

FOREWORD

Airshows can and do change your life. Steve Bridgewater reveals how a trip to an airshow as an aspirational nine-year old moulded his life.

I remember straining my neck to look into the far distance. An unmistakable shape was circling on the horizon, a shape this fresh-faced nine-year old [see right!] had seen in books and magazines, but never seen in the 'flesh.'

But it wasn't time just yet. High in the sky above RAF Cosford nine red jets spiralled and pirouetted their way between the clouds, their coloured smoke painting a trail and smelling divine as it drifted down onto the crowd.

The jets arched over the top of a loop and speared straight down towards the earth... "Ladies and gentlemen..." said the commentator, adding a dramatic pause as the aeroplanes dropped ever-lower, "I give you the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team for 1984... the Red Arrows!" Seemingly at the last moment the jets split in nine directions and tens of thousands of people applauded and cheered. In front of me a small aeroplane burst into life belching a cloud of oily smoke behind. Its silver fuselage and yellow wings glinted in the dappled sunshine.



But this young boy's attention was drawn back to the horizon, the incoming aeroplane was now trailing a cloud of thick black smoke and flying straight towards the airfield. The mighty Vulcan bomber was inbound. At crowd centre the pilot stood the big delta onto its tail and the engines howled as it climbed towards a large blue patch in sky. For the next 15 minutes I stood spellbound as the V-Bomber cavorted in front of me, a wide eyed grin seemingly painted onto my young face.

This was 1984, I was just nine years old but I remember my first airshow experience to this day. I'd always been interested in aeroplanes but that day, more than 25 years ago, I knew I wanted to be a pilot.

Airshows do that to a young child. They enthral, they energise an active imagination and they inspire. Ask almost any aviator and they will tell you that a childhood airshow experience was instrumental in their decision to work in aviation.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of both the world's first airshow and the first aviation meetings in Great Britain. The century has seen British airshows firmly establish themselves as the biggest, best and most famous in the world. In 2009 the British airshow scene is the healthiest in the world. Attendances top 6.5 million – making it the second largest spectator event in the country, second only to attending football matches.



Airshow attendees in this country also have the widest choice of venues (per capita) and the biggest variation in airshow genres. There are events tailored for those who are passionate about modern jets, shows specialising in restored World War Two aircraft, aerobatic contests and fly-ins of general aviation aircraft. There are tradeshows for helicopters, microlights, light aeroplanes, kitplanes and of course the SBAC Farnborough show remains the best regarded aviation trade show in the world.

However, perhaps more importantly, there are shows that feature a mix of all these genres – offering something for everybody. These shows offer much more than aeroplanes, they include funfairs, markets, craft stalls and all manner of attractions to appeal to the entire family. It is perhaps these shows that do the most work at inspiring the next aviation generation.

The largest growth area in recent years has been the boom in seaside shows. Local authority funded shows are now commonplace at cliff top and beach venues around the coast of Britain from Dawlish in the south to Sunderland in the north. The massive shows at Eastbourne and Bournemouth attract hundreds of thousands of spectators, many of whom would never consider visiting an airfield to watch aeroplanes.



British airshows do an immeasurable amount of work. They inspire young and old alike. They highlight the technological wonders created by the British manufacturing industry and pay tribute to the brave men and women of our armed forces. They enable us to commemorate the past and pay our respects to fallen heroes. Airshows also attract such huge attendance figures, which in turn play a massive part in the British economy with people from around the country (and the world) needing hotels, food, fuel and other services in the show's catchment area.

Since my indoctrination some 25 years ago airshows have become a way of life. As a teenager I spent almost every summer weekend on an airfield watching my heroes fly in the skies above me. In my early 20s I found a job that enabled me to convert my passion into a career and I have spent the last ten years reporting on airshows as an aviation journalist.

Having finally overcome a medical 'issue' I gained my pilot's licence in 2005 and am actively pursuing my goal of becoming a display pilot. It is my hope that I will one day be able to play my own small part and help inspire a child in the same manner as my eyes were opened on that June day in 1984.

Airshows determined my path in aviation, and resulted in a career that I dearly love. For me airshows are important in so many ways and the centenary of the inaugural event was an obvious choice for my third entry into the Dawn to Dusk competition.



Blackpool 1909



Fairford 2009



BACKGROUND

I first found out about the annual Dawn to Dusk competition in 2005 when I was working as Deputy Editor at *Today's Pilot* magazine. One of my contributors sent in an article about his entry – detailing how he had flown a flexwing microlight from Lands End to John O'Groats to raise money for charity – and he had clearly had a lot of fun.

At that time I was approaching the end of my National Private Pilot Licence (NPPL) and looking for ways to use my new licence. Through my friendship with Polly Vacher I had also become involved with the Flying Scholarships for the Disabled (FSD) charity and I decided to use my Dawn to Dusk entry to benefit FSD.

Using the 70th anniversary of the Supermarine Spitfire as our theme Louise Walker and I [right] set off early on June 29, 2006. At that time I had just over 80hrs total time and just 18hrs in command. Louise and I landed at 14 former Spitfire airfields during the day, covered 617nm and flew for 8hrs 35mins. Our entry was judged to have come third and was awarded the Tiger Club Trophy but we also raised around £3,000 for Flying Scholarships for the Disabled and generated a mass of publicity. Having been 'bitten by the bug' in 2006 I decided to enter again in 2007.



By this time I had formed a longstanding flying partnership with Amanda Harrison and our mutual love of 1920s aviation and air racing resulted in us marking the 85th anniversary of the King's Cup air race. By now I had logged 118hrs and I clocked up my 50th hour in command during the flight.

We flew our 2007 entry on July 27 and by the end of the day we had reached 14 former King's Cup race venues. We had flown 712nm and been airborne for 9hrs 05mins (10hrs 35mins 'chock to chock') by the time we landed back at our base at RAF Brize Norton.

Our 2007 flight resulted in yet more publicity for Flying Scholarships for the Disabled and was awarded both the Tiger Club Trophy and the Pooley Sword by the judging panel.

The following year saw Amanda working as a newly qualified Flying Instructor and I had just formed my own company, having been made redundant. As such we were unable to fund the flight ourselves and we had little available time to find a sponsor. Regrettably we were therefore forced to sit-out the 2008 contest.



Amanda and I are both keen advocates of Dawn to Dusk as a method of expanding a pilot's aviating horizons. All too many pilots allow their licence to lapse due to a lack of motivation or reason to fly, but we try to explain that Dawn to Dusk gives them that reason to fly.

We both actively promote the contest through lectures at flying clubs and aviation societies around the UK and Amanda extols the virtues of the contest to the many student pilots that pass through her hands each year. We have also published articles about our flights in *Today's Pilot*, *Pilot, Go Flying*, the *Guild of Air Pilots & Air Navigators* magazine and the magazine published by the British Women Pilots Association.

At least two teams of pilots have entered the Dawn to Dusk contest this year as a result of the promotion we have been doing. They are both dear friends and we have offered them as much advice and encouragement as possible, but that only made us more determined to enter ourselves and give them a run for their money!

DAWN TO DUSK 2009

My love of airshows recently combined with my publishing background and early in 2009 I was commissioned to write the definitive history of British airshows. With the research into the book progressing well it became obvious that the Airshow Centenary would make an ideal theme for a Dawn to Dusk entry... all we needed was a sponsor.

The current financial climate did not help matters and our former sponsors wished us well but sadly could not offer any assistance. By now my company, Awyr Aviation Communication – which specialises in marketing and promotion work for aviation companies – was building its client base and a number of companies were cajoled into giving the project consideration.

Despite a false-start with Air Atlantique's Classic Flight, who expressed interest but was eventually unable to help, we pressed on and a new customer sprang to the rescue at the eleventh hour.

Take Flight Aviation employed the services of Awyr Aviation Communication in July 2009 and on July 17 pledged to fully sponsor our Dawn to Dusk flight as long as we could guarantee publicity in one of the major General Aviation magazines.

As both *Today's Pilot* and *Pilot* magazines had already included features about the 2006 and 2007 flights respectively we decided to offer the rights to the third flight to *Flyer* magazine. Discussions with Ian Waller, Editor of *Flyer*, were instigated and July 21 he confirmed he would commission a major article about our flight. Take Flight Aviation's owner, Mike Roberts, gave us the go-ahead to start preparations immediately and the race was on to make the competition's impending deadline.

TAKE FLIGHT



Take Flight is a novel concept among flying 'clubs' and actually has more in common with an aircraft syndicate or fractional ownership scheme.



Take Flight members enjoy aircraft hire without limits. There's no minimum hours requirement, which means you can hire aircraft for a day or a weekend, but only pay for the time the aircraft is in use. It's like having your own aircraft to use as you wish, but at the fraction of the cost of ownership!

Unlike most flying schools and training organisations whose emphasis is training,

Take Flight focuses on pilots who want clean and reliable aircraft to fly without restrictions, whenever they want them. The monthly fixed cost to members is £40 per month then pilots pay per hour flown. Members can fly as little or as much as they like. No minimums - no maximums. Student PPL's pay half price for the duration of training. The hire rates – typically £89.00 for a PA-28-140 on a weekday includes fuel, VAT and home landing fees at Wellesbourne Mountford.

CHANGE OF CHARITY

As one of our friends was already entering the 2009 Dawn to Dusk contest on behalf of Flying Scholarships for the Disabled we decided to use our flight to benefit another charity. We felt that the general media would be less willing to offer publicity to 'another aeroplane' raising money for 'the same charity' so opted for a different stance.

In 2006 my first entry into the Dawn to Dusk contest received sponsorship from Shepherd Neame brewery, brewers of Spitfire Ale. Among their package of support was a media launch event at Biggin Hill, to which the media, supporters and friends were invited along with representatives of the Flying Scholarship for the Disabled charity.

Among the people I met that evening was a wonderful young lady by the name of Mandy Pantall. Mandy had enjoyed an incredible life, being a competitive gymnast, ballroom dancer and horse rider. She had also worked as a 'wingwalker' standing atop the wing of a Boeing Stearman biplane sponsored by the Cadburys Crunchie Flying Circus and had the world at her feet. Then, ten years ago a horse riding accident left Mandy unable to walk without grave difficulty and in chronic pain at all times.

In 2006 she was the recipient of a flying scholarship and on the day of my Biggin Hill press launch she flew a Piper PA-28 in from Goodwood with her instructor. To this day I remember the moment I met Mandy. She climbed from her cockpit and with the aid of two crutches she walked across the Biggin Hill apron to greet me. *"Hello,"* she said, *"I'm Mandy and I've just gone solo today!"* She then promptly burst into tears and flung her arms around me. We all remember our first solo fondly but for somebody who has been through so much as Mandy the emotion of such a landmark was too much to keep hidden. From that moment Mandy became a very dear friend. In fact she became the nearest I have to a sister and I love her dearly. It was a proud day for us all when Mandy passed her skills test and qualified as a fully trained pilot. She is one of the best aviators I know, precise, safe and cautious but she enjoys every second she is in the air.



Amanda met Mandy independently through the British Women Pilots Association and was equally in awe of her willpower and determination as well as her infectious personality and drive for life.

Mandy benefited from her scholarship in so many ways and she was eager to return the favour. In late 2006 she was approached by Rolls Royce's Chief Test Pilot, Phill O'Dell (POD), who asked her to join him in establishing a new charity at Kemble.

This would become known as the fly2help Foundation. The duo are seen here with F1 World Champion, and fly2help supporter Lewis Hamilton.

FLY2HELP - TURNING ORDINARY DAYS INTO EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES

The fly2help Foundation is an exciting charity that lifts people's horizons via the medium of flight; working with individuals, groups and like-minded charities to stretch physical, mental



and emotional boundaries that have been set by a life trauma or tragedy. The charity's core focus is disadvantaged youngsters for whom they aim to inspire imagination, determination, self-esteem and confidence. However fly2help is committed to supporting anyone who could benefit, regardless of age or circumstance, typically supporting the terminally ill, chronically sick and bereaved.



In addition, there are those who simply need a life boost; including those who have suffered extreme neglect and abuse, and those who face exclusion from society on a regular basis as a result of mental ill-health, sickness, disability, injury or financial deprivation.

Central to the beliefs of fly2help is that offering an exhilarating flight and enabling someone to reach for the skies gives them the chance to see the world from a whole new perspective, both literally and metaphorically.

For someone less-advantaged, just being able to wake one morning with a sense of achievement or excitement, rather than disappointment, can be an enormous step towards recovery. fly2help's goal is to share blue skies, adventures and smiles; creating precious memories for those who need them most.



fly2help's educational wing encourages youngsters to reach their full potential through educational programmes run in partnership with schools or community groups; also offering flying scholarships, fostering and mentoring those who have a thirst for a career within the aerospace industry.

Having seen firsthand the difference that fly2help makes to so many lives Amanda and I decided to use our 2009 Dawn to Dusk entry to benefit this amazing organisation.



CREW MEMBERS

Two members of crew were carried on the Dawn to Dusk flight – sharing the flying equally between them.

Amanda Harrison

Amanda obtained her pilot's licence in 2001, her night rating in 2005 and her Commercial Pilot's Licence (CPL), Multi-engine Instrument Rating (IR) Multi Crew Co-operation (MCC) rating and Flying Instructor rating in 2007. She was born in the Nottinghamshire but travelled around a lot as a child before her family settled in the Lake District. She now lives in Brize Norton in Oxfordshire.

She has spent the last two years instructing in various aircraft but has become a specialist in the glass-cockpit equipped Cirrus range of light aircraft.



Amanda has recently accepted a job with charter company PropStar at Kemble airport. She has recently completed her conversion onto the Piper Seneca and has been signed off as 'Pilot's Assistant' on the Beech King Air. She has also converted onto the Tiger Moth and hopes to begin instructing on the type very soon.

Before she flew for a living Amanda enjoyed a varied career with jobs ranging from photography and television production to dance teacher and prison warden. In her spare time she looks after injured birds of prey.

In September 2006 she competed in the 75th anniversary Schneider Trophy air race at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight. Racing a Cessna 182 she finished 26th overall and was the fastest female competitor in the race. She had previously been the Assistant Aviation Secretary for the Royal Aero Club Records, Racing & Rallying Association and has navigated in several air races.

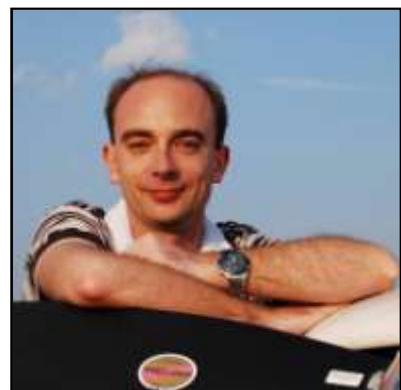
Amanda was diagnosed with Dyslexia at a young age yet has pursued her passion for aviation and become a commercial pilot despite this obstacle. She prints her PLOGs and other in cockpit paperwork on yellow paper and finds this helps her to read it in flight.

Amanda has flown around 1,300 hours in an assortment of types and was born to fly! She was elected as a Freeman of the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Men (GAPAN) in 2007 and is an active member of the British Women Pilots Association (BWPA).

Stephen Bridgewater

I have held a National Private Pilot Licence (NPPL) since September 2005 and had logged just under 150hrs when I began this Dawn to Dusk flight. Most of those hours have been logged in Piper PA-28s and Cessna 152s but I have also flown aircraft as diverse as the Jet Provost, Extra 300 and Bulldog.

I was born and bred in Tamworth, Staffordshire and have also lived next to RAF Wittering near Stamford. I now live in Nottingham where my fiancée is a doctor at the Queens Medical Centre.



After initially failing my PPL medical due to a minor heart condition (Wolff Parkinson White Syndrome – Type 2) I have now obtained a JAA Class II medical. It had been my intention to sit the PPL Skill Test to ‘upgrade’ my NPPL license to a PPL(A) but I have not yet felt that the NPPL restricts my flying sufficiently to justify the time and expense of swapping.

Although trained in marketing I made my aviation career as an aviation journalist and have edited Air Action and Go Flying! magazines and been Deputy Editor at Today’s Pilot and Pilot magazines. I have been short-listed for the prestigious International Aerospace Journalist of the Year Award (AJOYA) on three separate occasions and have had work published worldwide.

I have also worked for Pooleys Flight Equipment as Head of Marketing and the Air Atlantique Classic Flight Club as Commercial Manager. I now run Awyr Aviation Communication, a company offering marketing, PR and journalism services to the General Aviation industry.

I was also elected as a GAPAN Freeman in 2007 and in 2008 was asked to help create the GAPAN Young Members (GYM) organisation to promote youth in aerospace. I sit on the GYM committee to this day and have recently applied to become Liveryman of the Guild

I am also a founder committee member of the Friends of Duxford (FOD) organisation (which we created in 1999) and also sit on the committee of the Tamworth Model Aero Club – which I have been secretary of since 1991 (when I was 16).

The bulk of my time this year has been taken up researching a book marking the 100th anniversary of the first British airshow in 1909.

The Bears!

It is seemingly impossible for Amanda and I to conduct any long distance flight without the cockpit being infiltrated by at least two bears! On this occasion we welcomed aboard ‘Charlie’ the official



fly2help bear and ‘Ray’. The latter is my own bear, which has now flown on all three of my Dawn to Dusk flights. The name is two-fold. Firstly it is in memory of the late, great and much missed Ray Hanna – Spitfire maestro and airshow pilot par excellence. Secondly the name Ray also refers to the Rays of light we hope to see during the sunrise and sunsets we experience on our Dawn to Dusk flights. The bears were left on charge of provisions during this flight but in hindsight we are sure they consumed more than their fair share of bananas!

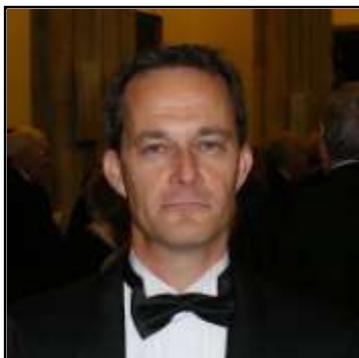
John Baker & Guy Stockley

My previous two entries have benefited from the input from an Operations Manager both beforehand and, crucially, on the day itself.

We have found that an Operations Manager helps co-ordinate our day by liaising with airfields and air traffic units to advise them of our amended timings and speed our transit through their facility. He also updates us with weather and NOTAM information as required and gives gentle reminders on food and hydration – which is all too easy to forget during the stress of the flight.

The Operations Manager for my 2006 flight was Guy Stockley but he was unavailable in 2007 so John Baker stepped up to the mark. In 2009 they both played a vital role... even though Guy was stationed in Afghanistan!

Guy [right] was born in Crawley, West Sussex and currently lives in Leicester. He is a newly qualified commercial pilot with a background in the RAF. He worked finished his RAF career in photographic interpretation at RAF Brampton before leaving to become an airline pilot in 2006. The slump in airline recruiting has resulted in Guy looking elsewhere for work and he is currently flying Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in Afghanistan on secondment to the Royal Netherlands Air Force.



John [left] was born in London, but now lives in Lingfield next to London Gatwick airport. He gained his PPL in 2005 at Shoreham-on-Sea and has flown about 140hrs, mostly in Cessna 150/152s and Piper PA-28s, but has also flown the Piper Cub, Tiger Moth, Harvard and an AirCam amphibian. He is a Design Engineer by profession and volunteers as the Turn Point Coordinator for the Royal Aero Club Records, Racing & Rallying Association. He has also navigated in several air races.

Both Guy and John were a tremendous help in the lead up to the flight. During the flight itself Guy was enjoying a welcome 'day off' in Afghanistan so he positioned himself at a computer and remained in e-mail contact with John. He kept a watchful eye on NOTAMs and weather and helped John as much as he could from afar.

FLIGHTWORX

During the flight John positioned himself in the 24hr Operations Room used by Flightworx Aviation at Earls Colne. FlightWorx provides one-to-one trip support to both business aviation and private pilots who want to travel throughout the world. This is provided on a fixed fee ad-hoc basis or fixed annual/bi-annual or monthly tariff as required.



They can provide all manner of services including customs and flight planning, airfield awareness briefs, flight following, ground handling, PPR and even hotel bookings – thus taking the uncertainty out of long distance touring.

Amanda and I are indebted to the help given by John and Guy – along with James Wiskin and Adrian Kinsley at Flightworx - without whom this flight would have been even more difficult than it was.

AIRCRAFT AND EQUIPMENT

Take Flight Aviation owns a variety of aeroplanes, all based at its Wellesbourne Mountford home. We had originally been allocated Piper PA-28-161 Warrior G-BSCY but as the day of the flight approached 'CY was approaching its 50hr check and we subsequently changed to Piper PA-28-181 Cherokee II G-BYSP.

'Sierra Papa' was built in 1985 and imported to the UK from Germany in 1999. Powered by a 180hp Lycoming O-360-A4M engine turning a two-blade, fixed pitch Sensenich 76EM8S5-0-62 propeller the aircraft has an economical cruise of around 100kts.

According to the handbook the top speed is 148kts, the best rate of climb speed is 85kts and the stall speed (with full flap) is 54kts. Best rate of climb is 735ft/min and the take off ground roll is 870ft (265m).



Fuel consumption at 75% power is quoted as 8.8 US Gal per hour (33.3 litres per hour). This power setting will give a 690nm range at a cruising altitude of 7,000ft. Fuel capacity is 50 US Gallons (189 litres).

The Cherokee II has a 35ft wingspan and a wing area of 170sq ft. Length is 23ft 9in and it stands 7ft 4in at the tail. The aeroplane has a wing loading of 15lb/sq ft and a power loading of 14.2lb/hp. The aeroplane's empty weight is 1,413lb (641kg) and its gross weight is 2,550lb (1,157kg) giving a useful load of 1,137lb (516kg).

Sierra Papa and has around 7,500hrs 'on the clock.' She is equipped with one VOR/DME, one ADF and two radios. It is equipped with an STEC autopilot but this was unserviceable during Dawn to Dusk and flagged as inoperative.



We carried an Airbox Foresight Global Positioning System generously loaned by Airbox Aerospace especially for the Dawn to Dusk flight.

This new, state-of-the-art, GPS was recently launched to the market after 20,000 man-hours of development by British company Airbox Aerospace. Based in Grove, Oxfordshire the company has produced this GPS to be as easy to use as possible and it comes in two versions – the Freedom Clarity

with a 4.3in screen and the Foresight with a 7in screen.

"We've carried out exhaustive research on both the hardware and the software and I'm proud to say that we've created a product that many pilots have been crying out for," says William Moore, chief technical officer of Airbox. "We set out to reduce pilot work load by simplifying the processes used to input data; icon-driven menu interfaces give the user vital seconds to focus on the greater job in hand; that of actually flying the aircraft."

