls and the instrument panel is so high that I had a job to see over it, even with cushions.

DO YOU CURRENTLY OWN AN AEROPLANE?

Yes, Stits SA3A Playboy, G-BGLZ. It's the greatest fun to fly as it is very responsive and well behaved. I was quite nervous before my first flight because I hadn't flown a single-seater before but it gave me a lot of confidence from the first time I flew it. It seems to enjoy flying as much as I do!

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BEST AVIATION MOMENT?

There have been a few. Probably the first flight in the Playboy (23 May this year) and realising that I had an aircraft that suited me perfectly.

“I found it too heavy on the controls and the instrument panel is so high that I had a job to see over it, even with cushions”

It took us three years to build it after seeing it for sale on the board in the Homebuilders centre at the Rally. What a great find. Looking out at the world past those small red wings is very special. I feel so very lucky to be able to do it.

There are so many golden moments, either flying with friends or on my own. A friend and I flew a Tri-Pacer to France in the early 1970s. We were the 'baggage plane' as the other flyers with us had Pitts Specials and a Chipmunk. Flying across the Channel and touring France made me realise that there are many sides to aviation.

DO YOU HAVE ANY AVIATION HEROES?

Yes, the ATA girls who proved that women are just as capable as men of flying every kind of aircraft. I also admire Carolyn Grace who mastered flying the Spitfire and then progressed to display standard whilst also being a mother to two children. We all know how difficult it can be to juggle home, school and work at the best of times.

ANY AIRCRAFT OR VEHICLES ON YOUR WISH LIST?

I wouldn't swap the Playboy for anything!

WHAT WORDS OF WISDOM WOULD YOU OFFER FELLOW PILOTS?

I would advise any new PPL wondering that the next step should be to do a tailwheel conversion course. It opens up the range of interesting aircraft to fly enormously, and means that you can fly in and out of smaller airstrips, which also opens up the places that you can visit and enjoy. ■



Wendy with the Piper Pacer, G-BFAO, which she shared with a friend for a few years in the early 80s. It was later sold to the late John Day, who bought it to learn to fly tailwheels.



(Above) Wendy in the Denham-based Chipmunk G-BCRX, in which she was checked out by Brian Lecomber. It was while flying the Chippie that she met future husband Roger.