



ABOVE 'Without limits' hire means fly-outs are more popular than ever
BELOW relax outside on the decking and plan your flight or simply watch airfield life



Pound stretching club flying

Steve Bridgewater visits Wellesbourne's Take Flight Aviation - a credit-crunch busting flying club that prides itself on hiring 'without limits'



Take Flight has invested in a comfortable clubroom making it more likely that members will stay around after flying and socialise

It's probably fair to say that we're all feeling the pinch at the moment and until those much awaited green shoots finally mature it is unlikely to get any better.

For a number of pilots the answer to a diminishing budget has been to reduce their flying hours. Many of us have also sold shares in our aeroplanes to make ownership more affordable. Some have even sold up or stopped flying all together. However, Take Flight Aviation boss Mike Roberts thinks there is another option... a new type of aircraft hire scheme which offers up a fleet of aircraft 'without limits'.

"I acquired Take Flight Aviation in 2005" Mike explains. "And I've made it

my mission to promote both cost-effective flying and fun flying. From the outset I wanted Take Flight Aviation to be a genuine alternative to aircraft ownership."

Renting an aircraft is usually more expensive than having your own... but not all of us have the capital to buy that aeroplane in the first place. Then there is also the constant worry that an expensive bill is just around the corner should your own aircraft become unserviceable. For many the next best option to owning an aircraft is to buy a share in one but you still have the fear of expensive bills (and the worry that somebody else may damage it and you all have to pay a share of the repair).

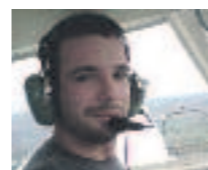
So Take Flight Aviation's new scheme

is fairly similar to group ownership in that you pay £40 per month to be a member (£20 if you are a student) after which you just pay for every hour you fly. However, unlike a syndicate, you do not have the financial burden if an aeroplane breaks... and you also have the choice of five aeroplanes to fly - three PA-28s, a Cessna 150 Aerobat and a PA-32 Cherokee Six.

"Like in a syndicate our members enjoy aircraft hire rates which are pretty much at cost price," explains Mike. "The club is funded by the membership subscriptions and also corporate operators and private owners who utilise the clubhouse building."

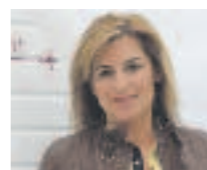
This means members can hire the 140hp Cherokee for just £89 per

WHAT THE MEMBERS SAY



David Iskra

AKA Sam, joined from another club earlier this year and is hoping to eventually pursue a career in flying. "The club makes flying affordable," he says. "I can hire a PA-28 for a whole day and pay less than £100 an hour flying time." Sam has been building his hours and is enjoying taking friends and family on trips all over the UK. "I've never had problems with availability and with three PA-28s it's easy to swap between the 140, 160 and 180hp aircraft. The first thing I noticed when I went to Take Flight Aviation was what a friendly club it was, it's great meeting more experienced guys and there are a few airline pilots in the club too so it's really interesting talking to them."



Marina Angelides

joined Take Flight Aviation this summer as a student. "If you'd said to me earlier this year that I would be flying aeroplanes I probably would have laughed," she says. "But that's exactly what I am doing and loving every moment of it. I was introduced to the idea of joining one sunny weekend when I visited the club for a pleasure flight with my two children. My preconception that flying was a luxury for only the very rich was soon laid to rest. Take Flight Aviation's scheme means anyone can fly according to their budget with the added bonus of social events. My only regret is that I didn't discover it sooner."



John Eburne

Take Flight's resident QFI and PPL Examiner is a firm believer in the club's ethos. "We offer additional night and IMC training and have several freelance instructors on hand," he says. "I believe our policy of cheap flying and no minimum hours restrictions promotes flight safety by keeping people in the air who may otherwise lose currency. I suppose the acid test is the number of ATPLs that we have reintroduced to Single Engine Piston flying. These are professional guys who don't put up with lax procedures but want a relaxed way to fly for fun. They are choosing Take Flight Aviation to renew their PPLs and flying regularly."