Airbox's chosen touch-screen design allows pilots to very quickly enter a destination and fly there on the very latest 1:500,000 UK digital CAA charts which come standard with system. Users can touch the map to divert their current route if warned of an approaching airspace. At the point of a finger, airfield and airspace information can be instantly recalled, whilst future additions to the software will include NOTAMs and weather information.

SPONSORS

As in previous years Amanda and I have been very lucky to receive sponsorship to enable to us to enter the Dawn to Dusk contest. In addition to Take Flight Aviation, who provided the aeroplane and fuel, we are indebted to Flightworx Aviation for logistical support, Pooleys Flight Equipment for the provision of maps and charts, Airbox for the generous loan of an Airbox Foresight GPS, the Charlecote Pheasant for providing free accommodation and The Will Turner Logs for additional funding.

TIMING

As this flight was being conducted to gain publicity and exposure for fly2help we needed to give media outlets as much notice as possible prior to the day of the flight. This, we hoped, would give sufficient time for journalists and photographers to be assigned to the story.

However, with Dawn to Dusk competition's August 11 deadline rapidly approaching the clock was well and truly 'ticking'. Fortunately during discussions with a fellow competitor it was suggested to us that the 2009 deadline had been extended to the end of August and an e-mail to the organisers' office confirmed this. Nevertheless we still had less than five weeks to plan and instigate the flight...

We decided to allocate a weeklong weather 'window' in order to give the press something to plan towards and based upon our calculations and discussions with weather 'guru' Simon Keeling at Flying High Weather it appeared that the week commencing August 10th would be the week to plan for... this was just three weeks away!

21ST CENTURY UPDATES

As we were doing this Dawn to Dusk flight on behalf of charity we expected there to be a significant amount of interest in the project. We therefore took an early decision to create a dedicated web-page on my Awyr Aviation website to provide people with the latest updates. Operations Manager John Baker would also update the site with our progress during the flight itself.

Regular updates were also posted on the social networking website Facebook and this generated a number of leads and useful contacts – especially when trying to obtain permission to visit various airfields.

PLANNING

As Amanda lives in Oxfordshire and I live in Nottinghamshire we do get to see each other very often so during the planning process we spent many hours on the telephone discussing ideas, creating and amending lists and drawing lines on maps – our lines were drawn 150 miles apart but in perfect synchronisation!

When planning our last entry into the Dawn to Dusk contest we had been able to narrow down our list of 'target' airfields very easily – the King's Cup had been held at 26 airfields and only 17 of them were still airfields in 2007.

However, for a theme as diverse as the Airshow Centenary we could not be so precise. If one looks into the history books almost every airfield has played host to a show, open day, family day, fly-in or

gathering at some point during its life. Even London's Gatwick has been an airshow venue in the not too distant past. As such we would not be able to define our route so easily.

We therefore began the planning process by creating a list of 'obvious' and 'must have' venues that spring instantly to mind when speaking of airshows. The big venues such as Farnborough, Biggin Hill, Fairford, Duxford, Coventry and North Weald were the first to be committed to paper and the list continued to grow.

The first British airshows took place at the racecourses at Doncaster and Blackpool in 1909 so it was vital that we included both cities in our list. Of course Blackpool has gone on to host a multitude of airshows over the years and Doncaster's RAF Finningley (now Doncaster Sheffield Robin Hood Airport) was the venue to countless memorable Battle of Britain At Home Day airshows during its RAF career.

With these 'essential' airfields drawn onto the map we found the best plan was to draw lines between them and see which other airshow venues fell within range. It is amazing how many airshow venues, past and present can be found on a CAA chart...! We soon found ourselves with a map containing somewhere approaching 50 'target' aerodromes and seaside venues – so it became obvious that a radical rethink was necessary.

A 'crisis meeting' was called in Oxford and a definitive wish list of venues compiled over a bottle of wine. This was then marked onto a 1:500,000 CAA chart and an action plan drawn up. We narrowed the list down to 30 airfields and set about developing the most efficient route around them. All landings would be 'touch and goes' unless we required fuel or were scheduled to meet the press to promote the charity.

Working on a maximum of four hours endurance – with 45 minutes reserve – a provisional route was planned using an average speed of 95kts. Although VFR rules call for just 30 minutes reserve we opted for 45 minutes to allow for various contingencies due to press commitments. As we expected to travel the length and breadth of the UK during the flight we reckoned that any headwinds we encountered on the day would be cancelled out by a tailwind at some point, so for the sake of planning we used nil wind at this stage.

We also factored in 10 minutes to every leg to cover the approach, landing (or touch-and-go), take-off and climb out. Where refuelling or press conference stops were scheduled we allowed ourselves 30 minutes on the ground.

As we had learnt when planning our earlier entries into the Dawn to Dusk competition the first hurdle to overcome in any flight such as this is what to do during the early morning hours. Most airfields do not open until 09:00 (08:00 at best) so, assuming an 04:30 departure, the first four and a half hours can be difficult to fill.

SUNRISE!

At this point our thoughts turned to our 2007 flight and the sinking feeling we felt when we realised that we (actually I'll hold my hands up and admit it was me) had forgotten to check the official sunrise and sunset times. On that occasion we had planned our flight for June but delays meant we did not fly until July... by which time the sunrise was significantly later. This resulted in us sitting on a dark airfield for 30 minutes waiting to take off and subsequently missing the bowser at our first refuelling stop.

For this latest entry we planned to fly during the first two weeks in August – which gave us a sunrise time of around 05.40 and a sunset time of about 20.40. Working within the CAA's permitted

'sunrise/sunset +/- 30minutes' rules meant we could be airborne no earlier than 05.10 and would need to be on the ground by around 21.10... this giving us about an hour less flying than the Dawn to Dusk rules permit.

In order to find an airfield to visit very early in the morning we have found that it is often best to conduct a long distance trip north or south to begin the day, then land at 24 hour (H24) airfield for fuel before beginning to work back through the country. We had a number of options on this occasion with Doncaster opening 24/7 and the Isle of Man opening at 06.30.

As such the decision was made to contact all the airfields on our 'hit list' and request permission to land, ideally with a waived landing in support of the fly2help charity.

In order to collate the replies and plan the flight an Excel spreadsheet was created detailing the airfield, contact name, and contact telephone number/e-mail. Fields were included in the spreadsheet to note whether the airfield operators had replied to our messages, whether they had confirmed a free landing and whether they had offered any other assistance. The final column listed the airport's normal operating hours.

This spreadsheet ensured that all members of the team would have access to the information at any time and as such would be updated as soon as contact was made. It was updated when details changed and a fresh version e-mailed to the entire team once a day.

PLAN A

With such a short timeframe to work within it was imperative that we started negotiations with our target airfields as a matter of urgency. In full knowledge that the route would change several times before the day of the competition we did not commit to dates, or even times, when approaching airfields and made it very obvious that we would not commit to visiting until much nearer the day itself.

Plan A, created during our 'crisis meeting' in Oxford called for stops at the following airfields:

Depart Wellesbourne	
Coventry	ETA 05.50
RAF Waddington	ETA 06.40
Durham Tees Valley	ETA 07.50
Fuel & Press	
Elvington	ETA 09.10
Doncaster	ETA 09.40
Blackpool	ETA 10.40
Fuel & Press	
Derby	ETA 12.10
RAF Cosford	ETA 12.40
Halfpenny Green	ETA 12.55
RAF Fairford	ETA 13.40
Sywell	ETA 14.25
Fuel & Press	
RAF Mildenhall	ETA 15.40
Cambridge	ETA 16.00
Duxford	ETA 16.15
Fuel & Press	
North Weald	ETA 17.15
London City	ETA 17.35

Biggin Hill	ETA 17.55
Shoreham	ETA 18.30
Fuel & Press	
Farnborough	ETA 19.30
Kemble	ETA 20.15
RTB Wellesbourne	ETA 20.50

This would give a total flying time of 12hrs 50mins and a distance of 834nm.

Initial contact was made with these airfields by means of an e-mail requesting permission to land. It also offered each airfield the chance to host a press conference to promote their support of the flight.

A number of these airfields were very familiar and we have good friends at them. My contacts at the Imperial War Museum, particularly within the marketing team, were the first to respond with the offer of a press conference at Duxford. Esther Blaine was a tremendous help throughout the project.

Terry Holloway, Group Support Executive at Marshall Aerospace replied minutes later offering the use of Cambridge Airport, including a press conference if we desired.

The next response came from Tony Rowlands, FISO at Wolverhampton's Halfpenny Green airport, advising us that he would waive all fees if we chose to land at the airport.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that all three of these offers came within 30 minutes of sending the e-mail! However, things then started to dry up...

Over the course of the next few weeks a significant amount of time was expended trying to contact and negotiate with the 'right' person at each airfield. We were often passed from 'pillar to post' with little or no joy.

In 2007 we had benefited from the help from Tim Fenton, Operations Manager at Durham Tees Valley, but he had sadly moved on to pastures new along with most of the marketing team. The airports public relations work was now carried out by Peel Holdings HQ at Liverpool who sadly did not see the potential in a Dawn to Dusk visit. We also struggled to find a useful contact at RAF Waddington and Doncaster Sheffield Robin Hood Airport (formerly RAF Finningley) was also proving problematical. Flying north in the morning was clearly a none-starter and it was obvious that a radical rethink was on the cards...

RADICAL RETHINK

I was sitting in a friend's garden near White Waltham on a sunny Saturday morning when the idea struck me. An Emeraude flew overhead and my thoughts turned to my old friend Neil Harris who owned similar machine and still owed me a flight in it. Neil used to work in the tower at East Midlands Airport and had been my duty controller when I organised the Today's Pilot Fly-In at Tollerton. He'd then moved onto Heathrow but he had recently taken over the control tower at Newquay Airport...

Newquay had held countless airshows in its days as RAF St Mawgan so I didn't waste a moment and was on the phone to Neil while the Emeraude was still within ear-shot. He was only too happy to help the project, informed me that they were generally open at 06.30 and that he would ensure any fees were waived.

So the decision was made, we'd head south to start our flight and then work northwards during the day.

Later than day I also received a call from Ed Swain, organiser of the Isle of Man TT Races. Ed had been helping research my airshow book and he suggested that we might like to consider flying to the island during Dawn to Dusk. He had good contacts on the island and assured us we'd be well looked after... how could we refuse?

PLAN B

Trying to work both Newquay and the Isle of Man into the trip proved trickier than first thought but we re-issued a provisional route on July 28. We were also unsure if we could depart Wellesbourne 'out of hours' so we planned to start from Coventry airport (having positioned the aeroplane from Wellesbourne the previous evening). This version of the plan read as follows:

Depart Coventry	
Isle of Man	ETA 07.00
Fuel & Press	
Blackpool	ETA 08.20
Fuel & Press	
Doncaster	ETA 09.50
Derby	ETA 10.30
Fuel & Press	
Stoke Golding	ETA 11.20
Sywell	ETA 11.50
Fuel & Press	
Old Warden	ETA 12.40
Cambridge	ETA 13.00
Mildenhall	ETA 13.20
Duxford	ETA 13.40
Press & Fuel	
North Weald	ETA 14.40
London City	ETA 15.00
Biggin Hill	ETA 15.20
Farnborough	ETA 15.50
Newquay	ETA 17.50
Press & Fuel	
Kemble	ETA 19.10
Press (No Fuel)	
Birmingham	ETA 20.30
Press (No Fuel)	
RTB Wellesbourne	ETA 21.20

This route would result in 12hrs 20mins airborne and a total distance flown of 819nm.

Over the coming weeks the route evolved somewhat as more airfields confirmed their level of support. At this point Adrian Kinsley also joined the team and instantly proved to be a tremendous asset. Adrian is currently studying to be a commercial pilot and working in the Flight Operations office at Flightworx.

During his "long and boring" night shifts he took it upon himself to try to get permission for our Dawn to Dusk flight to land at as many airfields as possible. Using his network of handling agents

around the country he quickly got the necessary authorisation to visit Biggin Hill, Doncaster and Farnborough! He also made several calls to London City Airport on our behalf.

Landing at London City in a single-engined Piper PA-28 was always a long-shot but to their credit they looked into every possible angle to try and make it viable. Sadly red tape defeated us in the end as neither the aeroplane nor the crew were checked out for the 5° glide slope required to land at the Docklands airport.

We had hoped to land at London City as their annual Fun Day is one of the most unusual airshow venues in the country. The event takes place on behalf of charity and the 2009 event, which took place on July 4, raised £41,644.91 for the Richard House Children's Hospice.

Sue Kendrick at Blackpool Airport has always been a strong supporter of my Dawn to Dusk exploits and goes out of her way to help. As Blackpool was the venue of Britain's first 'official' airshow we felt confident that they would want to play a major role in the flight. However, it transpired that the airport is planning its own celebration in October and Sue decided not to schedule a press conference to coincide with our flight. She did waive landing fees for a touch and go however and invited us to fly in again during the main commemoration later in the year.

Whilst this did mean we would miss the press conference at Blackpool it did mean that we had 30 minutes spare to stop off at Doncaster where Adrian's hard work had paid off and we had been invited to hold a media photo call.

CALL THE PENTAGON!

If London City had been a long-shot our hoped to land at both Mildenhall and Fairford – both active USAF bases – were even more remote. However, we are nothing if not persistent!

A number of contacts were made to RAF Fairford, both through the airshow office and the base itself... there was no response.

RAF Mildenhall however was a different matter. I had visited the base earlier in the year on behalf of the Friends of Duxford organisation and had enjoyed lunch with Vicky Stayton, the 100th Air Refuelling Wing's Public Relations Officer. I contacted Vicky who duly passed my e-mail along the chain to the powers-that-be.

To my surprise I received a telephone call from the base a day later and found myself speaking to Sqn Ldr Rick Fryer, Mildenhall's RAF Commander. Over the coming weeks Sqn Ldr Fryer proved to be one of the most helpful people I have ever dealt with and worked wonders behind the scenes to make our wish come true. Sure enough, on July 30, he forwarded me the forms to sign to apply for Pentagon clearance to land on the base (which is classed as US territory).

We received our permission a few days later – but only to perform a 'roller' - and Sqn Ldr Fryer apologised for the USAF's bureaucratic red tape. I did explain that, in fairness, the USAF had been far more accommodating than the RAF who had not bothered to even respond to our requests to land at Waddington or Cosford!

I was eventually able to contact RAF Fairford too. A 'friend of a friend' passed me the private e-mail address of the base's RAF Commander, Sqn Ldr Tony Maycock.

Sqn Ldr Maycock called me almost straight and away to learn more. I was mid way through explaining what the Dawn to Dusk contest entailed when he stopped me in my track... "I knew I'd heard your name somewhere before!" he exclaimed. "I saw you lecture about Dawn to Dusk at the

Lyneham Flying Club!" He put me on hold and within three minutes he had obtained permission for us to do a 'low approach and go around' at Fairford as long as we didn't touch down.

Sqn Ldr Maycock even offered to arrange for staff to come in especially to man the tower if we needed to visit out of hours. Both Sqn Ldr's Fryer and Maycock are both active private pilots and I think that was what inspired them to go beyond the call of duty to help enable us to visit their bases – despite the USAF red tape and headaches that this undoubtedly caused them.

An approach had also been made to the Royal Navy to enquire whether it would be possible to perform touch and goes at both Yeovilton and Culdrose en route to Newquay. Unfortunately we were informed that the Navy was effectively "shutting down" for the month of August and they would not be able to assist.

FULL HOUSE

As the final weeks progressed our routing began to firm up as more and more airfields signed up to support us. Tim Jinks, the owner of Stoke Golding airfield in Warwickshire (venue to the small but popular Stoke Golding Stake Out event) not only agreed the use of his airfield but also offered to formate on us and escort us in with his new Christen Eagle biplane. Our old friends at Derby also agreed to have us back as did Damyns Hall, Sywell and the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden.

Little Gransden (home to the Children in Need airshow) also extended an invitation to visit as did the former Red Arrows base at Little Rissington – the latter allowing an out of hours landing.

Our route from Farnborough to Newquay took us very close to the little airfield at Branscombe in Devon - itself a small but growing airshow venue- and a call to the airfield owner resulted in an invitation to overfly it. Sadly he wasn't able to let us land as the number of movements at the site is restricted but he did offer to accommodate us in the future if we gave more notice.



Tony Rowlands at Halfpenny Green was keen for us to include the airport in our list but the only time we could fit it into our schedule was very early in the morning (around 05.30). He graciously agreed to allow us to land out of hours and we signed an indemnity form to make it fully legal.

We were also granted permission to depart out of hours from Take Flight Aviation's home base at Wellesbourne Mountford. This was fortunate as Coventry had recently changed their operating hours and they were not prepared to let us depart there before 08.00...

With a little re-jigging of the route we were able to move Coventry to 11.00 and use it as a refuelling stop. This would also negate the need to refuel at Derby and depart a 600m grass strip with a heavy load of fuel, so there was a large sigh of relief from the entire team!

My connections at Air Atlantique put me in contact with Chris Wild, Operations Manager, who kindly agreed to have a bowser on standby for our arrival at Coventry. We allowed ourselves just 15 minutes from landing to take off to get uplift the 140 litres of fuel we figured we would need at that point... it was going to be tight!

'GO' DATE

The media needed at least five working days to mobilise so by early August thought was being given to the date of the flight. On August 5 Amanda and I were invited to give a presentation to the club members of Take Flight Aviation to explain why were taking one of their aeroplanes away for a whole day!



We got to Wellesbourne Mountford mid afternoon and sat down together to do some fine tuning to the plan. It was at this stage that Simon Keeling called to discuss the weather... "The latter half of next week looks better than the first half" he advised, "I'd suggest you go for Thursday 13th or Friday 14th, there doesn't seem to be any real difference between the two days at the moment."

Amanda and I debated this for a while before speaking to Take Flight Owner Mike Roberts to see if he had any preference. We ultimately decided to opt for the Friday because it gave us an extra day to plan and allowed us to have the weekend to recover afterwards!

The date was set and the team were contacted. The aeroplane was booked and Mandy at fly2help was advised. We then began contacting the press and distributing the pre-prepared press releases and images.

We had just nine days to finalise plans and prepare for the flight...

THE FINAL PLAN

By the time the various minor and major tweaks had been implemented we were up to Version 10 of the route. Having a definitive date enabled us to work out a precise sunrise and sunset time – which on Friday August 14 was schedule to be 05.37 and 20.32. The CAA rules allow a pilot to take off 30 minutes either side of sunrise and sunset – meaning we could be airborne at 05.07 and must be on the ground no later than 21.02. Both of these times fell within the 04.30-21.30 rules of the Dawn to Dusk contest so we aimed for an 05.15 departure from Wellesbourne.

The latest 're-jigging' of the programme resulted in a small amount of 'spare' time at the end of the day so we planned to overfly the disused aerodromes at Upper Heyford and Gaydon (both once famous airshow venues) en route home to Wellesbourne.

Version 10 of the plan was issued to the team on August 11 as part of the Daily Update e-mail that was sent round in the run up to the flight. It reads as follows:

Depart Wellesbourne	ETD 05.15
Halfpenny Green	ETA 05.30
Isle of Man	ETA 07.15
Fuel & Press	
Blackpool	ETA 08.30
Doncaster	ETA 09.25
Press (No Fuel)	
Derby	ETA 10.25
Stoke Golding	ETA 10.45
Coventry	ETA 11.00
Fuel (No Press)	

Sywell	ETA 11.40
Old Warden	ETA 12.05
Little Gransden	ETA 12.20
RAF Mildenhall	ETA 12.45
Cambridge	ETA 13.00
Duxford	ETA 13.15
Fuel & Press	
North Weald	ETA 14.10
Damyns Hall	ETA 14.25
Biggin Hill	ETA 14.40
Farnborough	ETA 15.05
Branscombe	ETA 16.15 (overflight only)
Newquay	ETA 17.10
Fuel & Press	
Kemble	ETA 19.15
Press (No Fuel)	
Fairford	ETA 20.00 (low approach only)
Little Rissington	ETA 20.10
Upper Heyford	ETA 20.25 (overflight only)
Gaydon	ETA 20.40 (overflight only)
RTB Wellesbourne	ETA 20.50

With a final ‘definitive’ route to hand we then created LOGs for each leg of the flight, in an attempt to keep cockpit management as simple and efficient as ever. Each PLOG was printed on an A4 sheet of paper and showed the waypoints along the route and the distances between them along with the minimum safety altitudes and planned altitudes. The PLOG also contained the frequencies for every ATC unit we were likely to encounter on that leg along with any nav aids we might find of use. Finally a list of useful telephone numbers included our point of contact at the previous, current and next airfield along with anything else of relevance.

Copies were e-mailed to Ops Manager John Baker and two copies were printed for the aircraft – one copy in yellow to aid Amanda’s dyslexia.

FINAL RUN THROUGH

On Wednesday August 12 Amada and I met in Oxford to ‘fly’ the route for the first time. With 1:500,000 CAA charts laid out on table we talked our way around the route, discussing the various ATC units we would call and landmarks we expected to see en route. This was a tremendous help as it enabled us to prepare for the flight and understand what each other was expecting to do. Discussions (lively at times!) more often than not centred around which frequencies to call when and what we would – or wouldn’t – be able to see when transiting a certain area.



We decided to use a ‘call and response’ system for all of our cockpit drills and checks. With fatigue an issue we wanted to ensure we didn’t leave any check incomplete or miss anything vital. Amanda and I fly a lot together, so we know what the other is likely to do or expect in the cockpit. But on this occasion we did not want to

take any chances. This would be a multi-crew flight with both pilots in command. All checks would be read out loud and acknowledged by the other person... without fail.

During the day we also spent time with a journalist and photographer from the Oxford Mail and conducted a number of other telephone interviews with the press.

We had issued press releases and photographs from our previous flights to the aviation press as well as assorted newspapers and media outlets along our expected route. A number of our destination airfields had also contacted the press and as the day approached it was evident that there was a lot of interest in our little project.

RECORD SETTERS?

As a result of her air racing background Amanda is in contact with various officials from the Royal Aero Club. She approached the RAeC's record co-ordinator Geoffrey Boot and enquired whether it would be possible to use our Dawn to Dusk flight to establish one or more UK National Speed Records...

Ever since she started racing she had wanted to set a speed record and it appeared this would be the ideal opportunity to do so she registered our intention to compete. Each record attempt would need to be ratified by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) and paperwork would have to be signed at our departure and arrival point. This ruled out records at any of our touch and go stops, but we had plenty of fuel or press conference stops to choose from.

It was decided to make an attempt at the speed record from the Isle of Man to Doncaster, Duxford to Newquay and Newquay to Kemble and the FAI agreed to consider each of these records.

Whilst we recognised that we would not set a very competitive speed (especially as we were not flying direct between the two points) we felt that the record attempts would help us gain even further publicity for fly2help. There were no existing records in place for these routes – so all we had to do was complete the flight to set the record!

Amanda would have to log these flights though, as she was the only one of us with a racing licence. When we normally fly Dawn to Dusk we split the legs between us with one person logging the take-off and the other logging the landing – this means we both get each airfield in our logbook and the flying hours generally work out evenly. However if Amanda was going to log these long distance legs it would have left me with lots of landing but very little flying time so we broke with convention and decided that Amanda would log the record flights and I would log the rest of the time.

PPR

With just 48 hours left to run to the flight we contacted each airfield in turn and spoke to the air traffic controllers to obtain prior permission (PPR) to land or touch and go. This proved a worthwhile exercise because even though our landings had all been agreed by airport management or marketing staff that information had not always filtered through to the tower!

The USAF at Mildenhall was as efficient as ever and issued us with a PPR reference number, as did Blackpool airport. By the close of play on the 12th we had PPR in place at every airfield, with the exception of Old Warden, Little Gransden and North Weald which required PPR on the day itself.

At this stage Adrian Kinsley and James Wiskin at Flightworx Aviation also filed our VFR Flight Plans and customs forms to the Isle of Man and the Flight Plan from the Isle of Man to Doncaster. We also prepared an IFR Flight Plan in case we needed one.

D2D DAY MINUS 1

Thursday August 13 dawned bright and sunny... a perfect day to go flying... we could only hope that the weather would hang around one more day.

Final preparations for the flight began at 08.30 when I dropped my fiancée at work en route to the supermarket. Nia had been very understanding throughout the planning process. She had seen our apartment turned into an aviation haven full of maps, charts and books, yet she had not complained once. She had suffered endless chat about VORs, MSAs, PPR and all manner of acronyms of which she knew nothing about. Now she was bidding me farewell as I departed on what she considered to be a long and potentially risky trip. She smiled in a slightly bemused manner as she waved goodbye, not quite understanding why I was planning to get up at 4am and fly around the country.

I promised to keep her as updated as I could over the next 48 hours but explained that she may have more success if she logged onto my website to see where I was... she smiled again sweetly!

With our goodbyes made I set off to pick up supplies for the flight. Past experience has shown that the choice of food one takes on a Dawn to Dusk flight is very important. Food needs to be high in sugar and energy to help sustain you through a long day, but it cannot melt or be messy in any format. Bite sized snacks are ideal as they enable you to eat a mouthful of food quickly – we have discovered in the past that the likelihood of being called on the radio is directly proportionate to the amount of food you have in your mouth!

Liquid intake is also important. It is vital to remain hydrated during the flight but with some flight legs exceeding three hours 'comfort breaks' must be considered! We do carry water on the aeroplane but also fresh and dried fruit as a source of liquid. Sweets such as 'Jelly Babies' also provide liquid and sugar.

I carry a supply of energy drinks (such as Red Bull) in the aeroplane but Amanda is allergic to caffeine so she does not have the luxury of stimulants to keep her awake and alert. This year we located a new 'V-Water' drink which contains a natural stimulant called Ginseng (which Amanda is not allergic to). It also contains vitamin B3 (needed for normal neurological functioning), vitamins B5 and B6 (which promote cognitive support and help you think) and vitamin B12 (which maintains energy and vitality).

This year's shopping list consisted of:

- 12 x Breakfast Bars
- 6 x Bananas
- 6 x Apples
- Dried Fruit (cherry, berries and raisins)
- 12 x mini scotch eggs
- 12 x 500ml bottles of water
- 4 x cans of Red Bull
- 4 x 500ml bottles of 'V Water'
- 4 cartons of apple juice
- 1 carton of Pringles crisps
- 1 bag of Jelly Babies
- 1 Bag of Wine Gums

With the food stashed in a thermally insulated bag it was time to head to the airfield and start final preparations for the flight.

Up-to-date PLOGs were printed off along with promotional material to hand to journalists we met at the various press conferences. We included details of the charity along with details of Take Flight Aviation's aircraft as well as background information on the team, the Dawn to Dusk contest and the theme.



Take Flight's Bob Shuttleworth and his son Oliver were on hand throughout the day to help and by mid afternoon Oliver had polished G-BYSP to a deep sheen. Bob applied the Take Flight Aviation logo to the nose and at 17.00 Amanda and I taxied the aeroplane to the pumps asking the refuellers to fill her "to the gunnels." This took just over 30 litres and the cost (£45.53) was added to the Take Flight account.

AIR TEST

Although Amanda and I have a lot of combined time on various PA-28 aircraft – including the Cherokee 180 – we felt it prudent to take 'Sierra Papa' aloft for a quick circuit in the evening light. We took the opportunity to test the short take off and landing (STOL) performance as we knew we had some short grass strips on the following day's itinerary – and much to our delight 'SP handled impeccably. We departed Wellesbourne at 17.20 and shut down at 17.40 having flown a circuit each.

After I had made a 'hash' of parking the aeroplane in the tight spot outside Take Flight we adjourned to the club house to carry on with our preparations!

First off was a telephone conference with John Baker and Adrian Kinsley, who were now ensconced in the Flightworx Ops Room at Earls Colne. We ran through the route one final time, detailing the various ATC units that we planned to call en route. John noted these down so that he could telephone ahead to inform the controllers of our impending arrival.

The latest weather TAFs and METARs were discussed as were our parking and refuelling arrangements at our various top offs. By now Amanda and I, as well as John, were all receiving a large number of calls from journalists and it was quite difficult to concentrate on the task at hand – so we decided to ignore all non-essential calls until after the briefing.



At this time Guy Stockley joined the discussions by e-mailing through his synopsis of the NOTAMs. His location 'somewhere in Afghanistan' meant he was unable to join us on the telephone but he was in e-mail contact throughout the evening. We later checked through NOTAMs in full, for peace of mind, but as per Guy's synopsis there was little to affect us.

I also took the opportunity to telephone Ed Swain, my contact on the Isle of Man, and the person instrumental in obtaining permission to visit the airport. We had planned to make landfall at the Maughold Lighthouse... but I didn't know how to pronounce it! Not wanting to make a fool of myself of the radio I called Ed, who flies a PA-28 on the island, and asked his advice. It transpired that it is pronounced 'Mach-Hold'... so I'm glad I asked!

With the telephones set aside to cool down we next turned our attention to 'SP. We loaded spare oil, life jackets, and Take Flight's 'pop-up' banners for use at press conferences. The media packs were also loaded as well as other 'non-valuable' items such as jackets. We figured the more we could do in the daylight the better, as it would be undoubtedly dark when we arrived the following morning.



LAST MINUTE

Amanda and I both live at least an hour from Wellesbourne Mountford aerodrome (in different directions) and didn't relish the thought of an extra hours commute on top of a long day.



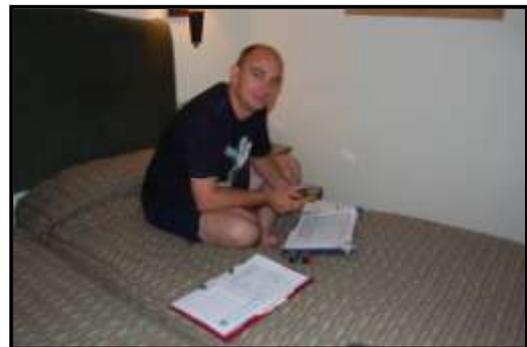
We were therefore very grateful to the Charlecote Pheasant hotel, which provided us with free accommodation the night before the flight. The hotel is a beautiful country house set in the village of Charlecote – less than 3 minutes from the airfield. It has 72 bedrooms and free WiFi internet enabled us to continue planning at the hotel whilst waiting for dinner.

Like many organisations the Charlecote Pheasant had never heard of fly2help before this flight but is now a firm supporter of the charity – and they were more than willing to assist our flight by providing free accommodation for the crew.

With the knowledge that eating opportunities the next day would be sparse Amanda and I both enjoyed a big dinner at the hotel to 'stock up' on energy. It was only a swift visit to the hotel however as we needed to return to the airfield to continue preparing the aeroplane and printing off the final weather.

After showering and shaving I finally adjourned to bed at 22.30 - although I took the opportunity to plan the first few legs using the spot winds shown on the most up-to-date Form 214 (valid 21.00-03.00UTC on the 13-14/8/09) whilst getting ready for bed.

An average 2,000ft wind was judged to be 220° at 10kts and this was entered into the first few PLOGs.



I turned off the light at around 23.00 contemplating how well things were going. Indeed, compared to previous Dawn to Dusk entries there had not yet been any massive last minute re-routings to plan for or dramas of any description!

D2D DAY

I was awake before the alarm sounded at 03.45 – I have a knack of waking up 5 minutes before the alarm. I often consider not setting the alarm, but I guess ‘Murphy’s Law’ dictates that the day I don’t set it will be the day my body-clock lets me down... and today was not a day for nasty surprises.

Thanks to the proximity of the Charlecote Pheasant to the airfield we were able to surface, get dressed and be at the airfield within 15 minutes. The automatic lighting at Take Flight flickered into life at 03.59 as we sheltered our bleary eyes from the glare of the artificial light. Outside it was dark, with about 50% cloud cover at about 3,000ft. The moon was bright but we still needed torches to find our way safely out to Sierra Papa. A heavy dew had fallen overnight and the airframe was sodden, so our first job was to wipe down the screen and windows with a cloth. A thorough exterior ‘A’ Check was completed by both of us – using the call and response checklist method – before we climbed aboard for the first time.



“Did you hear that?” Amanda whispered excitedly... “It was a Tawny Owl!” It was nice to know we weren’t alone and a broad smile spread across both of our faces. “Excited yet?” I asked... “You bet!” came the response.

Back in the aircraft our headsets were plugged in and checked, and then flight bags were loaded along with the food and an assortment of cameras and charging equipment. A Portable Locator Beacon (PLB) was also stashed within grasp – as we would be crossing the Irish Sea to

the Isle of Man – and life jackets were prepared for donning.

At 04.15 we checked in with the Operations team at Earls Colne. John Baker had positioned himself there the night before and stayed in a local B&B whereas Adrian had drawn the short straw and had been at work since 20.00 on the nightshift.

Everything seemed in order so we went for a ‘last chance comfort break’ before locking up Take Flight HQ and waving at the webcam... just in case anybody was suffering from insomnia or was awake enough to be watching at that time of the morning! It was 04.45 as we walked out to G-BYSP to begin our latest adventure...



There wasn’t a breath of wind at Wellesbourne Mountford as we clambered into our lifejackets (is there a more undignified article of clothing known to mankind?). It was a beautiful morning and on the eastern horizon we saw the first glimpses of sunlight. We latched the door closed at exactly 05.00 and Sierra Papa’s engine fired into life at 05.06.

Sierra Papa is a really lovely aeroplane, she's clean, comfortable but above all else I noticed how smooth she was. The engine purred as it warmed up on the apron at Wellesbourne. With the interior lights on, as well as the strobes, nav-lights and landing light she must have made quite a sight on the deserted airfield.

Just then a hair ran across the grass in front of us until it reached the extended beam of the landing light. Puzzled, it stopped and stared briefly in our direction. He cocked his head on one side, as if in bewilderment. It was as though he was wondering what on earth we were doing at such an ungodly hour.

Amanda booted up the Airbox GPS and stuck it to the windscreen with the suction cup that had been provided by the manufacturer. She had only taken delivery of the unit the day before and had spent a few moments 'playing' with it in the hotel prior to going to sleep the night before, but despite this unfamiliarity she soon had a route planned from Wellesbourne to Halfpenny Green and a magenta line to follow.

There was nobody in the tower at Wellesbourne at 05.10 (although we later found out that Frankie the controller – was listening at home whilst cleaning her teeth!) but I made a traffic call as I prepared to open the throttle to taxi.

"Wellesbourne Traffic Good Morning, this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa" I called. "We are a PA-28 at Take Flight departing on the Dawn to Dusk Challenge and we're just taxiing to the Echo hold for Runway Three Six."

"Are you ready m'dear?" I asked, looking at my companion.

"Ready to Roll!" was her clipped response.

ROLLING

We both tried our brakes as we taxied to the hold and with little or no wind registering on the sock I taxied directly to the hold lines to do our power checks.

"Parking Brake On" Amanda called

"On" I responded

"Power set"

"Twelve hundred and steady"

"Fuel"

"Tanks changed – left tank selected – both showing full"

"Engines Ts & Ps"

"Cool but warming"

"RPM Set Two Thousand"

"Two Thousand"

"Carb Heat"

"Slight drop registered"

"Magnetos"

"Left... Both... Right... Both... all fine"

"Suction"

"Sucking"

"Ammeter"

"Charging"

"Engine Ts & Ps"

"All now in the green"

"RPM Idle"

"Four hundred indicated, nice and smooth!"

"Rest Twelve Hundred"

"Twelve Hundred Steady"

"Trimmers?"

"Set to Take Off"

"Throttle Friction?"

"Finger Tight"

"Mixture?"

"Set Rich"

"Mags?"

"Set to both"

"Master Switch?"

"On"

"Pitot Heat?"

"On"

"Primer?"

"Locked"

"Fuel?"

"On and sufficient"

"Fuel Pump?"

"On"

"Flaps?"

"Stage One selected"

"Instruments?"

"DI aligned, HI erect, compass checked and I have a QFE of one zero one five. Engine Ts & Ps now firmly in the green"

"Hatches and Harnesses?"

"Good my side – confirm door latched?"

"Door latched and harness secure. Recycle carb heat?"

"Slight drop."

"Controls Full & Free for Fletch?"

"Full & Free for Fletch!"

The last call is a modification to the standard checklist in memory of a very dear friend Steve 'Fletch' Fletcher. Fletch was my photographer at Today's Pilot magazine and he was killed in a flying accident in the USA earlier this year. It appears as though the ailerons on the aeroplane he was flying in were not connected and the pilot had not performed a 'full and free' check prior to departure. Fletch lost his life as the aeroplane crashed on take-off – leaving behind a wife and two young children. "Full and free for Fletch" is my way of remembering a very dear friend and ensuring I never make the same mistake.

AIRBORNE

“Golf Sierra Papa is rolling Runway three six” Amanda called as we opened the throttle and accelerated down Wellesbourne’s 917m runway.



It was still fairly dark, despite the sun trying to break through the thickening clouds [left], and the few cars on the roads had their headlights on full beam. We smiled at each other again and Amanda was visibly ‘bouncing’ in the right hand seat. The adventure had begun.

My pre-bed reckoning the night before had given me a heading of 307° to reach Wolverhampton’s Halfpenny Green airport. I reckoned we should be there in 19 minutes.

As I steered us onto heading Amanda called Birmingham Approach on 118.05 to ask for a Traffic Service and to ask him to open our flight plan.

“Golf Sierra Papa good morning, traffic service you have, squawk seven thousand for the time being. The Birmingham QFE is now one zero one seven. You’re up early?” he enquired, clearly wanting further information.

Amanda read back the information we’d been given, adding “We’re on the Dawn to Dusk competition, we’re aiming to visit 25 airfields between now and 9pm – all for a charity called fly2help!”

“Sounds interesting...” he replied, having clearly heard enough!

We pressed on northwards, around the western edge of the Birmingham CTA at about 2,000ft, and passed Redditch two minutes later than schedule at 05.25.

At 05.30 we requested to briefly leave the Birmingham frequency and we made a ‘blind’ call to Halfpenny Green Traffic as we approached the airfield from the south. It was difficult to spot in the early morning gloom but I thought I glimpsed hangar roofs in our eleven o’clock. It corresponded with the GPS reading so we descended down to circuit height and began our approach to runway 34.

G-BYSP touched down at 05.36 – six minutes later than our pre-planned schedule but just two minutes later than the wind adjusted PLOGs. We were happy.

The light conditions were still too low for the digital SLR camera to operate but we obtained a dull photograph [right] of Halfpenny Green as we climbed away on a new heading of 345°.



We called Birmingham Approach again on 118.05 and he continued providing our Traffic Service.

HALFPENNY GREEN

Halfpenny Green, as the home to many flying schools and parachuting schools, has been home to numerous airshows and fly-ins over the years.

Today fly-ins and family days – such as the recent Project Propeller day which saw countless military veterans take to the skies in light aircraft – are commonplace but back in the 1970s ‘proper’ airshows could be found at Halfpenny Green. Taking one such event on August 27, 1972 as an example spectators were treated to displays by the Army Air Corps Blue Eagles (flying Westland Sioux AH1s XT134, XT193, XT206, XT242 and XW192), Avro Anson C.19 VM325, Westland Whirlwind HAR.10 XD163 and de Havilland Dominie XS712. There was also a three-ship of Jet Provost T.4s dubbed the ‘Macaws’ (flying XP558, XR670 and XS180) as well as a little-known Chipmunk team dubbed the ‘Blue Chips.’ The latter flew Chipmunk T.10s WD285, WG316, WG317 and WG348.

However, the town of Wolverhampton traces its airshow routes back much further, way back to June 1910 in fact. The first flying meeting of the year – and thus the third flying meeting ever held in Great Britain – was organised by the Midland Aero Club at Dunstall racecourse near Wolverhampton. This meeting was open solely to British airmen and attracted 19 entrants, although three didn’t make it through the preliminary trials.

The majority of entrants came from the flying clubs and privateers from Brooklands as well as a few from Eastchurch. Charles Rolls and Claude Grahame-White were among the competitors however Sam Cody was notable by his absence. He was recovering from injuries caused when he crashed while testing his Biplane III a few days earlier.

The meeting was a moderate success but was marred by bad weather that resulted in several flying machines being damaged or even destroyed.

COSFORD

Heading 345° from Wolverhampton in the semi-darkness our next point of call was the RAF Museum at RAF Cosford. We had hoped to land at Cosford but a resounding silence was heard in response to our various requests... until the day before the flight!



Sadly it was too late to amend our plans but as it happened our route from Halfpenny Green to the Isle of Man took us directly through the overhead of the museum. We passed Cosford at 05.41 – exactly on schedule. Again it was far too dark for photographs but we did obtain a blurry image of the airfield [left] as we routed past.

Cosford had a certain sentimental value for me as it was here that I attended my first airshow as a child [see the foreword].

I attended every Cosford airshow from 1984 through to around 2003, with the exception of 1992 when I grumpily embarked on a Geography Field Trip instead!

Upon researching my book on British airshows I stumbled across a record of that 1984 show... it certainly lived up to the memories I held dear for more than 25 years. Highlights included BAC-111

G-AWBL from British Airways, Robin Bowes WAR Replica Focke Wulf 190 (G-WULF), The Vintage Pair Meteor T.7 (WF791) and Vampire T.11 (XH304) from Leeming, and Sea Fury T.20 WG655 from the Royal Navy Historic Flight.

The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight provided the Lancaster (marked in Guy Gibson's AJ-G codes) along with Hurricane PZ865 ('Last of the Many') and Spitfire Ila P7350 (marked as SH-D) and Sir Adrian Swire's Spitfire MH434 also put in an appearance.

Other display items included Mike Crimble's Piston Provost (WW397), Buccaneer XT277 from 237OCU at RAF Honington, Hercules C.1 XV182 from RAF Lyneham and Jaguar T.2 XX141 from 226 OCU at RAF Lossiemouth.

That Vulcan which inspired this nine-year-old into a life in aviation was XL426, the dedicated display aircraft that year and assigned to 50Sqn at RAF Waddington. Today XL426 survives in ground-running condition at Southend airport.

Then of course there were the nine scarlet Hawk T.1s of the Red Arrows (XX227, XX251, XX252, XX253, XX257, XX259, XX260, XX264 & XX266) which stopped me in my tracks.

Today RAF Cosford remains one of the nation's foremost airshow venues with the 2009 event attracting a record 60,000 spectators.

EVER NORTHWARDS

Pressing on past Cosford our route took us northwards (on a heading of 345°) towards the Manchester low level corridor.

At 05.45 Amanda called Birmingham APP saying "Golf Sierra Papa is now north of Cosford and would like to continue with Shawbury LARS on one two zero decimal seven seven five."

"Golf Sierra Papa, frequency change approved," responded Birmingham. "Good luck and have a nice trip."

Shortly afterwards, at 05.50 we got our first glimpse of the sun – breaking through the clouds to our right. It was only a glimpse but the bright orange sunrise was enough to lift our spirits completely – we wouldn't be flying below cloud all day after all.

This seemed like a good time to do a FREDA check, and we reverted to the call-and-response method yet again.

"Fuel?" prompted Amanda

"On and sufficient" I responded. "Fuel Pump on please"

"Fuel Pump On"

"Tank changed – Right tank selected – Fuel Pump off please"

"Fuel Pump Off. Radio?"

"On, set and working"

"Engine Ts & Ps?"

"In the green, Carb Heat selected Hot"

"DI?"

"Compass Aligned"

"Altitude?"

"Two thousand feet on one zero one seven. Carb Heat Cold"

As we expected we receive no response from Shawbury so at 05.51 we changed to Manchester APP on 118.575.

“Golf Sierra Papa, good morning this is Manchester... you’re up early, pass your message” responded the controller in a very ‘flu-ridden’ voice. He was clearly yet another controller surprised to hear a PA-28 on the airwaves prior to 6am.

“Manchester Approach good morning Golf Sierra Papa is a PA-28 routing from Wellesbourne to the Isle of Man in the Dawn to Dusk competition” I said. “We’re currently approaching Crewe at two thousand feet on one zero one seven, requesting a Basic Service as we route through the low level corridor towards Blackpool.”

We were given our Basic Service and approved to transit the corridor ‘not above 1,250ft’ on 1017. Shortly afterwards we passed Crew at 05.56 – three minutes ahead of the PLOG.

Our next waypoint was the small town of Winsford. We were due to reach the town at 06.01 but we reached it a minute early at 6am exactly. “There’s my school!” Amanda shrieked. When she had calmed down she informed me that she had lived in Winsford as a child and although she couldn’t remember how to see her house from the air she had indentified her school [right].



It’s nice when flights such as this trigger memories and have sentimental value. During our 2007 flight we had flown past the gliding field where Amanda had received her first taste of gliding and I had flown into Birmingham Airport from where I had watched aeroplanes fly as a small child. It’s a humbling experience and one of the many things I treasure most about being able to fly and compete in contests such as Dawn to Dusk.