Drive to the airfield, hire a plane for the day without the worry of extra costs and make a long journey to a business meeting in record time

hour (£99 at the weekend) – a figure that includes fuel, VAT and even unlimited landings at Wellesbourne. The newly acquired Cessna 150 Aerobat is even cheaper at just £79 per hour (£89 at weekends) while the six-seat Cherokee Six can be rented for £189 per hour (£199 at weekends).
“We strongly feel that flying should

call it ‘Hire Without Limits’ and we actively encourage our members to take the aeroplanes away from base and experience different airfields.
“In an attempt to dissuade you from renting aeroplanes for long periods – and to keep them at base where they can earn money flying trial lessons – many flying clubs charge not only for

worse than taking your family flying from a club that is tatty, damp and untidy,” says Mike. “That’s why we invested in comfortable leather seating, a microwave, fridge, DVD and shower as well as desktop and wireless internet access.”
The club also organises fly-outs and regular social events including a recent

MAKING ENDS MEET IS A STRUGGLE BUT NO ONE WANTS TO STOP FLYING

be as affordable as possible,” continues Mike. “We’re all struggling to make ends meet at the moment but none of us want to stop flying.”
Of course the economy is not the only reason why pilots stop flying. There have always been a significant number of pilots who achieve their PPL and then allow it to lapse within the first few years. Once you have flown your family and friends around their houses the next logical step is to take an aeroplane further afield but that costs a lot. The next sting in the tail is many clubs don’t like their aeroplanes being taken away for more than a few hours (as they want to use them for training). This then restricts your usage for a complete day trip to somewhere further afield.
“I remember being in the same boat” says Mike, “So we vowed to make our aircraft available for extended hire. We

the hours you fly but also for the hours when the aircraft is away. We don’t think that’s fair so we only charge for the hours you fly. If you fly two hours to Jersey, stay all weekend and fly two hours home we only charge for the four hours you fly. That’s only fair.
As a direct result of this policy Take Flight Aviation now has 50 pilots signed up to the scheme. Members often fly away for days or weekends with partners and children because there is no deadline to return the aeroplane.
For many pilots their partners can also be a factor in the amount of flying they do (or don’t do). Being able to take them flying in relaxed comfort can only help matters. Again, this is something Take Flight Aviation has addressed by ensuring its aeroplanes are clean and comfortable and it’s ‘VIP lounge’ as welcoming as possible. “There’s nothing

weekend trip to Jersey, Alderney and Guernsey. More pilots taking part means the cost can again be brought down even further. “With different members flying different legs it meant that everyone got to fly on a budget they could afford and with a leg they felt comfortable with,” says Take Flight member Amanda Jenkins. The club’s next fly-out is to Dublin in November and the monthly ‘social’ meetings have included go-karting, model flying and bowling trips... as well as discussing flying trips in the pub afterwards.
Although Take Flight Aviation does offer PPL instruction, it only books out one aeroplane at a time for training – ensuring that the others are available for hire. “We are very much a club rather than a school” explains Mike. “You learn to drive with a driving school but you wouldn’t go to the same place to



Taking an aircraft away for a whole day opens up numerous new places to visit on that CAA chart

hire a car so why would you go to a flying school to hire an aeroplane? We’re trying to offer the ideal surroundings for aircraft rental.
“One of our members said to me recently that being in the club was the next best thing to owning his own aeroplane,” Mike summarises. “He then thought for a moment and corrected himself – it is actually better than owning your own aircraft!”
On first glance the prices and the

benefits of Take Flight Aviation membership seem too good to be true. “There are no secrets” Mike says, “We just want to promote affordable touring for all. Membership will cost you about the same as a decent cup of coffee a day – and by the way our coffee is free to our members and their guests as well. You can join for a month and if you don’t like us you can walk away with no hard feelings.” **GF**
www.takeflightaviation.com