From Winsford we changed heading slightly and flew 001° – effectively due north – to the Thelwall Viaduct VRP. We were due to reach this at 06.08 but we made it with two minutes to spare. From here we turned west slightly onto a heading of 318° towards Blackpool airport.

We made up another minute by the time we had reached the M62/M6 junction – arriving at 06.08 instead of 06.09 – before heading to the M6/M58 VRP.



Manchester instructed us to contact Warton on 130.80 next, giving us the regional pressure setting of 1012 and wishing us the best of luck. There was no response from Warton so we made blind calls.

Our next waypoint was the River Ribble at Warton [left] by which time we could see Blackpool Tower and the coast ahead of us.

There was no radio response from our transmissions to Blackpool either – they were

probably still warm in their beds – so we kept making blind calls in case there was other traffic in the area.

We continued to make up time and turned overhead Blackpool [right] at 06.23 before coasting out to sea on a heading of 303° at 06.24.



FEET WET

The cloud over the water looked foreboding as we set course for the Isle of Man. However, to the south west we could see Wales and behind us the sun was shining brightly over Blackpool. The warm sun tinted the choppy sea with a copper hue in a spectacular manner. The clouds were breaking up now, but in front of us they seemed to be lowering.



We had hoped to transit the Irish Sea at 4,500ft but the threatening clouds [left] forced us down to just 1,000ft above the waves. We could see the white tops of the crests braking beneath us and small fishing vessels being bounced around on the swell.

“Happy?” I inquired to my flying companion. I received a non-committal nod in return.

I dislike flying over water in a single-engined aeroplane. I’m sure it is psychological but my hearing become more acute as I listen for every odd noise from the engine. I select Carb heat more often and my breathing deepens. Of course I know that the aeroplane doesn’t know it is over water and it is no more likely to suffer a failure than it is when it’s over land – but the anxiety level increases three-fold.

My anxiety was compounded by the fact that we couldn’t raise Scottish Information on 119.875. We transmitted several calls without a response, no doubt because of our low altitude over the water and the hills on the mainland blocking the transmissions.

VIBRATION

At 06.29 I felt a vibration... It took me a few seconds to realise that it was my mobile phone! It was hanging around my neck and we were clearly low enough for it to still receive messages. I asked Amanda to take control of the aeroplane and I read the message out loud.

[Hi steve & amanda, just 2 wish u lots of luck wiv d2d 2day. We r all finkin of u. Mandy, sarah & jessie-may xx]

It was from our dear friend and fly2help founder Mandy Pantall. Our mutual friend Sarah Pepper and her 8 month old daughter were visiting whilst 'daddy' (Mark 'Arnie' Arnold) was off working with the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Mark is an engineer with the flight and very much part of the airshow world.



It was lovely to receive a message of support from such close friends, especially from Mandy as we were really doing this trip for her benefit... but my nerves could really have done without a vibration at 1,000ft over the Irish Sea!

Mid way across the water the clouds finally began to lift [left] and we

were able to climb slightly and breathe a sigh of relief. We never made it to more than 2,000ft but every extra foot counted and carried us further from the waves.

With no success raising Scottish Information we switched our attentions to Ronaldsway Approach and at 06.35 we made contact. "Golf Sierra Papa, good morning, readability three" said the controller (doubtless due to our range). "You're cleared to enter the zone, the Ronaldsway is QFE one zero one five and runway in use is two six. Squawk four five five one."



PARDON?

We tuned in and checked the Ronaldsway VOR (IOM 112.2) before listening in on the ATIS on 123.875 for the latest weather.

Ronaldsway Information November told us that the wind was 190° at 10kts, visibility was 10km, cloud was 'few' at 1,500ft and scattered at 4,000ft. The temperature was 14° and the dew point 11°. The TDME was unserviceable.

It was shortly after this that I encountered a most peculiar sensation. Whilst looking down at the waves below I lost all sense of hearing in my right hand ear. It was most disconcerting and I asked Amanda to take over flying the aeroplane for a few moments.

"I can't hear through my right ear" I explained to her.

"Pardon?" she responded.

“I said I can’t... OK, very funny!” It was the oldest joke in the book, but I’d fallen for it at 2,000ft over the Irish Sea.



But what was wrong? I took off my headset and could hear without problems – which was a relief. I tried what Amanda described as the ‘male logic’ method of hitting the headset increasingly hard but that didn’t seem to make a difference.

“Maybe you need to change batteries?” Amanda suggested.

Then, as I leant forward to pick up the battery holder I saw the problem... I had trodden on the unit and turned down the volume control for the right ear!

“Fool!” exclaimed Amanda (actually it wasn’t that polite but I’ll spare you the specifics!)

“Actually – it was deliberate” I retorted, “there was an annoying whine coming from the right hand side of the aeroplane... I was trying to block it out!” Shortly afterwards I was poked in the ribs!

ISLE OF MAN & THE MANX AIR DERBY

We coasted in overhead Maughold Lighthouse [right] at 06.54 – three minutes earlier than planned, no doubt aided by the fact that we hadn’t used the expected climbing time to 4,500ft.

I reported landfall and turned onto a heading of 228° past Douglas Bay [below] towards Ronaldsway.



Amanda chose this opportunity to apply her makeup and ‘do’ her hair in readiness for meeting the first people of the day. Although we’d spoken to countless people on the radio we had actually seen nobody but each other since about 10.30pm the previous evening.



We could see Ronaldsway as we passed Douglas Bay and upon reporting “Field in Sight” at 07.01 we were told to contact the tower on 118.90.

Our routing across the sea had been very specific as we had wanted to recreate the route flown by the Manx Air Derby in the 1930s.

The first Air Derby, in 1932 saw aeroplane escorted across from Blackpool by a flying boat but subsequent events saw a fleet of aeroplane racing from the south of England, turning overhead Blackpool and coasting in at Maughold Lighthouse (as per our route).

The 1932 event established a pattern of hosting an airshow after the racing had been completed. Ronaldsway had attracted well over a thousand spectators, at a shilling a time and they were treated to a display of flour bomb dropping, aerobatics and balloon bursting.

Attempts were made to hold a race meeting in 1935 but it was not until the following year that the first of a series of international events was held. It aroused tremendous interest in the aeronautical world and attracted 20 entrants including many famous names. The start was at Hanworth Aerodrome, London, and the race route would be via Speke, where a compulsory stop of one hour was required to check and refuel aircraft, before flying on to Blackpool, then across the Irish Sea to Maughold Head and the finishing line in Douglas Bay [below]. The total distance to be covered was 298 miles including the 31 mile sea crossing which would be patrolled by lifeboats. The event was to be open to any type of aircraft, both British and foreign, and it is interesting to note that the entries included one of the new Cierva autogiros.



With so many different types of machines competing the handicappers had a formidable task in deciding starting times according to known performance which, theoretically, were designed to bring all aircraft over Douglas at the same time. The first aircraft would leave Hanworth at 10.00am and the last at 12.55pm

Progress of the race was broadcast by BBC North Region and spectators lining Douglas Promenade, in cold and miserable conditions, were kept informed by

loud speaker. The judges were in position and were headed by the Duchess of Bedford who had flown to the Island in her own Moth.

Just after 15.00 the first aircraft was sighted at Maughold Head. It was the DH 85 Leopard Moth piloted by the youthful 19-year-old Alex Henshaw who received tremendous cheers as he dived across the Bay, circled and headed for Ronaldsway. Last home were Mabel and Sheila Glass who had force-landed near Heston, Wirral, when their Moth ran out of petrol.

The 1937 race caused great excitement when the news broke that that the Aero Club von Deutschland had entered two BFW 180s (later to be known as Messerschmitt BF108s).

For the London – IOM race there were 23 entries received although just 20 started. The handicappers placed the Taylor 'Cub' of A. J. Walter in the front, starting at 10.50 and it was nearly two hours before 'scratch' man Alex Henshaw, would be able to give chase. He was flying his new 205hp Percival Mew Gull – which he would go on to race to Cape Town and back in 1939.

Thick fog over Maughold Head reduced visibility to between 300 and 400 yards and caused complete chaos as competitors anxiously searched for check points. Many gave up and returned to Blackpool but first home was one of the dark blue BFW 180s piloted by Major Seidemann – complete with swastika on the tail...

Alas he was judged to have missed the finish line in Douglas Bay and was excluded. He immediately took off again and flew to Douglas, resulting in a protest being lodged with the Stewards who held three meetings over the weekend to sort things out. It was not until Monday morning that they announced the final placings, declaring Major Seidemann the winner as he had been the only competitor to be recorded at Maughold Head. He was of course delighted to be taking the Challenge Cup back to Germany, claiming it was 'better to race in peace than in war'.

The following year the race and subsequent airshow attracted a considerable number of foreign entries making the Isle of Man Air Races a really international affair. The entries rose to 33 and included six from Germany with Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Latvia and America all represented. By far the strongest force came from Germany with an entry of three ME 108s, an AGO Ao192 Kurier, a Klemm 135 and a Focke Wulf Fw 44 Steiglitz which became a standard basic trainer for the Luftwaffe.

An interesting British entry was that of Flying Officer Geoffrey de Havilland, son of the brilliant aircraft designer. He was flying the racing T.K.2 built by the de Havilland Technical School under the sponsorship of Lord Wakefield of Castrol fame who did so much to support speed sports in pre-war days.

The start of the race was moved to Hatfield and the finish was at Ronaldsway rather than Douglas. First away on a bright Saturday morning was Ronald Porteous in a Chiltern DW.1. He left at 11.25 and once again Alex Henshaw in the Mew Gull was last away at 12.45.

The little Comper Swift, once owned by the Duke of Windsor and now flown by Stan Lowe came home first having taken 111 minutes and 21 seconds flying time and averaged 159.5mph.

That weekend also saw the first glider (towed) crossing of the Irish Sea. The pilot was German ace Herr Kronfield who, in 1931, had been first to cross the English Channel winning a Daily Mail prize of £1,000. Herr Kronfield took off in a Kirby Kite from a Yorkshire airfield, towed by instructor pilot Mark Lecayo at the controls of an Avro Cadet. Strong winds were against them and it took one hour and 50 minutes for the 31 mile crossing between Blackpool and Maughold Head.

When the entrants for the London - Isle of Man Race assembled at Hatfield for the 1939 event the absence of Continental competitors was conspicuous, due no doubt to the increasingly tense international situation.

The race was blessed by fine weather though strong winds kept speeds down. The BBC broadcast commentaries from both Blackpool and Ronaldsway and listeners heard of the thrilling finish as Geoffrey de Havilland flashed over the line hotly pursued by a rapidly gaining Alex Henshaw finishing just seconds behind.

Although the Manx Air Derby's were probably the most important aviation events on the island it actually traces its airshow history back to 1911.

The summer of 1911 saw the Coronation of King George V and was also the year when the Isle of Man celebrated its Jubilee as a municipality. To mark these events the town of Douglas laid on a lavish programme of events to amuse and entertain both residents and holiday-makers alike.

Included in the schedule was an Aviation Display on Tuesday July 4 which gave island residents their first chance to see aeroplanes in Manx skies. Two pilots were contracted to appear the meeting,

Claude Grahame-White in his Farman biplane and George Barnes in his Blériot. The aircraft were shipped across the Irish Sea but Barnes' aeroplane was damaged whilst being reassembled.

The island still has a rich aviation heritage and air events take place at both Jurby and Ronaldsway airfields. The annual TT Races also boast an aviation element so a visit on the Take Flight Dawn to Dusk Airshow Challenge was a 'no-brainer.'

SAFELY DOWN

We landed on runway 26 at 07.06 – nine minutes ahead of our scheduled arrival time.

“Golf Sierra Papa, welcome to Ronaldsway” said the jolly controller. “Exit at Charlie and you’ll be parking on Victor this morning, I believe you have a welcoming committee!”

He wasn't wrong! We taxied onto parking area Victor to be greeted by a sea of yellow coats and cameras. We shut down at 07.10 and took a deep breath of sea air – it felt good to have that water crossing behind us. Before climbing from the aeroplane I made a quick call to John in the Ops Room to check in. There wasn't time to talk – simply to let him know we were safe and to say we would call for a full briefing before we departed.

The first to greet us was a representative of 'Special Branch' and we immediately expected to be quizzed about our Flight Plan, customs forms and passport details – however we were far from the truth. This policeman was an aviation enthusiast who wanted to be the first to welcome us to his island!



We were also greeted by Gary Lee the Duty Manager at the Isle of Man Airport. Director Ann Reynolds sent her apologies for absence and extended an invitation to visit the islands as her guest in the future. Joining Gary was Ed Swain from the TT Races and a mass of media.

The next 15 minutes were a blur of interviews and posing with the BBC Isle of Man TV taking up the bulk of our time [right].

Emblazoned in fly2help logos we spoke in detail about our flight, the charity, the history of the Manx Air Derby and why we loved to fly so much.

The press were gentle with us but as a journalist it felt odd for me to be on the 'wrong' end of the interview for once.



By 07.25 we were becoming desperate for a 'comfort break' and the ever obliging Special Branch representative gave us a high speed lift – in his police car – to the main airport terminal! [left]

The Duty Manager joined us and offered us coffee, but time was of the essence. He did agree to sign Amanda's FAI Speed Record forms though and by 07.40 we were ready to head back to the aeroplane.

It was at this point that our Special Branch friend reappeared [right]... holding a pair of plastic bags. "I thought you might like some breakfast!" he said, handing us a bag each.

They contained sandwiches, chocolate, crisps, fruit, flapjacks and smoothies and were both a godsend and a lovely touch.



Before returning to the aeroplane we posed for photographs alongside the 'Three Legs of Man' statue (the symbol refers to the island's motto (Quocunque Jeceris Stabit, traditionally translated from Latin as 'Whichever way you throw it, it will stand') and then jumped into the police car for another ride around the airport perimeter at high speed!

As we donned our lifejackets and boarded Sierra Papa we were presented with Three Legs of Man badges and wished god-speed. We could not have wished for a friendlier welcome on the island and we are indebted to the airport's 'can do' attitude and enthusiasm – and to the police for our free breakfast!

BACK OUT TO SEA

We had been due to depart the Isle of Man at 07.45 but we didn't start the engine until 07.50. We had been swamped by the press and hadn't factored in a police escort to the lavatories!

That said, we were given a fast and efficient service by Ronaldsway ATC to get us airborne as quickly as possible: "Golf Sierra Papa good morning again" said the Tower Controller, "QFE one zero one five. I understand you're slightly behind schedule? If you can expedite your taxi you are clear to Alpha Two crossing Runway Two One."



With priority taxi instruction in pace Amanda conducted as many pre-take-off checks as possible 'on the roll' and were ready to depart at 07.57. I also phoned Ops Manager John from the hold to update him on our progress and to check if he had any messages. He was happy, we were happy, so it was time to go.

"Golf Sierra Papa is at Alpha Two ready for departure" I called as we moved up to the line

with my checks complete.

"Golf Sierra Papa, after departure it will be a left turn on track, squawk four five six zero, line up and wait runway two six"

I read back the information and advised the tower that I would be 'holding it low' on departure for benefit of the film crew waiting on Victor.

"Golf Sierra Papa you are clear take-off runway two six. Wind now One Nine Zero at Eight."

Amanda accelerated down the runway at exactly 08.00 and rotated at 65kts, holding Sierra Papa in ground effect until we passed the film crew at about 95kts. She then pulled up into a gentle climb whilst rocking the wings to wave goodbye.



We turned left onto a heading of 118° and set course out to sea [above], initially following a high speed ferry [left]. Within a few minutes Isle of Man Tower asked us to contact Approach on 120.850 but with little traffic there was nothing for them to talk to us about.

Even with a headwind our ground speed was 92kts and we soon overtook the ferry and concentrated on maintaining our heading. The conditions were bright

now but there was no discernable horizon over the sea so we maintained heading and attitude on instruments alone. We eased the throttle open slightly to make up the 15 minute delay we had incurred at the Isle of Man.

We bid farewell to Isle of Man Approach at 08.15, squawked 7000 and attempted to contact Scottish Information. Sadly we had no response once again so we were forced to cross the water in solitude.

With little in the way of landmarks across the sea our first – and only – waypoint was a gas field after 37nm. I estimated that we would reach this at 07.24 but were there four minutes early. The sun glinting off the water made the gas fields appear to hover in the air [right] – it was an eerie and magical sight and we were transfixed as they disappeared under the nose.



Soon the English coast came into view with the unmistakable sight of Blackpool Tower [left] on the horizon. I tried in vain to contact Blackpool Approach on three occasions before I got a clipped response: **“Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa, please contact me on the TWR frequency – one one eight decimal four.”**

“Blackpool Tower” I said with a smile on my face, imaging a ballroom dancing controller atop the ‘tower’, **“Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa is a PA-28 on a Dawn to Dusk competition flight, we are inbound to**

you from the Isle of Man for a touch and go, currently one five miles to run at three thousand feet on one zero one five and requesting airfield information and joining instructions.”

“Golf Sierra Papa, do you have the field in sight?”

“Affirm, Golf Sierra Papa has the field in sight.”

“Golf Sierra Papa you are number one to land, make a straight in approach for runway one zero, report five miles to run. The Blackpool QFE one zero one four. Confirm this will be a landing or a touch and go?”

I read back the information adding that **“this will be a touch and go, with a PPR reference number of 1408FW01.”**

At five miles to run [right] we had established Sierra Papa into a long final for Runway 10 – which was just 18° off our heading. I reported ‘five miles to run’ and was cleared to touch and go and advised that the wind was 140° at 5kts.

We touched down at 08.31 – four minutes earlier than my PLOG and now just one minute behind the pre-planned schedule. A higher cruise speed combined with a direct tracking out of the Isle of Man and a straight in approach for Blackpool had meant that we were back on schedule.



All legs on this flight were planned with an additional ten minutes built in to allow for descent, circuit join and climb out – but the straight in approach at Blackpool had saved most of that time.

BLACKPOOL

In October 1909 Blackpool was home to Britain's first 'official' airshow. [Full details are included in the airshow history appendix]

October 18, 1909 dawned bright and sunny however the weather deteriorated as the week progressed. Twelve competitors entered but only seven managed to fly during the week. Among them was A V Roe who brought his new Roe Triplane. His brother Humphrey had contributed significantly to the project and in recognition of the fact Roe called his Triplane 'Bulls Eye.' The name came about as Humphrey owned a factory in Manchester making the then famous Bulls-Eye elastic braces.



Unfortunately Roe was unable to get airborne and it fell to Frenchman Henri Farman to make the first circuit of the course – reportedly to thunders applause from the assembled masses.

Over 200,000 people are thought to have attended the Blackpool meeting over the course of the week, much to the delight of the Blackpool Corporation.



Farman went on to dominate the prize table and went home with £2,400 in winnings. He also achieved a British distance record of 35 miles.

Speaking of the events at Doncaster and Blackpool *The Wonderful Year 1909 – An Illustrated Record of Notable Achievements and Events* recalls that “In the third week of October flying meetings were held in England at Doncaster and Blackpool and attended by enormous numbers of spectators.

Both suffered from unfavourable weather, especially Doncaster.

“At Blackpool, Mr Henry Farman won the £2,000 purse with a flight of thirty-seven miles, 1,184 yards, in 1 hour, 32 minutes 16 seconds. He established, in addition, the English [distance] record of thirty miles, 1,577 yards in a storm. “

It goes on to record that “Latham performed a noteworthy feat at Blackpool on Friday, October 22. In the teeth of a gale of wind, estimated at forty miles an hour, he ran his monoplane out on the course, and succeeded in flying twice round at a height of fifty feet. The fight with the elements was most enthralling to the spectators, and indicated the great advance that had been made in controlling such machines in rough weather.

“On the last day of the Doncaster meeting M Delagrangé succeeded in establishing a new world's record for speed, covering 1 mile 1,543 yards in 1 minute 47.2 seconds - or at the rate of 53 miles 1,543 yards an hour.”

Blackpool still plays host to airshows today but they are a shadow of those held in the 1970s and 80s. The last major event took place on June 13, 1993 with a plethora of airshow acts flocking to the Lancashire airport. These included the Hawker ISS Fury (G-BTTA) and Lockheed T-33 (N33VC) from the Old Flying Machine Company at Duxford, the Fleet Air Arm Historic Flight's Fairey Firefly (WB271) and Robs Lamplough's P-51D Mustang G-BIXL (then named Miss L). Gary Numan's AT-6 Harvard G-AZSC – painted as a Mitsubishi Zero – was also in attendance as was Brian Lecomber's Extra 230 (G-XTRA) and Nigel Lamb's Toyota sponsored Pitts Special G-TIII. Dave Gilmour's yellow Gnat G-MOUR put in a flying appearance as did the Red Arrows and a Search & Rescue Wessex from RAF Valley. An extensive static park included the following:

C130K Hercules XV292
Gazelle HT3 XX396
Wessex XT668
Puma XW237
Canberra B2T WJ731
Jetstream XX476
Hawk T1 XX247
Hawk T1 XX164
Andover XS640
Dominie XW790
Bulldog T1 XX615
Bulldog T1 XX685
Dornier Do-28 Sky Servant 59+15
Mil-8 94+12
Panavia Tornado IDS 46+15
Jaguar T2A XX845
PA-28 G-BGPU
DH89A Dragon Rapide G-AIDL
Bell JetRanger G-DORB

FOLLOWING THE PIONEERS

It was fitting that after calling in at the venue for the first 'official' British airshow our next port of call would be Doncaster – the venue for the very first aviation show in the country. Doncaster beat Blackpool to the honours by three days but its event was shrouded in controversy and was never officially recognised by the powers that be.

From Blackpool's runway 10 we had to alter our heading very little to come onto our track of 113°.



My calculations predicted a 91kt groundspeed and I estimated we would arrive at Doncaster at 09.17 – some eight minutes ahead of schedule – if everything went to plan.

“Golf Sierra Papa, on departure you are clear to enter the Warton MATZ not above three thousand four hundred feet,” the Blackpool Tower controller told us as we climbed away from our touch and go. **“Remain clear of the ATZ and report crossing the M61.”**

We passed abeam Warton at 08.34 – exactly on schedule and reached the M61 [above] at 08.40 – again, exactly on time.

At this point Blackpool asked us to contact Manchester Approach – who in turn asked us to squawk 7373 and offered us a Basic Service. There was little traffic in the area so he had little to talk to us about – with the exception of the police Islander operating at 3,000ft around the Oldham area. We didn't see the traffic but it was very hazy by now.

Our next way point – a wind farm near Ramsbottom [right] – came and went two minutes earlier than expected at 08.47 and we remained with Manchester Approach until we passed abeam Crossland Moor airfield at Huddersfield at 08.56.



Just as we passed a large reservoir and dam [below] the controller informed us that: “Golf Sierra Papa, you're reaching the end of my world now – I suggest you squawk seven thousand and free call Doncaster Approach on one two six decimal two two five.”



We took the opportunity to listen to the ATIS first. Doncaster Information Echo was reporting wind of 190° at 4kts, visibility of 10km with 'few' clouds at 3,000ft. The QNH was 1016, the QFE 1015, the temperature +16° and the dew point +14°.

I always enjoy speaking to the Doncaster controllers, they seem so relaxed and GA friendly. The Approach controller welcomed us to his frequency and cleared us “direct to the field, not above three thousand feet on

one zero one six for a right base join runway for runway two zero.”

A few minutes later, just as we passed Barnsley at 09.02 (two minutes early) he called us again to ask if we were squawking 6160...

“Negative” I replied, “but we can do if you would like us to...”

“Did I not ask you to?” he asked, sounding puzzled.

Amanda and I looked at each other – neither of us recalled the request and neither had written it on our PLOGs... “Not that I recall sir...” I responded, waiting for a telling off.

“My apologies then Sierra Papa, but I have you identified now, let me know when you have the field in sight”

Approaching Doncaster I got my first glimpse of the historic racecourse [below]... the venue of Britain's very first airshow – way back in October 1909.



We were struggling to find the airfield in haze by now and although the GPS told us it was in our two o'clock neither of us could see it.

Then, suddenly, like a torch in the dark, the runway began to glisten and the runway lights came into view. "Golf Sierra has the field in sight" I reported unable to disguise the sense of relief in my voice.

We were cleared to contact the Tower controller on 128.775 and I made my initial call at 09.10.

"Golf Sierra Papa, you are clear land runway two zero, the wind now one nine zero less than five knots" came the response.

The main runway at Doncaster [right] is huge and you get a real sense of scale when you are on long final at about 800ft. The 2,893m long runway was extended when Finningley was home to V-Bomber squadrons and dispersals and it is clearly well looked after today.



"Golf Sierra Papa, welcome to Doncaster!" said the Tower Controller as we rolled out on our landing at 09.14 – a full eleven minutes ahead of schedule. "Do you know where you parking?"

"I believe we're parking on Foxtrot and being handled by Signature" I replied, "but if you could give me some pointers it'd be appreciated!"

"Have you been to Doncaster before Sierra Papa?"

"Negative Sir"

"Sierra Papa, that's understood, take the next exit – that's Echo – then it's right, left, left and left onto Foxtrot – I can see you've got a welcoming committee!"

I taxied us into the Foxtrot apron as Amanda updated her 'lippy' and checked her hair. Yet again there were cameras aplenty and I spied at least one TV camera pointing at us as we taxied toward the throng. I flashed the landing light at the camera and was immediately met with a barrage of camera flashes in return.

A quick run through the shut down checks later and I stopped the engine at 09.16. Immediately we were surrounded by cameras on both sides of the cockpit with photographers shouting and asking for us to look in their direction.

Amanda opened the door and was greeted by the smiling face of John from Signature. They had graciously agreed to 'handle' G-BYSP free of charge and they looked after us like royalty. First things



first, Amanda got John to sign her speed record forms, which he eagerly did as the cameras continued to roll. We had our first record 'in the bag!' Despite the fact that the flight guides list Doncaster as only stocking Jet A1 we were offered 100LL fuel on arrival – however we were not scheduled to uplift fuel so we decided against the offer.

Now it was time to meet the press. With so many to speak to we split up and took it in turns to speak into whichever microphone was thrust in our direction.

After ten minutes our throats were dry, we needed a drink and we needed the 'facilities' so John drove us to Signature for a brief rest-bite. I used this time to speak to Ops Manager John back at Earls Colne, who informed me that he had managed to obtain the PPR we needed to visit Old Warden, North Weald and Little Gransden. He has also been in contact with the USAF bases at Mildenhall and Fairford to keep them apace with the day's developments. We sent John some photos from our camera-phones which he added to the Awyr website along with updates and quotes from the team.

Back out at the aeroplane the press were still swarming around wanting quotes and photographs. Whilst Amanda was off having her photo taken for another newspaper I was interviewed by Lorna Dockerill from the airport's PR agency. When she mentioned that she'd never seen inside a small aeroplane I showed her up into the cockpit and sat her in G-BYSP. Fresh out of university she doesn't have the time or money to learn to fly at the moment, but the look of wonder in her eyes as she gazed around the cockpit left me in little doubt that a seed had been planted – another person has been inspired to fly.



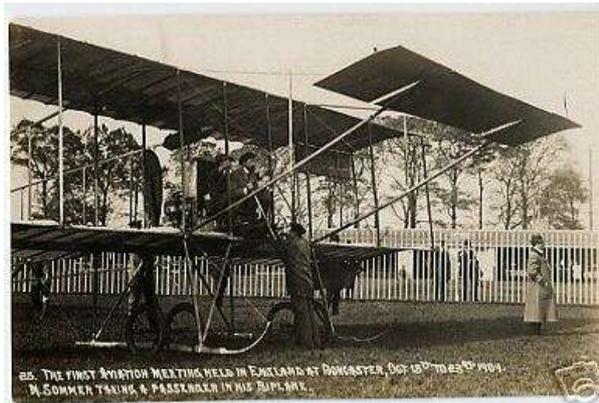
DONCASTER

Doncaster really is the spiritual home of airshows in this country. Britain's first airshow was dubbed 'Britain's First Aviation Race' by the organisers in an attempt to appease the Blackpool authorities – whose long-planned airshow was due to start three days later. Full details appear in the airshow history appendices.

The Doncaster event began on Friday October 15, 1909 and the day dawned with high winds and torrential rain – doubtless to the delight of the Blackpool Corporation! Nevertheless the show went on and the crowds turned out at Doncaster in their hoards.

Most had come to see Samuel Cody, the flamboyant American who had performed the first powered flight in Britain a little over a year before. It is said that Cody's biplane towered above the other competitor's machines and it was sheltered from the inclement weather within a large shed christened the Cathedral. The attending press mistakenly thought the name referred to the gigantic aeroplane however, and it was reported as such. Over the course of time the name became synonymous with Cody aeroplanes and several versions of the Cody Cathedral would fly over the years to come.

Joining Cody at Doncaster were England's Capt Windham and the Frenchmen Delegrange, Sommer, Leblon, Prevot and De La Vaux but it was inevitable that the colourful American would steal the show. The consummate showman chose Doncaster to swear the Oath of Allegiance and sign his British naturalisation papers. The band played both *'The Star Spangled Banner'* and *'God Save the Queen'*, the audience lapped up every moment and the newly declared 'Englishman' announced to the Daily Mail that he intended to make an attempt on Northcliffe's £1,000 prize for the first 'British' aviator to complete a circuit of one mile in an all-British aeroplane. He promptly taxied out and crashed before take off!



On another occasion Cody got as far as 600 yards before crashing but it mattered not to the public or media though who lapped up every moment of entertainment that Cody offered.

That first event took place at Doncaster Racecourse but modern day Doncaster Airport also saw more than its share of airshows over the years when it was used by the RAF and known as Finningley.

A look at the flying programme for the 1969 Battle of Britain At Home Day reveals a mouth-watering selection of aircraft on display. Flying items included a five-ship of Hunter FR.10s from 229OCU, four Lightning F3s from 111Sqn, two Lightning F6s and two Lightning T5s from 11Sqn, a Buccaneer from 736Sqn RN, a Royal Navy Phantom FG1 and four RAF Phantom FGR2s from 54Sqn, four F-5 Freedom Fighters from the Royal Norwegian AF and an F-104 Starfighter from the Royal Netherlands Air Force. AS if that were not enough the French Air Force sent the nine Fouga Magisters from the



Patrouille de France along with a pair of Nord Noratlas transports and the RAF provided the 'Red Pelican' team of six Jet Provost T4s.

RAF transports in the flying display included a Basset, Belfast, Britannia, Hercules, Comet C2 and no fewer than five Varsities! Add to this a Harrier GR1, Sea Vixen, Meteor F8, Gannet and Rolls Royce's Spitfire XIV and you have an impressive show... but then you add the V-Force to the list.



The highlight of many a Finningley Battle of Britain Display was the mass scramble of V-Bomber and in 1969 this included a stunning display by four Vulcans (XL321, XL360, XL390 & XL427) from Scampton as well as a pair of Victor BK1s from 57Sqn and a Victor SR2 from 543Sqn. The last show to be held at Finningley took place in 1994 and the venue is one of the most missed in the country.

DONCASTER TO DERBY

All too soon it was time to say goodbye to our new friends at Doncaster. We strapped in shortly before 09.55 and after listening to the ATIS contacted the Tower on 128.775. Engine start was approved at 09.56 and we immediately called for taxi clearance to Coventry via Derby. Our 'wheels off' time had been budgeted to be 09.55 so we were slightly behind schedule.

"Golf Sierra Papa you are clear to Charlie One for departure on Runway Two Zero" called the chirpy controller. **"The QFE is now one zero one five, report ready for departure."**

With our call-and response checks complete I called ready for departure just after 10.00 and was told to line up and wait. **"Golf Sierra Papa, hold position. After departure squawk six one six zero. You are clear to route direct to Coventry, not above three thousand feet VFR."**



Amanda read back our clearance and we were then cleared to depart. Our wheels lifted off at 10.03 [left] – just eight minutes behind schedule – and we held the aeroplane low before 'zoom-climbing' for the assembled cameras.



Once we had established in the climb the Tower controller wished us good luck and handed us to Doncaster Approach on 126.225 who asked us to report leaving his zone. Our routing of 216° took us abeam Netherthorpe airfield [right] at 10.11 but not sufficiently close to warrant a radio call, so we changed en route to East Midlands Approach on 134.175.



East Mids offered us a Basic Service and told us their QNH was 1015 but apart from that we didn't hear much from them. The weather was glorious now and we cruised south westwards towards Derby at about 2,500ft admiring the view.

We passed our next waypoint – some quarries to the left of our track – at 10.23 (2 minutes later than I expected) and as we approached Derby city we changed to Derby Radio on 118.35.

“Derby Radio, Good Morning this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa” I called.

“Golf Sierra Papa, good morning reading you strength five” said my old friend Paul Jones, “pass your message Steve!” Paul and I had grown up together at Derby – the airfield owned by his family. He is now the CFI and his younger brother David the engineer at the popular grass airfield.

“Good morning to you!” I replied, “Sierra Papa is a PA-28 on the Dawn to Dusk Challenge, inbound to you from the north east with approximately five miles to run, requesting airfield information and joining instructions.”

“Sierra Papa, the wind at Derby is two four zero at less than five knots and we are using runway two three. Nothing known to conflict if you’d like to make a straight in approach.”

Amanda and I had already spoken to Derby in advance and decided that we would not try to make a touch and go at the airfield as the 528m strip was too short to safely do so. Instead we planned to land, backtrack and depart – and I nominated Amanda to do the flying!

She flew us over the trees just [right] above the stall speed, chopped the power and let the nose drop towards the threshold. Sierra Papa touched down just after the numbers and some deft braking brought us to a halt with room to spare at 10.30 – 5 minutes later than our plan. Although we are both proficient at strip flying – and I’d done a lot of flying from Derby as a youngster – we were a little tense as we came across the 23 threshold!



“Golf Sierra Papa to Derby...” I called.

“Pass your message Steve”

“Paul, could you do me a favour and contact my Ops Manager for me? I have his number if you’re ready to copy?”

“Go ahead”

“His name is John Baker and he is on 07507 861673. Could you give him a call as we depart as he needs to let the next airfield know we are inbound?”

“Roger”

“I’m really glad we decided against uplifting fuel!” Amanda said as she keyed the microphone.

“Affirm, a wise decision!” Paul agreed. “Can I also suggest two stages of flap for take-off and backtrack to the hedge?”

“Copy that, Golf Sierra Papa”

BURTON ON TRENT

Derby Airfield didn’t open until 1992 and apart from a few fly-ins each year it has never held an airshow or public event... so why did we include it in the Take Flight Dawn to Dusk Airshow Challenge?

It was the proximity to the town of Burton-on-Trent that makes this airfield so important to us.

Upon hearing news of the successful meetings elsewhere in the country in 1909 a columnist in Burton-on-Trent's *Burton Mail* newspaper proposed that the town should hold its own event in 1910. The town was affluent thanks to the brewing industry and the idea was quickly taken up by a group of local businessmen, including brewer Herbert Evershed.

Burton-on-Trent Aviation Week ran from Monday, September 26, to Saturday, October 1, 1910 and featured a solely French cast of pilots. The first aviators arrived on September 24 and more than 1,000 people reportedly gathered outside Burton station to catch a glimpse of them.

These first two aviators were Brunneau de Laborie, who was to fly a Farman biplane at the meeting and Paul de Lesseps who flew a Blériot monoplane. Son of Ferdinand de Lesseps (the man who built the Suez Canal), Paul was the first pilot to circle the Eiffel Tower in an aeroplane.

Other pilots at the meeting included Julien Mamet with his Blériot monoplane. He had been taught to fly by Blériot himself, in gratitude for being his assistant when he crossed the English Channel the year before.



Emile Ladougne flew a Goupy biplane, while L. Beau brought a biplane called a Laborie that closely resembled a Farman. However it was another Farman pilot who attracted the most interest... Mademoiselle Helene Dutrieu [left] a hit with the crowds not just because of her flying but rather the fact that she wore 'risqué' breeches!

The opening day of the event was cursed with 15mph winds that left the pilots sitting around with little to do but drink the local ale and smoke cigarettes. Luckily the following day the wind abated and mid morning Ladougne took to the air, circling over the River Trent at 100ft. A *Burton Mail* reporter enthused: "With a roar, the machine bounded along and ran like a bird with wings outstretched for about 60 yards, then it soared into the air in the direction of the Trent Bridge. The humming of the motor attracted the attention of men in the neighbourhood and shouts brought everyone into the streets."

Soon members of the public were given the chance to fly as passengers and the first to take up the offer was Mr H.O. Glass of Bass' brewery. Landing back after his flight with Beau Mr Glass was interviewed by the *Burton Mail* and asked if the experience was like going to heaven. Mr Glass replied: "Well, I wouldn't mind going to heaven if the sensation is as nice as that of flying."

The local railway companies seized the opportunity and offered cheap excursions from Derby, Nottingham and Leicester to see the aerial activity.

By Thursday, with their confidence growing, the aviators were attempting ever longer flights. Julien Mamet departed in his Blériot for Lichfield and circled the cathedral there before returning to base averaging a mile a minute. Paul De Lesseps tried to copy the feat but got lost en route. With darkness falling, he had to land instead at nearby Grange Farm in Harlaston.

Returning the following day De Lessops missed Burton altogether and ended up at Colwick Park in Nottingham. His exploits guaranteed the meeting plenty of publicity!

Later in the day Brunneau de Laborie crashed during a test flight. The *Burton Mail* reported: "There as an immense crash, heard all over the ground and on the hillside over Newton Road, and the machine crumpled like a pack of cards."

Medical staff and mechanics raced to the crash site but the Frenchman had suffered nothing worse than a torn trouser leg!

On the final day more than 20,000 people crowded on Bass' Meadow to witness the final flying and the awards ceremony. The event had been a tremendous success and is claimed to be the first aviation meeting to actually make a profit. A gold chain was purchased for the Mayoress of Burton from the profits – it is still in use today and the design incorporates an illustration of an early aeroplane.

AIR-TO-AIR

Our next leg was to Stoke Golding and was just 20nm. As we backtracked Derby's grass runway – in order to use make use of every one of the 523m at our disposal – Paul advised us to use the left hand side as it was firmer ground.

Amanda held Sierra Papa on the brakes as she applied the power, then released the brakes and we accelerated briskly down the grass runway. We were airborne quickly and the first stage of flap was retracted to aid our climb rate.

She turned us onto a heading of 173° and started the stop watch as scanned the horizon for our first waypoint – the M42 motorway.



"Golf Sierra Papa is airborne to the south now," I called "we'd like to QSY en route and change to Stoke Golding Radio on one one nine decimal two five."

"Golf Sierra Papa, that's understood" said Paul, "thanks for stopping off to see us – I'm on the phone to your Ops Man now. Good luck!"

"Thanks Paul, next time I promise we'll stop long enough for a cup of tea!"

We passed the M42 motorway at 10.45 – four minutes later than expected for some reason. I had changed to Stoke Golding Radio as we passed Burton-on-Trent but had received no response as yet. However I wasn't concerned as I knew there was somebody there. Sure enough, as we passed the M42 the radio crackled into life...

"Stoke Golding Traffic this is Eagle Golf Golf Uniform Lima Zulu at the hold ready for departure on runway zero eight"

"Lima Zulu, good morning, this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa – nice of you to join us!" I called, unable to resist the sarcasm as Tim's slight lateness. The pilot of Christen Eagle G-GULZ was Tim Jinks, the owner of Stoke Golding airfield and a good friend for the last 15 years. Tim and I first met when we started co-organising a fly-in and airshow at a local farm-strip but today he had offered to 'escort' us into Stoke Golding with his newly acquired Christen Eagle biplane.

"Morning Steve," said Tim, "I'm just rolling now – what's your position?"

“Just passing the M42 at one thousand five hundred feet on one zero one five.”

“Understood, I’ll meet you overhead Nuneaton Disused as briefed – I’m just passing through five hundred feet at this time.”

As we approached the area Tim reported some low cloud around and requested that we climb to 3,000ft.

“Sierra Papa is passing through two thousands six hundred feet now and is abeam the 3M Tower in Atherstone” I called, putting my local knowledge to good use.

“Overhead Nuneaton Disused at three thousand five hundred feet now, I’ll come and find you!” chuckled Tim, clearly relishing the power-to-weight ratio of his new toy.



At 10.50 we approached the overhead at Nuneaton Disused [right] – now used by the Motor Industry Research Association (MIRA) as a test track – at just above 3,000ft and Tim called again...

“If I had guns you’d be dead now!”

“Dacka-dacka-dacka” I responded. Resulting in a bemused look from my companion in the right hand seat! “Boys” she exclaimed!



Tim expertly slid into position alongside Sierra Papa [above] and spent the next five minutes using his onboard stills and video camera to record us in flight.

Amanda concentrated on flying the aeroplane whilst I called out Tim’s position and the position of surrounding airspace. I also managed to shoot a few images of the Eagle myself.

With time pressing on we called a ‘wrap’ and headed off to do a touch and go at Stoke Golding.



STOKE GOLDING

Stoke Golding Airfield, set amongst beautiful open countryside on the Leicestershire Warwickshire borders, has been an active airfield since its formation in the early 1960's.

Since that time the airfield has been in constant use by a variety of home based and visiting aircraft of all types and is active most weekends during the flying season.

Once a year Stoke Golding opens its doors for one of the best kept secrets in aviation... the annual Stoke Golding Stake Out.

Fish and chips, an ice cream van, a hilarious commentary team, a traditional jazz band and plenty of aeroplanes makes the Stake Out a personal highlight of the season for me.

The 2009 event [right] was held on August 1-2 but the first day was marred by horrendous weather. In true Brit spirit (or just desperation) we still managed to have a fun day and as the rain finally gave way to a fantastic sunset we seated around 40 people for the Sunset Fish & Chip Supper on the apron.



Blue skies and a gentle breeze enticed not just the planned Sunday inbound but most of the frustrated Saturday inbound also. Amazingly the runway was dry, firm and in near-perfect condition despite the rain that had fallen the previous day.

The whole event was a tremendous success; and Tim and Helen broke all previous records with 104 aircraft visiting in one day (their previous best was 88 over two days making 2009 the one to remember!)

Descending from 3,500ft to the 1,000ft circuit height took no time at all with Tim hanging on to the formation all the way down – despite the high stall speed of the Eagle.

Tim gave us 'vectors' to the airfield – which can be very hard to spot among the surrounding green fields – and broke off to reposition as we were downwind. As we climbed away – at 11.00 on the dot – Tim went whistling past us with his cameras ablaze!

We owe Tim a debt of gratitude for his hospitality and willingness to help. Formating on the Eagle was a highlight of the day and something neither Amanda nor I will ever forget.

FUEL STOP

Our 'showboating' over Stoke Golding had been enjoyable but it had cost us valuable time. It was now time for a refuelling stop and we set course on 113° to Coventry. Here, we hoped, Airfield Operations Manager Chris Wild had arranged a mobile bowser and a fast turnaround. We had been brave – perhaps rash – and scheduled just 15 minutes for our refuelling stop at Coventry – and those 15 minutes were measured from wheels down to wheels off – could we do it?

With a ground speed of 112kts it was just four minutes from Stoke Golding to our first waypoint at the M6. Amanda called Coventry Approach on 123.825 as soon as we had said goodbye to Tim but the traffic was heavy. It took a few attempts to find a gap long enough make our initial radio call and we then waiting a while for a response.

“Golf Sierra Papa, good morning” came the eventual response, “squawk 0620, the Coventry QNH 1016. Runway in use two three. You are currently number two to a Diamond DA40 on the ILS – report visual with the traffic.”

We did eventually spot the other traffic and we obtained permission to fly a single left hand orbit over the M6 for spacing.

With the traffic in sight we were cleared to contact the tower on 118.175 and positioned ourselves to land.

“Coventry, Golf Sierra Papa is landing for fuel” said Amanda as she established us on long final behind the DA40. “Apparently Chris Wild has arranged a mobile bowser can you advise where you would like us to park?”

“Golf Sierra Papa – Standby” replied a rather confused sounding controller. Our heart sank. We’d received a similar call during our 2007 flight – which resulted in a 90 minute delay whilst the bowser was located. We hoped it wouldn’t come back to haunt us today.

“Golf Sierra Papa, after landing roll to the end and vacate at Alpha – there is a marshaller waiting for you.”

Amanda read back the information and I looked at her and smiled, simply adding... “Phew!”



We landed at Coventry at 11.10, taxied off the runway at Alpha and waited for our promised marshaller. There was construction underway on the taxiway and we waited for a digger to pass in front of us, shortly before a figure in a 4x4 gestured that we should follow him.



We actually parked at the pumps and shut down at 11.15 – some 15 minutes later than planned. I hoped that we hadn’t missed our slot...

Luckily, after a few moments a shiny yellow bowser arrived and G-BYSP got her much deserved ‘drink.’ We uplifted a total of 140 litres of 100LL – the first fuel we had taken on board since the Isle of Man.

COVENTRY

Coventry has a rich and varied airshow past – with events ranging from small scale fly-ins to air races such as the King’s Cup, the Lockheed Trophy aerobatic competition and full-blown airshows.



One of my earliest airshow recollections was visiting the Wings of Victory Airshow at Coventry in August 1988. This was one of the first true ‘warbird’ shows in the UK and boasted all manner of rare and exotic old aeroplanes from across Europe. The French based B-17 Flying Fortress F-AZDX (then named

Lucky Lady) made an appearance as did a Lockheed 12, the Scandinavian Historic Flight A-26 Invader

(N167B / *Sugarland Express*) and the majority of the fighters operated by the Old Flying Machine Company and The Fighter Collection at Duxford.

It was probably this show that resulted in my long-term passion for historic aviation and 'warbirds' in particular.

Other more recent Coventry shows have pulled upon the propliner expertise of the resident Air Atlantique fleet whereas the 1962 Baginton Air Pageant boasted a diverse line up consisting of two F-100 Super Sabres, two F-101 Voodoos and a KB-70 Stratotanker from the USAF, eight Dassault Mysteres from the Patrouille de France, seven English Electric Lightnings and five Jet Provosts. There were also singleton displays by a Vickers Valiant, Canberra, Shackleton and Vampire T.11.

AIRBORNE AGAIN

With Sierra Papa's tanks full we had the engine started at 11.33 and called ready for taxi. This time our marshaller was ready and Coventry Tower cleared us to immediately backtrack runway 23 for departure.

Landing traffic was even told to go-around to accommodate the "charity flight" that was backtracking.

As we passed abeam the tower Amanda called and informed them that: "Golf Sierra Papa is happy to go from here if it helps?"

"Golf Sierra Papa Roger, after departure it will be a left turn on track VFR not above fifteen hundred feet, remain clear of Birmingham controlled airspace."

With the clearance read back correctly we were cleared to take off at 11.38 – just 23 minutes after we had touched down.

We turned left after take-off and established ourselves on track of 113° towards Sywell, changing almost immediately to Coventry Approach on 123.825. Passing abeam Rugby – the first of our logged waypoints – at 11.43 we were a minute behind the PLOG.

Heading eastwards we said farewell to Coventry as we passed the M1 motorway and changed to Sywell Radio on 122.70.

"Sywell Radio good afternoon this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa" called Amanda

"Golf Sierra Papa good afternoon, readability five" replied Jeff Bell in the tower. Jeff had been instrumental in arranging our visit to the airfield and he knew who we were before we had even had chance to give him any more details.

Sywell was home to one of the training camps set up around the country to acclimatise overseas pilots in readiness for the World Aerobatic Championships – scheduled to be held the following week at Silverstone. We had been forewarned by Jeff that if a practice flight was underway we would have to join the circuit at 300ft for a 'straight in' join.

"We're using runway Two One left hand with a QFE of one zero zero one. I have an aerobatic aeroplane practising in the overhead at this time, are you happy to join at three hundred feet?"

"Affirm, that's not a problem," Amanda advised "we still have about one five miles to run so we'll call you as we get closer."

The sky around Sywell was very busy and we needed eyes like hawks to keep track of all the aircraft – many of whom did not appear to be speaking to Sywell Radio!



We descended to 800ft and Amanda called five miles to run. Approaching long final for Runway 21 she descended us down to 500ft, with a view to descending to 300ft as soon as it was safe to do so. Then, out the corner of our eye, we spotted another aircraft clearly on long final but well above 1,000ft! He then called Sywell and announced that he was on final – causing us to orbit [left] at 800ft to maintain separation. Suffice

to say the comments within the cockpit of Sierra Papa were far from complimentary!

We repositioned on final, descended to the briefed 300ft and performed our touch and go at 11.56 – 16 minutes later than our plan.



SYWELL

Sywell airport near Northampton has a long history of airshow flying, right back to when it first opened in 1928 as home to the Brooklands School of Flying.



Throughout the 1970s the venue became synonymous with the Popular Flying Association (PFA) Rally [left] with hundreds of kitplanes and vintage aeroplanes converging on the aerodrome for the weekend long event. The Barnstormers Flying Circus was formed in 1963 and based at Sywell for many years. Even though it displayed at venues all over the UK the shows at its home base were among the

best attended and the team made an art out of aerial 'entertainment'. Few can forget Barry Tempest's crazy flying – especially when wearing a tea-towel around his head and flying as the character 'Yasser Verifat!'

Today Sywell is home to an airshow which raises money for the Warwickshire & Northamptonshire Air Ambulance. The 2008 show [right] raised £7876.82 for the charity and was one of the most enjoyable displays of the year. The laid back 1930s feel of the aerodrome makes it an atmospheric airshow venue, especially when combined with classic 1930s era aircraft cavorting in the skies.



IN SEARCH OF THE CLASSICS

Departing Sywell at 11.56 we routed 141° towards another timeless airfield – Old Warden. This was scheduled to be a short leg – just 13nm in total – but would boast two of the most recognisable waypoints en route. Firstly, after 10nm and 7 minutes we passed the River Ouse one minute behind schedule. At that point, to our left we could see the unmistakable layout of the disused airfield at Podington – now better known as Santa Pod [below].



Originally built in 1940/41 to accommodate two RAF bomber squadrons the base was soon turned over to the USAAF who based C-47s, A-20 Havocs and later B-17 Flying Fortresses at the field.

The USAAF returned Podington to the RAF in July 1945 and the airfield was retained by the Air Ministry for storage. As late as 1960, Ministry of Defence personnel were assigned to Podington looking after the well-being of several million sandbags.

With the end of military control, some demolition and concrete removal was performed in the early 1960s but a group of drag-racing enthusiasts approached the owners to use the main runway as a drag racing strip. In 1964 an agreement was reached for what became Santa Pod Raceway, which opened during Easter weekend, 1966.

In 1972, the concrete was resurfaced with asphalt and Santa Pod became a major European centre for drag racing. Santa Pod now hosts over 50 events during the race season.

Passing Santa Pod at 12.03 Amanda and I said our farewell to Jeff in the tower at Sywell and set our sights on the next obvious waypoint – the enormous airship hangars at Cardington [right].



Short Brothers constructed the first airship hangar on the site – a 700ft long structure – in 1915 to enable them to build two rigid airships, the R-31 and the R-32.

After nationalisation in 1919 the Royal Airship Works began preparations to create even larger airships. Instrumental in this was extending the original hangar in 1924. The roof was raised by 35ft and its length increased to 812ft. The second ‘shed’ had originally been located at RNAS Pulham, Norfolk but was dismantled in 1928 and re-erected at Cardington.

After the crash of the R101, in October 1930, all work stopped in Britain on airships. Cardington then became a storage base.



We passed the legendary hangars at 12.08 – a minute ahead of schedule – and carried on tracking 141° towards Old Warden. We had debated calling Cranfield on the way past but at 1,000ft we were well below their traffic and it made a welcome break to have a quiet radio for a change. Amanda made blind calls to Old Warden Radio on 130.70 as we approached the field but no response was received and we set ourselves up on right base for runway 21 [left].

OLD WARDEN

Today the Old Warden aerodrome is owned by the Richard Ormonde Shuttleworth Remembrance Trust. Richard Shuttleworth inherited the Old Warden Estate on his 23rd birthday and took a keen interest in farming and estate management as well as in motor racing and aviation.

His 'playboy' lifestyle enabled him to indulge his hobbies to the full and in 1935 he drove a 2.5litre Alfa Romeo Monoposto to victory in the very first British Grand Prix. He was later badly hurt in a motor racing accident and took up flying because 'it was safer'!

Richard's passion for aviation grew and he could perhaps be described as the very first 'warbird' collector. In an era when the world was fascinated by newer, better and faster technologies Richard saw the potential, and appeal, of collecting, restoring and flying old aeroplanes.

Typical of those aeroplanes saved by Richard Shuttleworth was a Blackburn Mercury monoplane [right] dating to 1912. It was the seventh Mercury built but it crashed at Wittering in 1914 and lay forgotten until Richard discovered it under a haystack in 1937. He had to purchase the haystack to obtain the aeroplane but he took it back to Old Warden and started to restore the aircraft.



Tragically Richard was killed in a flying accident whilst flying for the RAF On August 1st 1940. His Fairey Battle crashed during a night flight and he was killed instantly. His mother set up the Richard Ormonde Shuttleworth Remembrance Trust in 1944 to maintain and expand the collection and work continued on many of the aircraft he had acquired.



Richard's Chief Engineer, Squadron Leader L.A. Jackson completed the restoration of the Blackburn Monoplane in 1949 and it remains airworthy today – 97 years after it first flew.

Today Old Warden hosts a number of airshows throughout the season traditionally taking place on the first Sunday of the month between May and October. The delightful 'sunset' evening shows also take place on the second Saturday in May, June, July and September. However one of the real highlights of the airshow year is

the traditional Flying Proms where aeroplanes fly in synchronisation with a live orchestra in a real 'Last Night of the Proms' atmosphere.

Shows at Old Warden traditionally include a mix of the collection's aeroplanes and selected 'visitors' to add to the mix. The Shuttleworth fleet includes Edwardian aeroplanes such as the Blackburn Mercury through Great War fighting machines such as the Sopwith Pup and SE5A to classic 1920s and 30s civil and military machines. The World War Two era is represented by a Spitfire and Hurricane while more modern aircraft include a Chipmunk and Piston Provost.

CHILDREN IN NEED

We touched down on the hallowed Old Warden turf at 12.10, retracted the flaps, applied full power and climbed away. The museum car park was busy and I glanced across at the museum and saw a small group of people waving as we departed.

We had been due to land at Old Warden at 12.05 – so we were now running just five minutes later than planned.

An early left turn onto 058° took us towards our next grass strip – the small airfield at Little Gransden. Not to be confused with the former bomber airfield at nearby Gransden Lodge Little Gransden is a farm strip formed by brothers Mark and John Jefferies. Mark is the British Aerobatic Champion and as these words were being written he was competing at Silverstone in the World Aerobatic Championships.

It may only be a 650m grass strip but Little Gransden is home to one of the best loved airshows in the country. Now in its 17th year the show raises much needed money for the BBC Children in Need appeal – and has raised more than £80,000 to date – including more than £10,000 in 2008 alone!



Organised voluntarily by Dave Poile [shown on the right of this image, with Mark Jefferies on the left] – who has quite rightly earned an MBE for his efforts – the four hour show features a mix of acts with the emphasis being on 'entertainment.' Most importantly

all the airshow pilots and crews donate their time and their aeroplanes completely free of charge.

The Little Gransden show has grown year on year from a small fly-in to a major airshow but it has retained the small, country fete atmosphere that makes it so special.

ABOUT TURN

The flight from Old Warden to Little Gransden was scheduled to take just 6 minutes so we made a final blind call to Old Warden Radio before changing to Little Gransden Radio on 130.85.

"Little Gransden Radio – good afternoon, Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa is inbound from the south west" called Amanda, knowing too well that we were unlikely to receive a response.

We had trouble locating Little Gransden at first but Amanda eventually spotted the airfield in our two o'clock. She positioned us to avoid the villages and set us up to land on Runway 12.

We continued to transmit blind calls with no response but Mark Jefferies had said that he was unlikely to be around so we were not concerned.

With full flap selected we touched down just past the numbers at 12.16 [below] and I promptly retracted the flaps.



“I’m going to stay down” said Amanda, “I’m not comfortable doing a touch and go.” She had, of course, made a good call. There were cables at the end of Runway 12 and we still had a significant fuel load so it was better to err on the side of caution.

She glanced at the windsock and what little breeze there was indicated a slight cross wind. “Are you happy to turn around and go off in the opposite direction?” she asked. I looked at the wind, checked the airfield plate and agreed. “I’m happy if you’re happy!”

Instead of turning around to backtrack we taxied to the end of the runway and turned around against the hedge. I took advantage of the few seconds on the ground to phone Ops Manager John to give him our position while Amanda prepared for take-off. This allowed him to phone ahead to Mildenhall and give them an accurate ETA.

After another blind call we accelerated briskly down runway 30 and Sierra Papa leapt into the air at 12.18.

We made a left turn onto 077° flying back past Little Gransden [right] and Gransden Lodge before approaching Bourn airfield. We changed to Bourn Radio on 124.35 and Amanda called them to tell them we were passing south of their field [below].



“Golf Sierra Papa, no known traffic to affect you but there is one aircraft in the circuit at Bourn” came the response.

We passed Bourn at 12.22 – four minutes after leaving Little Gransden, exactly as we expected. With no traffic to affect us we left the Bourn frequency almost straight away and I made my initial call to Mildenhall.

PUTTING THE PENTAGON TO THE TEST

Mildenhall was the airfield we were most looking forward to visiting. The work that had gone into securing permission to land there had been immense and we were about to put the Pentagon approval to the test.

Our first contact was with a very fast speaking American radar controller at Lakenheath Approach (on 128.90). “Lakenheath, good afternoon this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa” I called.

“Err Golf Sierra Papa pass your message”

“Good afternoon sir, Golf Sierra Papa in a Piper Papa Alpha Two Eight on the Dawn to Dusk Competition with two POB. We are inbound to Mildenhall for a roller and have just passed Bourn airfield at two thousand five hundred feet on one zero zero one. We are estimating the MATZ boundary at Time Three Three and are requesting Basic Service at this time.”

“Sierra Papa squawk zero four five four”

“Squawking zero four five four. I have a PPR reference number for you if you require it sir?”

“That would be useful sir”

“Golf Sierra Papa’s PPR reference is ‘22602 Mike Juliet’ and I have been liaising with Tech Sgt Leonini”

“Sierra Papa that is copied. Runway in use two nine left and the QNH one zero one five. You are approved to enter the MATZ – report the field in sight.”

“Two nine left hand, MATZ penetration approved, report the field in sight – Golf Sierra Papa”

As we approached the edge of the Mildenhall MATZ at 12.32 we could hear another aircraft on frequency and it was clearly military. By now the massive Mildenhall complex was also coming into view [right].



“Golf Sierra Papa is just entering the MATZ with the field in sight”

“Sierra Papa - go to the tower on one two two decimal five five.”

Amanda leant across and changed the frequency for me and I made an initial call to Mildenhall.

“Mildenhall Tower good afternoon, Golf Sierra Papa is with you one thousand four hundred feet on one zero one five.”

“Sierra Papa you are number two to land behind the E3 [AWACS] on the TACAN. Caution wake turbulence. Report downwind.”

Just then I spotted the E3 on final and pointed it out to Amanda.

“Sierra Papa is visual with the E3.”

Amanda kept an eye on the traffic as I positioned us downwind for runway 29. I reported downwind just at the E3 touched the runway with a cloud of tire smoke. “He’s going around” Amanda told me, and I glanced across to see him climbing away. “I’ve started my stop-watch” she continued, “we need to allow four minutes for his wake to clear.”

“Sierra Papa you are number one to land, runway two nine, wind now two three zero at ten knots. Report final.”

“Report final number one, Golf Sierra Papa.”

We extended downwind for spacing and I called “Final to Roll” as we turned onto left base.

“Sierra Papa you are cleared to roll runway two nine”

“Cleared to roll, Sierra Papa”



Rolling out onto final approach [left] we kept the speed slow give the wake turbulence as long as possible to dissipate. The view ahead of the 2,811m runway surrounded by an assortment of pans occupied by KC-135 Stratotankers and MC-130 Hercules was wonderful.

“Can you believe we’re doing this?” Amanda asked with a girly grin...
 “Nope, there were times when I thought it wouldn’t happen! I replied – with an equally wide smile on my face.

We touched down at Mildenhall at 12.37, rolled for a while and then powered up and climbed away. Another efficient service by air traffic mean that we were now back on schedule – in fact we were ahead of schedule as we had not planned to visit Mildenhall until 12.45.

MILDENHALL

Any airshow aficionado will bemoan the end of the Mildenhall Air Fete in 2001 but few will know that airshows at the base began well before its USAF days.

The first Mildenhall airshow was recorded on July 6, 1935 when the Royal Air Force gathered en masse at RAF Mildenhall to mark King George V’s Jubilee Year. Accompanied by the Duke of York and the Prince of Wales the King was treated to an awe inspiring sight of more than 350 aircraft laid out on the Suffolk airfield.



Hawker Audaxes, Demons, Furies, Harts and Hinds dominated the flightline along with a myriad of other types.



It is, of course, the appearance of American hardware that has made subsequent Mildenhall shows so appealing to British airshow enthusiasts... plus the chance to eat ‘real’ American burgers [left]!

One of the earliest took place on May 19, 1956 and included gems such as a B-45 Tornado from the 85thBS/47thBW at Sculthorpe, an SA16 Albatross from the 582nd ARS at Molesworth, a B-47 from the 97thBW at Biggs AFB and a T-33 from Wiesbaden in Germany.

During the shows heyday in the 1980s and 90s it was common to see examples of almost every USAF type on display at Mildenhall – be it fighter, bomber, trainer or transport. Flying displays by the amazing SR-71 Blackbird were standard-fare in the 1980s and in more recent years the F-117A ‘Stealth Fighter’ [right] and B-2 Spirit were regular visitors.



Sadly a number of factors, not least the perceived threat from terrorists in the post-September 11 political climate, meant the popular event came to a halt in 2001. It is missed just as much for its American catering facilities as it is for its air power demonstrations.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BOUND

As we climbed away from Mildenhall we turned onto a heading of 232° and set course for Cambridge.

“Sierra Papa contact Lakenheath LARS now on one three six decimal five– good day sir”

“To Lakenheath LARS on one three six decimal five– thanks for being so accommodating today”

“It was our pleasure sir!”

We hadn't seen 126.50 noted anywhere to date so Amanda retuned the radio as I settled us onto our new heading.

“Lakenheath LARS good afternoon Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa is with you”

“Sierra Papa you are radar indetified 1.5 miles north west of Mildenhall – what service do you require and what is your destination?”

“We'd like a Basic Service and we're routing to Duxford via Cambridge”

My calculations showed that we should make it to Cambridge in 8 minutes and at 12.40 Lakenheath asked us to squawk 7000 and free call Cambridge.

We listened in on the Cambridge ATIS on 134.6 and 'Information Yankee' informed us that runway 23 was in use with the wind 200° at 10kts. The cloud was scattered at 2,500ft, the QFE 1016 and the QNH 1014.



Amanda called Cambridge Approach on 123.60 at 12.40 – shortly before we passed Newmarket racecourse [left], right on time.

“Sierra Papa good afternoon, runway two three left hand is in use at Cambridge with the QNH one zero one six. Squawk six one seven five” came the response.

“Two three left hand, one zero one six and squawk six one seven five– Golf Sierra Papa” Amanda responded.

“Sierra Papa, route south of ILS until you are east of the airfield to remain clear of instrument traffic. You're currently number two to a Cirrus doing instrument circuits.”

Amanda acknowledged the call. We knew it would take us longer than planned but we were now ahead of schedule so time was not a concern.

We performed a left hand orbit for spacing (with ATC permission) and Amanda established us on a long final to land over the A1303. The traffic was busy as it was now lunchtime and it was easy to get distracted by the large lorries driving through the undershoot. There was some light turbulence as we crossed the road but Amanda kissed the wheels onto the numbers [right] at 12.52.



Cambridge may not spring to mind as an airshow venue but its grand opening in 1938 boasted a very large flying display with some very important 'acts'. The farmland that forms the site for the present Cambridge Airport was first used as an airfield in 1937 but it was officially opened in October 1938. To mark the event a flying display was held with thousands of spectators, pilots and celebrities turning out to christen the aerodrome. Displays included the then revolutionary Cierva Autogyro – which stopped the crowd in its tracks – as well as a Mew Gull racer and no fewer than nine Avro Tutors from the Cambridge University Air Squadron. However, it was



the appearance of three Vickers Supermarine Spitfires from 19 Sqn [left] at nearby RAF Duxford that stole the show.

In the subsequent years the Spitfire has become a firm favourite at airshows around the world but that day in October 1938 gave the public their very first view of this attractive and important fighter aircraft. The high-profile opening of Marshall's airfield was an ideal opportunity to show off the new fighter to the media and the public, as well as 'sabre-rattle' on the international stage.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Duxford remains an active airfield to this day and is one of the most prolific airshow venues in the country. I am also heavily involved at the museum so it was therefore obligatory that we land at the airfield during the Take Flight Dawn to Dusk Airshow Challenge.

Climbing out of Cambridge I set a course of 200° and followed the M11 motorway for a short while. My PLOG told me I should be in the overhead at 12.56 but we could see the museum's hangars as we climbed away from Cambridge.

Amanda bid farewell to Cambridge and I took over the R/T for the run into Duxford.

"Duxford Radio, good afternoon this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa" I called on 122.075.

"Golf Sierra Bravo, good afternoon Steve!" replied Frank Marsden, Air Traffic Control Manager at Duxford and another old friend. "We're using runway two four and the QFE is one zero one two. I have a Spitfire approaching for a run and break - what's your position?"

"We're just airborne out of Cambridge with about four minutes to run"

"Sierra Papa roger – break break – Spitfire India X-Ray be advised I have a PA-28 inbound from the north on a charity flight, he'll be joining right base for runway two four."

At that point Carolyn Grace – who was flying her two-seat Spitfire Tr.9 – replied and offered to hold off to allow us to land.

“Sierra Papa to Spitfire India X-Ray” I called, “it’s OK Carolyn we’ve still got a few miles to run, you go ahead.”

“Spitfire India X-Ray is also a few minutes out to the north, if you make a standard approach I’ll do a run and break overhead.”

“That’s understood. Frank, are you happy with that?”

“I guess I’ll have to be, it sounds like you’ve sorted yourselves out!”

I made a tight right base join for runway 24 – electing to take the hard to allow Carolyn to land on the grass if she needed to.



“Golf Sierra Papa final to land two four and visual with the Spitfire!”

“Surface wind two one zero degrees less than five”

I deliberately touched down long as I knew there was a long taxi to the parking area and the grass runway would technically be blocked until we had vacated past holding point Charlie.

As we rolled along the runway at 13.00 the unmistakable sound of a Rolls Royce Merlin engine shattered the air as Carolyn ran in over the top of Sierra Papa at low level before breaking into the circuit [right]. The sight of such a wonderful machine through the windscreen of our aeroplane was magical and I beamed like a child.



As I watched Carolyn pull up into a victory roll I heard another voice on the radio – and it was undoubtedly John Romain.

“Spitfire Nine is at the hold ready for departure 24 grass”



There was no response from the tower and we were about to leave the hard runway to taxi across the end of the grass.

“Frank would you like Sierra Bravo to hold on the hard until John’s airborne? I inquired

“Negative, he’ll be airborne well before he reaches you – break break – Spitfire Nine clear take off your discretion, wind two one zero degrees less than five, one aircraft crossing the end of the runway.”

We taxied down to the control tower as briefed and shut down next to the fence... in Carolyn's normal parking space! "I hope you've got your 'lippy' on Steve?" enquired Frank, "your press and fan club is waiting for you"
"He looks gorgeous darling!" chirped Amanda.



DUXFORD DAYS

After a long and distinguished history with both the USAAF and the RAF Duxford was finally declared surplus to requirements in 1969. The Imperial War Museum had been looking for a suitable site for the storage, restoration and display of exhibits – particularly aircraft – that were too large for its headquarters in London and obtained permission to use the airfield for this purpose.

Cambridgeshire County Council joined with the Imperial War Museum and the Duxford Aviation Society and in 1977 bought the runway to give the abandoned aerodrome a new lease of life.

The first airshows actually took place two years earlier in 1975 today the site hosts six major flying display days each season – including the annual Flying Legends show.



Duxford is home to the bulk of Britain's airworthy 'warbird' population with countless Spitfires and Mustangs a regular sight on the airfield. Other residents include Grumman fighters such as the Wildcat and Hellcat, Corsairs, Hurricanes and bombers such as the Bristol Blenheim and B-17 Flying Fortress.

With so many aircraft airworthy or being restored to fly no two Duxford shows are the same. The 2009 Flying Legends show, for example, featured a fleet of 60 aircraft including seven P-51 Mustangs, nine Spitfires, four Hurricanes, a Focke Wulf FW190 and a Bleriot! Shows over the years have included rarities such as a Boeing 747, Gloster Meteor and Lockheed Constellation. There have also been memorable formations – either of similar types (such as the 21 Spitfires or three 1917 Bristol Fighters) or mixed. The latter has included a Blenheim, Gladiator and three Lysanders in formation as well as a Hawker formation of Hind, Hurricane and Sea Fury. However the traditional Flying Legends 'balbo of 30 or more piston powered fighters in close formation is truly memorable.

PASSENGER

We were running 15 minutes early by this stage and we chose to break with convention and do something a little bit special. Ellie Kitney is an eight-year old airshow enthusiast who loves being at Duxford. She waves at the pilots, knows all of the aeroplanes and is a delight to be around. But she had never seen Duxford from the air...

I relinquished my seat in the front of Sierra Papa, Amanda moved into the left hand seat and with the aid of some cushions Ellie was just able to see over



the nose. With a cheery wave to mom and dad we taxied off at 13.30 and departed from the grass runway at 13.33.



As we turned downwind Amanda handed control to Ellie and her face lit up as she steered the aeroplane around the sky for a few moments. The grin when we landed back at 13.40 spoke a thousand words!

I was Ellie's age when I was introduced to airshows. She has a head start on me but I think we definitely have an airshow pilot in the making.

Ellie has kindly offered to write about her experience and that report is attached among the appendices.

We also took the opportunity to eat and drink whilst at Duxford and had a 'comfort break' both on arrival and departure. We had our longest leg ahead of us and we would need bladder control if we were to make it safely... We had a lengthy discussion to John in the Ops Room and he updated us with developments down route – although in fairness everything was pretty much going according to plan... but would it last? It certainly seemed too good to be true!



Amanda went up to the tower to book out and get her FAI Speed Record paperwork signed while I prepared G-BYSP for departure. Sam from Propshop [right] kindly arranged for Sierra Papa's tanks to be topped up (68 litres) I strapped in and awaited Amanda's return. We were ready to start engines at 13.55 and with the aeroplane still warm from its quick circuit with Ellie our checks did not take long. The tower invited us to depart from the grass to keep our taxi time to a minimum and we gratefully accepted.

"Golf Sierra Papa you are clear take off on two four grass, the wind now two four zero degrees at thirteen knots – good luck guys" said Colin, who had now taken over the in the tower.

"Nice to see you, we'll be back" I replied

"I was afraid of that!" came the response! I guess it's nice to be appreciated...

Sierra Papa lifted off at 13.57 – some twelve minutes later than our itinerary due to the fact that we had taken Ellie flying.

We climbed to 1,200ft on Duxford's QFE of 1012 turning onto a heading of 209° towards the Nuthampstead VRP. At our estimated groundspeed of 114kts I figured we would reach Nuthampstead at 14.01 but we were two minutes late. We kept a listening watch on Essex Radar as we passed between Luton and Stansted

At Nuthampstead we changed course slightly onto 205° and tracked 7nm to the Puckerbridge VRP, which we overflew exactly on time at 14.07. Our next course change was onto 202° and a 5nm leg took us to the Ware VRP arriving on schedule at 14.10.

From here, through the haze, we just make out the Millennium Dome and the tower blocks in the city of London [right] but a turn onto 141° then routed us overhead Harlow [below] and into North Weald.



North Weald was surprisingly quiet and cleared us to make a right base join for runway 20. Their QFE was 1005.

We touched down at 14.17 [below] and were now just seven minutes behind our pre-planned schedule. I looked right as we climbed away and saw Peter Teichman's newly restored Hawker Hurricane being pulled out of the hangar. He was off to Eastbourne for the seaside show and this sighting took our airshow

aircraft sighting tally to a Christen Eagle, two Spitfires and now a Hurricane (and that's not counting the various Air Atlantique machines we taxied past at Coventry). As our theme was airshow related it seemed quite apt to have seen these aircraft on our travels.

NORTH WEALD

As the one-time home to the Black Arrows Hunters of 111Sqn North Weald has a long history of staging airshows.

It was home to various airshows in the 1950s and 60s but one of the most notable came in 1971 when it played host to the very first Air Tattoo. Now the largest airshow in the world, and taking place at Fairford, the first Tattoo attracted just 100 aeroplanes including Royal Danish AF Saab Drakens, a Royal Norwegian AF F-5A Freedom Fighter and the Fouga Magisters of the Patrouille de France.



It was the 1980s when the airfield really became synonymous with 'warbird' display flying. From 1986 Paul Warren Wilson and his team established a world-leading airshow at North Weald focusing on a mix of classic aeroplanes and the latest fighter jets. Known as 'Fighter Meet' the event was a huge success and featured some memorable formations – including the 1987 coupling of a Northwest Airlines Boeing 747 and twelve World War Two fighter aircraft and the 1994 formation of Lancaster, Spitfire, Hurricane and two Bf109s [left].

Fighter Meet 88 featured a plethora of warbirds – including Hans Dittes Hispano Buchon (BF109) D-FEHD from Germany, B-17, B-25, Catalina, Lancaster, Hurricane, Sea Fury, P-47 Thunderbolt, two Corsairs, two Kittyhawks, Mustang, Kingcobra, Avenger and a gaggle of Spitfires.

Sadly Fighter Meet came to an end in 1997 when a lack of sponsor could be found. Smaller airshows have taken place at North Weald over the subsequent decade but nothing on the same scale.

LONDON CALLING

As we crossed the M11 motorway on the climb out from North Weald the traffic was at a standstill. It was now Friday afternoon and the south east of England was starting to grind to a halt as usual.

Our heading of 172° to Damyns Hall took us close to Stapleford and we gave them a courtesy call on 112.8 as pass the edge of their zone at 14.19. All was quiet on the airwaves so opted to keep a listening watch on Thames Radar instead.

However, with just 12nm from North Weald to Damyns Hall we didn't have long to listen to London as it was time to call for permission to touch and go. I tried to raise 'Hornchurch Radio' a few times on 119.550 with no response and was about to give up when Deepak Mahajan called and asked "Is that you Steve?"

"Affirm Deepak, we're just approaching the overhead now at 800ft" I replied.

"OK, there's nothing in the area to conflict, we've been using runway 21 all day."



We made an approach to runway 21 and logged Damyn's Hall at 14.25. Damyns Hall – close to the site of the former RAF Hornchurch – holds an airshow once a year to raise funds for local charities. As one of the closest airfield to London (it's 2.3nm from the London City CTA) the catchment area is large and the event well attended. The organisers try to offer something for everybody and the 2009 show combined military vehicles and vintage aircraft. There were militaria [left]

collectors stalls, stalls for all the family, arena events, vintage aircraft, flying displays, helicopter rides, re-enactment groups, refreshments and a licensed bar.

There was also a full program of entertainment on Saturday night including music, refreshments and a bar.

BIGGIN ON THE BUMP

Climbing away from Damyns Hall we set course for the venue of one of the UK's best known and best attended airshows – Biggin Hill.



Heading 216° from Damyns Hall took us along the M25 and directly overhead the QEII Bridge at Dartford [left]. By now the traffic congestion was becoming horrendous and I didn't envy the drivers in the nose-to-tail queues for miles around [below].



“Do you remember all those times we've been stuck in traffic jams and seen a lucky person flying overhead?” I asked Amanda “today we're the lucky people for a change!”

We passed the bridge at 14.28 – exactly on schedule and pressed on towards Biggin Hill. Amanda called Biggin Approach on 129.40 and we were asked to squawk 7047 before being handed to the tower on 134.80 at 14.31.

We switched to the tower frequency but it was very busy and it took us a few moments to make our initial call. During that time we added another machine to our airshow aircraft tally...

“Biggin Tower good afternoon ‘Lancaster’ is ready

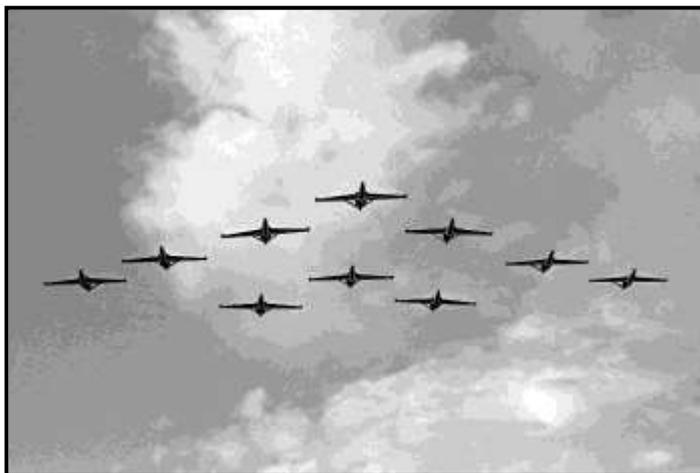


to enter and backtrack runway two one for our time three five departure” called Ed Straw, captain of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster. The Lancaster backtracked [left] as we did an overhead join and we got a tremendous view of it moving majestically down the runway towards the numbers.

We reported downwind as Ed poured on the coals and the Lancaster accelerated down the runway and into the air en route to the Eastbourne airshow.

We established ourselves on a final and touched down at 14.40... exactly on schedule having made up our lost time through a combination of straight in approaches and an increase in air speed.

The Biggin Hill International Air Fair is not only one of the most famous worldwide aviation events in existence but it is also the largest privately organised air show in Europe. Visitors flock to Biggin Hill Airport, the former World War Two fighter station, for the great mix of flying display participants and ground attractions, offering fun and entertainment for all the family. Unlike many shows Biggin has not forgotten that the art to entertaining the crowds is 'entertainment' itself. They variety and mix of acts is second to none and on the ground over 200 exhibitors, a funfair, craft fair and classic car show keep the whole family occupied.



The first International Air Fair at Biggin Hill was held in 1963 and is has run every year since. Early shows saw a mix of light aircraft, airliners and military aircraft – and was, in effect, a trade show. Nowadays the GA aspect has all but gone but Biggin Hill is one of the few shows at which airliners can still be seen regularly.

Marking its important place in Battle of Britain history the airport frequently marks the September anniversary with a separate airshow.

FARNBOROUGH

Climbing away from Biggin Hill at 14.40 [photo below by Paul Fidian] the tower controller asked us to continue on the runway heading for one mile before turning right on track. He also asked us to report passing Kenley, which we did at 14.43.



Our heading of 261° took us directly north of Kenley [right] and on towards Wisley and Woking towards our next stop at Farnborough.



We were passed from Biggin Tower to Approach and then crossed the River Wey at 14.50 – two minutes later than I expected. I had hoped we may be able to see Brooklands off our right hand wing at this point but the haze was getting worse by the minute. At this point Biggin Hill Approach asked us to squawk 7000 and told us to free call Farnborough Approach on 125.25.

Farnborough airspace was very busy with two business jets and an Airbus A319 all in bound as well as Sierra Papa. We listened in on the ATIS first and Information Papa listed a QFE of 1017, runway 24 in use and the wind 210° at 10kts.

Amanda called the approach controller and we were asked to squawk 0421.

“Golf Sierra Papa, are you able to accept vectors for the ILS?” asked the lady on Farnborough Approach.

“Affirm maam” replied Amanda.

“Golf Sierra Papa, in that case can you orbit in your current position for spacing and I will then give you radar vectors onto the ILS for runway two four.”

The visibility was much improved now, and by Amanda’s own admission it was better to do an ILS in good weather and check that the equipment works than find ourselves in poor weather and have to use them ‘in anger’ without testing them beforehand.



Amanda intercepted the localiser quickly and we were soon passed to the Tower controller on 122.50. She had the ILS ‘nailed’ [left] all the way down the approach and she was clearly enjoying it. I glanced across and could see the satisfaction in her eyes as we descended through 400ft on final approach.

Due to our orbit and being vectored away from our intentional route my time keeping to our various waypoints went a little awry – however during an idle moment I calculated

that our wheels should touch down at 14.59. We had clearly been vectored ‘the long way around’ as we landed on the pristine runway at 15.05... exactly the time we published in our plan. We rolled steady for a few seconds, retracted the flaps and opened the throttle – there was no rush as we had 2,440m to take off in.



SBAC

The Farnborough International Airshow must surely be the most famous aviation event in the world. Although it is now held every two years the show was originally an annual event and first took place at Farnborough in 1948.



Over the years Farnborough has seen many historic public debuts – such as the DH Comet jetliner and the Avro Vulcan bomber but it has also witnessed some truly amazing spectacles. In 1958 the Black Arrows Hunters [left] from 111Sqn wowed the crowds by looping a formation of 22 aircraft and in 1948 John Derry broke the Sound Barrier at a public show for the first time.

Other highlights have been the western debut of the MiG 29 in 1988 and Concorde's debut in 1970. Today the show is one of the most prestigious events in the aviation calendar and the 2006 event alone resulted in \$42 billion worth of orders. Typically 270,000 people will attend the weeklong event with 130,000 turning up for the weekend public shows alone.

Farnborough International Airshow is the world's largest temporary exhibition. The 'build up' period takes four months prior to the start of the show and 3,600 tonnes of temporary structures are transported to the show site

Last year there were 1,500 exhibitors from 35 countries and the local economy was said to have benefited from £19 million of business during the show! Airshows are big business!

OUR LONGEST LEG...

Climbing away from Farnborough after our touch and go at 15.05 our next stop would be Branscombe – a relatively new airshow venue in Devon.

Farnborough Tower passed us back to Farnborough LARS on 125.25 in the climb and we were approved to turn right on track after departure, not above 2,400ft remaining VFR and clear of controlled airspace.

It would be a 96nm trip to Branscombe – but we were not landing there due to planning restrictions – so it would be another 71nm to Newquay before we could land and stretch our legs. We had already been aloft for an hour and ten minutes and I reckoned we were about a third of the way through the leg.



Farnborough LARS was getting increasingly busy as we routed to the south west on a heading of 246°. There was a gliding meeting a Lasham which resulted in numerous traffic reports. We were offered only a 'Reduced Traffic Service' but we readily accepted all Farnborough were willing to offer us.

Farnborough had asked us to remain clear of Odiham, so our track was further north than intended, but passing abeam Odiham [left] I

counted at least three Chinook helicopters manoeuvring at various heights as well as an Apache attack helicopter. We passed Odiham at 15.08 – a minute sooner than I expected – and pressed on to the M3, which was our next waypoint.

POPHAM

We passed just to the north of Popham [right] (we'd planned to route well to the south of Popham but our diversion around Odiham had left us further north). This was an added bonus though as Popham is home to the International Microlight Trade Fair along with a host of monthly fly-ins each season.



We may not be landing at the small grass airfield but we took the opportunity to photograph it on the way by and add it to our tally of airshow venues 'visited.'

As we approached the M3 at 15.15 we debated turning south to avoid the Boscombe Down MATZ. At this point Farnborough LARS asked us to squawk 2652 and then gave us a handover to Boscombe Down on 126.7. Boscombe Down approved us to transit through their MATZ so we maintained our heading and got a good view of Middle Wallop as we flew through the overhead.

Middle Wallop

The Army Air Corp HQ at Middle Wallop held its own international airshow until relatively recently. As was the case with Popham we had not intended to route so close to Middle Wallop but we took the opportunity to photograph it and 'bag' another airshow venue for the list.



Middle Wallop [left] shows were famous for their helicopter displays and the mass helicopter approach in particular. Upwards of one hundred helicopters have been known to take part in the approach and the sound as they crept forwards in columns was incredible.

Defence cuts and other restrictions mean that the Middle Wallop International Airshow is a thing of the past but

After passing Middle Wallop we were sadly too distant from Boscombe Down to count it as one of the airfields on our list, but we did get a fantastic view of Salisbury Cathedral [below] as we passed south abeam the town.

Thick cloud was now building and visibility was getting worse by the minute. Our new track was taking us closer than anticipated to Compton Abbas airfield so we felt it wise to call them to ask for circuit information. We also had a thought in the back of our mind that we may need to divert into the airfield if the weather conditions worsened further.



Amanda bid farewell to the Boscombe controller and we switched to Compton Abbas Radio on 122.70 calling "Compton Abbas Radio, good afternoon this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa."

After a long pause Compton Abbas responded with: "Lady calling Compton Abbas, pass your message!"

We explained who we were, where we were and what we were trying to do and eventually learnt that there was once aeroplane in the circuit, they were using runway 26 righthand and the QFE was 1020.

We passed abeam Compton Abbas at 15.40 – some six minutes later than I had calculated we would, but our route had wandered slightly as we had routed around some low cloud en route. We



photographed Compton Abbas as we flew past but we are not aware of any airshows taking place at the airfield.

[I did organise the Pooleys Fly-In at Compton Abbas in 2008 but that was a fly-in rather than an airshow, so we are not counting it in our final tally of airfields.]

CLOUD!

Shortly after we passed Compton Abbas the cloud began to worsen and we found ourselves descending to remain in VMC.

Our next waypoint was the radio masts at Rampishall [right] which stand 325ft tall atop land that is 1,050ft AMSL.

As we descended to 1,800ft on 1020 we finally got our first sight of the masts to our left hand (south) side at 15.55.



We pressed on a few more miles towards Branscombe but the clouds ahead were significantly lower [left].

Regretfully we took the decision to turn onto a southerly heading and out to sea to ensure we avoided any high ground or other masts in the area.

We overflowed the coast at Sidmouth [below] and followed the cliffs for a short time.



We later found out that John Baker in the Ops Room had phoned Branscombe at 16.15 to enquire about our progress – he was told that the cloudbase was currently 200ft and worsening! We undoubtedly made the right decision.

Now that we were over the water I was keen to make radio contact with somebody. We tried calling Exeter Approach on 128.975 but initially had no success –

presumably because we were now down to about 1,000ft above the waves [right].

“We’re going to have to climb up through the cloud” Amanda declared. At this point I was really glad I had an instrument rated pilot in the aeroplane with me.

“A wise decision,” I suggested. “I’ll take over the radios, let me know if you need me to do anything else.”



I eventually managed to raise Exeter Approach but was immediately told to recall on 119.05 as the controller was working two frequencies. He gave us a regional QNH of 1012 and asked us to squawk 0411.



Amanda continued to climb us up through solid cloud and we finally flew out of the top of them at 3,300ft. We climbed up to 4,000ft and it was beautiful on top but we were worried what lay ahead so we asked if Exeter could provide us with a METAR for Newquay. We were asked to standby for a few moments before Exeter contacted us again. The weather front had obviously moved in quicker than forecast.

"Golf Sierra Papa, are you ready to copy the Newquay weather?"

"Affirm, Golf Sierra Papa"

"Golf Sierra Papa the Newquay METAR timed at 14.50. Visibility 999, cloud few 900, broken 1800, temperature +17 dewpoint +15 QNH 1016."

"That's copied, thank you very much, Golf Sierra Papa"

NEWQUAY ILS

There was very little other traffic talking to Exeter but the local Helimed helicopter was clearly struggling with the weather too. He had let down in a field near Bodmin but when Exeter Approach asked if he had reached 'the incident' he replied by saying that "the fog is so bad we've had to let down and wait for it to clear!"

By 16.25 we were approaching the extreme edge of Exeter's radar coverage so the helpful controller suggested we change en route to Plymouth Approach on 133.55. Plymouth provided us with a Basic Service until we passed north abeam the airfield at 16.35 at which time he asked us to squawk 1733 and handed us over to Newquay Approach on 133.40

"I'm glad we tried and tested this ILS at Farnborough" Amanda sighed, "we're going to need it for real now."

"Newquay Approach good afternoon this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa"

"Golf Sierra Papa you are identified four zero miles east of Newquay, the Newquay QFE one zero one six."

"One zero one six gives us an altitude of three thousand three hundred feet, Golf Sierra Bravo"

A few minutes later the vectoring to the ILS began in earnest...

"Golf Sierra Bravo descend to 3,000ft on 1016"

We did as we were asked.

"Golf Sierra Bravo turn left onto a heading of 190"

"190° Golf Sierra Bravo"

"Golf Sierra Bravo turn right on to 210"

"210° Golf Serra Bravo"

"Golf Sierra Bravo turn right on to 260"

"260° Golf Sierra Bravo"

"Golf Sierra Bravo, closing on the localiser now turn 270° Report established"

"Report established Golf Sierra Bravo"



It seemed to be taking a very long time to establish on the localiser and Amanda was clearly struggling.

Another series of vectors finally saw us established and we were then asked to descend to 2,500ft on 1016 before contacting the tower on 134.375.

We finally broke clear of cloud at about 800ft with runway 30 directly ahead of us and lit up like a Christmas tree beneath an angry sky. Our formation sigh of relief was

certainly impressive. I took over from Amanda as we broke clear of the cloud – so she could rest her tense muscles – and landed Sierra Papa at 17.00.

ST MAWGAN

Newquay International Airport was, until very recently, used by the RAF and known as St Mawgan. Military bases close to tourist areas – such as St Mawgan – were obvious choices for summer airshows and it is no surprise that a variety of events have taken place both at the base and over the coast.

Back in its military heyday St Mawgan was home to a variety of types and it was not unusual to see line ups of Shackletons and Nimrods on the pan during airshows. The 1970 show also saw attendance by Vulcan XL839 from 27Sqn along with a Canberra, Hunter, MeteorT7, Lightning F1, Whirlwind HAR.10, Sea Vixen and VC10 – as well as a rare appearance by a USAF F-4 Phantom from the 81st TFW.

Our landing at St Mawgan – now dubbed Newquay International – was much needed. It was now



17.00 and we had not left the aeroplane since we strapped in at Duxford at 13.55. We discovered that three hours and five minutes is the limit of both our bladders and the threshold at which our backs started to ache.

We climbed from the cockpit and stretched our legs as we were met by Neil Harris – Duty Air Traffic Control Manager and another old friend.

After an urgent ‘comfort break’ Neil invited into his office for a coffee whilst his refuelling team looked after Sierra Papa. She was replenished with 145 litres of 100LL and we benefited from a warming and refreshing hot drink. Amanda also took the opportunity to check the METARs for Brize Norton and Lyneham – in an attempt to gauge the weather at Kemble – while I checked in with John Baker and phoned ahead to the fly2help team at Kemble, which was our next scheduled stop.

The 1500 – 2100 UTC Low Level Spot Wind Chart (Form 214) showed a slight swing in the wind direction. All day we had been planning our flights using a 2,000ft spot wind of 220° 20kts but it had now swung to an average of 230° and slowed slightly to around 15kts. I took the opportunity to plan the next leg to Kemble whilst enjoying my coffee.

We were ten minutes early landing at Newquay but the more we looked at the en route weather it appeared that our stay may be a long one. Outside the office window we could see wispy grey clouds swirling below a solid bank of cloud. The bright warm sun we had left at Duxford was nowhere to be seen and the breeze blowing through Neil’s window was decidedly chilly. What a difference three hours and 250 miles makes to the British climate.

Neil's phone rang and reception told him a group of journalists had arrived to meet us. They were



late as they had been trying to find their way into the airport so Neil went to escort them onto the apron as Amanda and I went to start preparing Sierra Papa for the next leg of our flight.

The photographers asked us to pose in different positions and also recorded Neil signing the FAI Paperwork to verify our arrival and departure from Newquay.

With interviews and photos complete we donned our life jackets again and

strapped in at 17.55, thankful to be in the warm of the cockpit at long last.

"Newquay Tower Good Evening" said Amanda, "Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa is with you again, we're requesting engine start."

"Golf Sierra Papa, start approved" replied the girl in the tower.

Once again G-BYSP started at the first attempt and the engine settled into a smooth rumble as we watched an Air South West Dash 8 [right] taxi past us.



"Golf Sierra Papa when you are ready taxi to Charlie One via Alpha for a runway three zero departure. The Wessex Regional QNH is one zero zero nine."

At hold Alpha we completed our checks and were cleared to line up and wait.

"Golf Sierra Papa squawk one seven three zero. After departure you are clear to climb on track not above three thousand feet on the Wessex regional, report ready for departure.



"After departure climb on track not above three thousand feet on the Wessex, squawking one seven three zero, and we're ready for departure now, Golf Sierra Papa" Amanda replied.

"Golf Sierra Papa you are clear take off, surface wind two four zero at eight knots."

We lifted off at 18.05 and immediately turned onto our en route heading of 056° [left]. We had been on the ground 55 minutes at Newquay and we needed to pull out all the stops if we were going

to make up some headway and reach Kemble in time for our published ETA of 19.15. During the planning stage I had used 95kts as our cruise speed – and allowing my statutory ten minutes for the climb and descent into the circuit – my calculations indicated it would take 1hr 35minutes to fly from Newquay to Kemble in nil wind conditions (via our turning point at the Severn Bridges). Now, on the day itself with a 2,000ft wind of 230° at 15kts, our flight was likely to take one hour and 33 minutes – giving us an actual ETA of 19.40... 25 minutes late. We would have to fly faster and hope for a snag free routing.

ON TOP

Turning onto track we soon entered cloud at 1,700ft, shortly after we had switched from Newquay Tower to Newquay Approach on 133.40. Neil Harris' familiar voice greeted us on frequency and he guided us up through the clouds, initially clearing us to 2,500ft.

As we passed 2,300ft we were still in solid IMC and Amanda called to ask if he could extend our clearance to 3,000ft.

“Golf Sierra Papa climb to 3,000ft approved” Neil responded.

By 2,800ft there was no sign of the cloud breaking so we called and asked for permission to climb to 3,500ft.

“Golf Sierra Papa, I now have no known traffic to conflict, you are cleared to climb until you reach Victor Mike Charlie, advise levelling off” Neil agreed.

We broke through the top of the worst clouds at 3,600ft but there was still partial cover up to 4,000ft. We continued to climb up to 4,500ft before levelling off and advising Neil back at Newquay.

Up at 4,500ft [right] the world was serene. The white clouds below looked puffy and soft, nowhere near as dark and menacing as they had seemed when we had climbed through them moments earlier. The sky above was bright blue and the sun shone into Sierra Papas cockpit through the left hand windows. I donned my sunglasses for the first time in a while and we smiled again.



Our climb to height had been at the expense of forward speed so we passed our first waypoint seven minutes late. We didn't actually see the waypoint [Davidstow Moor airfield] below the clouds but the GPS told us we passed it at 18.18. We opened the throttle in an attempt to make up some of the lost time and hoped that the extra 2,500ft above our planned height would also aid our speed.

We passed our next waypoint – Eaglescott airfield – at 18.34... six minutes ahead of schedule – so something was clearly working!

CARDIFF

We said our farewells to Neil and thanked him for his help. He asked us to squawk 7000 and suggested we contact Bristol but we opted instead to call Cardiff Radar on 126.625.

“Golf Sierra Papa, good evening this is Cardiff Radar pass your message” replied the very Welsh sounding controller.

“Cardiff, good evening sir, Golf Sierra Papa is a PA-28 on a Dawn to Dusk competition flight” I replied, “we are currently at four thousand five hundred feet on one zero zero nine routing Newquay to Kemble via the Severn Bridge and requesting a Basic Service at this time.”

“Golf Sierra Papa, Basic Service you have. Squawk 3601.”

Cardiff’s frequency was relatively quiet with just an EasyJet Boeing 737, a BMI Baby Airbus and us talking to the controller.

“Golf Sierra Papa I have you identified now, you are cleared to transit the Cardiff CTA not above four thousand feet on one zero one five. Turn left ten degrees for traffic. How’s the competition going?”

“Turning left ten degrees and descending to four thousand feet on one zero one five” I replied. “It’s going well thank you, we’ve visited seventeen airfields so far but we’re currently behind schedule and trying to make it to Kemble by 19.15 local.”

“We’ll do our best to get you there as quickly as possible Sierra Papa. Maintain four thousand feet for the time being and I’ll descend you in a few moments.”

We maintained our track for a few more moments listening as the Cardiff controller manoeuvred the airline traffic. He even asked the EasyJet 737 to “increase your descent rate please I have a PA28 on a competition flight and I’d like to route them over the top of you.”

At 18.55, as we passed to the south of Penarth, we were instructed to descend to VMC and began a slow descent through the cloud. As the altimeter wound down I called out speeds and heights to Amanda as she kept us level in solid IMC.

The cockpit became dark and cold as we flew deeper into the cloud. I removed my sunglasses and shuffled in the seat as I tried to exercise my back and legs in readiness for taking control once we broke out of the cloud.

“If we’re not out of the cloud by one thousand feet I’m going to climb back up” Amanda told me, conscious that the Severn Bridge and who knows what else was lurking below – or in – the cloud beneath us.



At 1,200ft the cloud began to break and I caught a glimpse of the coast out of the left hand side of the aircraft [left]. Beneath us I saw my first glimpse of the Severn Estuary, its water looked cold and menacing with small white crests on the choppy waves.

Below the clouds it was dark and grey but ahead of us I could just make out the unmistakable shape of the Severn Bridge [right]. It was 19.05 and we changed course to 088° towards Kemble.



“Golf Sierra Papa is at twelve hundred feet and just maintaining Victor Mike Charlie,” Amanda told Cardiff. “We’re visual with the Severn Bridge now.”

“Golf Sierra Papa, thank you for that, can I suggest you free call Filton Approach now on one two two decimal seven two. Good luck with the competition.”

“To Filton on one two two decimal seven two, thanks you for all of your help, Golf Sierra Papa.”

Filton provided us with a Basic Service as we routed through the overhead at HRH Prince Charles’ Highgrove residence. We had also over flown Highgrove in our last Dawn to Dusk entry but yet again we were too busy and preoccupied to marvel in its beauty. This time we were trying to remain in VMC and navigate towards Kemble.

We crossed the M5 at 19.10 and were soon visual with Kemble airfield. I hadn’t expected anybody to be in the tower at Kemble but somebody had just landed and they were receiving parking information.

“That’s Mike!” I exclaimed to Amanda.

“Who?” she said, looking at me with a puzzled expression.

“Mike Roberts – the owner of Take Flight!”

Sure enough Mike had flown across from Wellesbourne in PA-28 G-BSCY, along with Bob Shuttleworth, to lend us his support as we landed at Kemble. He had actually caused complete confusion as ‘Charlie Yankee’ and ‘Sierra Papa’ have identical colour-schemes and air traffic, the journalists, the fly2help contingent and our friends all thought Mike and Bob were us!



In fact as they rolled to a halt Air Traffic shut down! As we had heard Charlie Papa on the radio we knew the visibility was ‘all the nines’, the QFE was 1002 and the runway in use was 26 with a left hand circuit so we continued to make blind calls and landed at 19.20.

We parked Sierra Papa next to her sister beneath the tower and shut down at 19.25 – just ten minutes late.

A direct routing courtesy of the controllers at Newquay, Cardiff, Filton and Kemble as well as a direct join at Kemble had all saved us time and a higher power setting had increased our groundspeed somewhat.

We climbed out of G-BYSP and blushed slightly as we received a round of applause as we walked towards the welcoming crowd.



It was a relief to remove the lifejackets once again and finally stretch our tense and tired legs after a stressful IMC flight over the water.

KEMBLE

Kemble traces its RAF history back to World War Two and was a long-time home to the Red Arrows display team. However the bulk of its airshow history dates from after the airfield was sold into civilian hands.

After a series of fly-ins and small airshows in the mid 1990s the first major event took place in 1996 with star 'acts' including a visiting Douglas C-54 Skymaster from the USA. A number of Hawker Hunters are based or maintained at the resident Delta Jets and the type has become synonymous with Kemble airshows.

Today the airfield hosts three major events each year – the Great Vintage Flying Weekend in May, the Kemble Air Day in June and the Battle of Britain weekend in September.

The annual Air Day is a highlight of the show season for anybody with an interest in classic jet aircraft and the 2009 event, held in June, included a mix of Hunters, Vampire, Venoms, Sea Vixen [right], Vulcan, Sabre and Jet Provosts.



However, in my view, what makes Kemble Air Day important is the eclectic mix of aeroplanes that appear in the Cotswold skies. The variety of jets, helicopters, 'warbirds', aerobatic aeroplanes,

gliders and even microlights that take to the air is unsurpassed at any British airshow. The flying programme includes something for everybody and Kemble is one of the most entertaining shows in the country.

FRIENDLY FACES

A small crowd of well-wishers was on hand to greet us at Kemble, including a pair of professional photographers – both of whom had previously worked for me at *Today's Pilot* magazine. Glenn Stanley from Your Digital Memories lives locally in Swindon but Jo Hunter from Futurshox Photography normally resides in Austin, Texas. I wish we could say that Jo had travelled across the Atlantic to support our Dawn to Dusk flight but in truth she was across visiting family in Gloucestershire and made the short drive to Kemble to record our arrival!

Joining Glenn, Jo and the Take Flight Aviation contingent were representatives from fly2help and Nick Howard from Kemble. Nick signed our FAI Speed Record paperwork [right] before wishing us bon voyage and driving off for a late dinner.

Amanda and I took the opportunity to grab some water and use the bathrooms before speaking to the mass of people waiting to see us.



We were in constant demand to pose for photos so we positioned ourselves in front of the aeroplane with our sponsor's logos on full view [below].



By now it was cold and grey so we wrapped up in fleeces for the photographs and through our shivering smiles to camera we discussed the rest of the day.

“Any news from Fairford yet?” asked Amanda.

“Not yet – as far as I know we’re still on for our 8pm ETA” I replied.

“What time is it?”

“Erm, 7.45!”

I made our apologies to the photographers and explained that we needed to get airborne ASAP. Meanwhile Amanda phoned John in the Ops Room to get an update on the final leg of the day.

USAF CONFUSION...

As per our agreement with the base John had spoken to Sgt Kirkby Rich at Fairford to advise him of our exact ETA. The plan was for him to man the tower especially for our arrival – which was limited to a low approach and go-around without touching the wheels on the runway – and he had been waiting for John’s call.

Sgt Rich gave John a brief to pass to us and asked us to contact him on 124.80 as we approached the edge of the MATZ. This was different to the frequencies published for the base (Fairford APP 122.1) but had been NOTAMed.

Amanda acknowledged the brief and asked John to phone Fairford to advise them that we would be with them at around 20.10.



We strapped in amidst a flurry of photo flashes [left] and taxied out to depart from Kemble’s runway 26. I accelerated down the runway, got airborne quickly and held the aeroplane low [below] until we had passed the photographers.



We then turned through 180 degrees and headed downwind towards Fairford.



With no controller at Kemble to talk to we called Fairford on 124.8 as we climbed away.

“Fairford, good evening this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa” Amanda called... with no response. She called three times before we reached the MATZ boundary but had no success.

“Fairford, good evening this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa” I tried as we turned ‘SP into a left hand orbit overhead South Cerney.

SOUTH CERNEY

It was quite apt that we were to hold over South Cerney. RAF South Cerney opened in 1937 and does not have a distinguished airshow history... with one key exception. In 1986 the airfield was home to the 13th World Aerobatic Championships along with the associated spectacular airshow.

Petr Jirmus of Czechoslovakia, flying a Zlin 50, retained his title as World Aerobatic Champion following an event which tested not only men and their machines to the limit, but the patience of contestants and organisers alike. After months of anxiety over airfield availability, sponsorship, and practice sites, the contest had to contend with the worst weather conditions possible, with mist, cloud, and wind.



Only the first three groups —Known Compulsory, Aresti Freestyle and the Unknown Compulsory Sequences—could be completed, the latter in the midst of the final flying display. The fourth group, a freestyle event, had to be cancelled, for lack of time.

UK team leader Pete Kynsey put up a commendable show in his Laser 200, coming eighth overall. Nigel Lamb took 18th place in his Extra 230, Ian Padden took 25th place while Tony Bianchi took 42nd place.

South Cerney is now the UK military's Air Mounting Centre and troops go there to be processed before going to Brize Norton or Lyneham to fly overseas. The airfield is also used by JATE (Joint Air Transport Establishment) who use it to test new parachutes and delivery systems.

South Cerney is also the home of the Royal Logistic Corps parachute display team, the Silver Stars, - another key link with the airshow world.

FAIRFORD?

We were pleased to add South Cerney to our tally of airshow venues but we were growing increasingly concerned that we may not reach Fairford... the venue of the world's largest airshow.

With no response on 124.8 we tried the published Fairford Approach frequency on 122.10 but still received no response. We were now on our third orbit so Amanda changed to Brize Radar on 124.275, who in turn asked us to pass our message.

"Golf Sierra Papa in a PA28 airborne from Kemble on a Dawn to Dusk charity flight" said Amanda. "We were expecting to do a low approach and go around at Fairford and were told to call on one two four decimal eight but we're getting no response, I wondered if you could check that frequency for me?"

"Golf Sierra Papa, roger I've been in touch with your Ops Manager so I'm aware of your flight. Standby I'll check that frequency..."

There was nothing to do apart from yet another orbit!

"Golf Sierra Papa, affirm, one two four decimal eight is the correct frequency. I suggest you try again but call me back if you have any problems"

"Thanks for that, we'll try them again, Golf Sierra Papa"

We tried again twice before calling Brize to ask if we could transit the Brize Zone en route to our next stop at Little Rissington.

"Golf Sierra Papa, maintain your current position, I'll see if I can raise Fairford on the telephone for you..."

We did another orbit... then another.

"Golf Sierra Papa I've just spoken to Fairford. You are clear to make an approach to Fairford heading west to east – not below three hundred feet on 1005. Squawk 3701."

"Brize, that's brilliant, thank you. We'll keep a listening watch on one two four decimal eight just in case."

I rolled out towards Fairford and opened the throttle to make up for lost time. It was now getting increasingly dark and the base was awash with lights. Turning onto the runway heading I lowered the nose and turned on our landing light. Almost as if in response the runway lights were turned on and we were greeted with the wonderful sight of green, red and blue lights along the runway edge. There was clearly somebody there watching us... even if they weren't talking to us...





I levelled off at 300ft and allowed the speed to build up. As we passed abeam the tower at 20.20 I glanced across and saw a solitary figure silhouetted in the light. I assume it was the mythical Sgt Rich...

“Thank you very much!” said a deep American voice on 124.8... that was all we ever heard from the staff at Fairford.

ROYAL INTERNATIONAL AIR TATTOO

It was very important for us to include Fairford in our list of airshow venues. Once a year the base hosts the Royal International Air Tattoo – the largest military airshow held anywhere in the world. The show provides one of the best opportunities to see aeroplanes from around the world with large scale appearances from American and European Air Arms as well as more exotic international participants. Recent stars have included a C-130 Hercules from Algeria, MiGs from Russia and a Saab Grippen from Hungary.

It is worth remembering that team of around 3,000 volunteers - ranging from air traffic controllers and aircraft engineers to medics and firefighters - provide the backbone of the Royal International Air Tattoo. During the show more than 15,000 packed meals are produced for the volunteer staff and organisers increase the number of catering staff from four to 380 during the period of the airshow. More than 3,000 bottles of champagne and wine are also drunk during the Air Tattoo!



More than four miles of fencing and barriers have to be erected and 50kms of rope & stake put up . 10,000 cones are laid out on the airfield for routing vehicles and static aircraft

BONUS!

Crossing the numbers at the end of the runway I eased Sierra Papa into a zoom climb and turned onto a northerly heading towards Little Rissington.

“Golf Sierra Papa, detail completed at Fairford and requesting zone transit en route to Little Rissington” Amanda asked.

“Golf Sierra Papa you are approved to transit the Brize Zone with a Basic Service. Would you like to add Brize Norton to your list?”

“We’d be honoured!” replied Amanda, “that’s very kind of you!”

“Golf Sierra Papa, nothing known to conflict at this time. You are cleared to make a straight in approach for runway two six not below three hundred feet on one zero zero five milibars.”

The kindness of the Brize controller lifted our tired spirits immensely and we grinned wildly as we turned onto a long final for runway 26. Amanda lives in Brize Norton village and we have both



conducted a lot of flying from the base – including our 2007 entry into the Dawn to Dusk contest. With the runway lights filling the screen Amanda’s house slipped under the nose and I accelerated to maintain 300ft. The pan was full of the usual VC10 and TriStar tankers but parked alongside the tower was a completely different shape...

“There’s the Vulcan!” I shouted excitedly. Recently restored Avro Vulcan XH558 is currently residing at Brize Norton between its summer airshow commitments and we added it to the tally of airshow ‘acts’ seen during the day... it now stood at Christen Eagle, Lancaster, Hurricane, two Spitfires and a Vulcan.

BRIZE NORTON

Brize has held a number of airshows, particularly in the 1980s when its ‘At Home Days’ were open to the public.

Taking the 1982 event as an example the variety of aircraft on display was typical of the day. The event was held shortly after victory had been secured in the Falkland Islands and boasted large numbers of resident VC10s and Andovers alongside a Canberra PR9, Lightning F6, Nimrod MR1, Puma, Hawk, Jaguar, Bulldog, a new Tornado GR1 and pairs of Vulcans and Phantoms. Joining them from overseas air arms were a Danish Saab Draken, French Alpha Jet and a large USAF contingent including an OV-10 Bronco, KC135A, F-111E, F-15Cs and A-10s.



Interestingly the static park also included Piper PA-28-140 G-AYJP... the aircraft Amanda and I flew from Brize Norton in 2007 in our last entry into the Dawn to Dusk contest!

LITTLE RISSINGTON

We climbed away from Brize Norton at 20.25 – just seven minutes before ‘official’ sunset – and climbed onto a heading of 228° towards Little Rissington. We were on home territory now as we had both flown many hours in the Brize locality. We saw the town of Burford slip past our left hand side and with it we knew we were clear of the Brize CTR. With nobody else to talk to we stayed on Brize Radar’s frequency until we were visual with Little Rissington.

“Brize Radar, Golf Sierra Papa is approaching Little Rissington now” Amanda called. “I know there’s unlikely to be anybody on the ground but I’d like to leave your frequency briefly to make traffic calls on one two four decimal one.”

“Golf Sierra Papa frequency change to Little Rissington Radio on one two four decimal one approved. Continue squawking three seven zero one and give me a call when you’re climbing away.”



Little Rissington is not particular famous for its airshows – although it did hold major events in 1967 and 1971. However it is more famous for the airshow acts it spawned.

As home to the Central Flying School (CFS) the aerodrome was the home to a variety of display teams including the Red Pelicans (Jet Provosts) and the world renowned Red Arrows (then flying Gnats). It is now home to 637 Volunteer Gliding Squadron who provide elementary flying training for Combined Cadet Force and Air

Training Corps cadets and has recently been taken over by aviation maintenance company, Devonair.

Typical of the displays held at ‘Little Riss’ was the 1967 open day which included a multitude of display teams. The seven Gnats of the Red Arrows naturally held centre stage but they were joined by the CFS Chipmunks operated by the Skylarks, the Sioux helicopters belonging to the CFS Tomahawks team and a pair of Jet Provost teams... the Blackjacks two-ship and the Red Pelicans four-ship. Other items included Andovers, VC10 and Argosy from Brize Norton and a Provost from the Central Air Traffic Control School at Shawbury.

HOMeward BOUND

Sure enough there was nobody on the ground at Little Rissington but we touched the wheels briefly onto runway 36 at 20.35 [right] before climbing away and turning north.

It was now starting to rain and the thick clouds meant it was getting very dark – even though we had a theoretical 27 minutes left before the limitations of my NPPL meant we had to be on the ground.

Our planned track would now take us on a wind-adjusted heading of 082 degrees to turn overhead the former USAF F-111 base at Upper Heyford (home to some memorable 1980s airshows) and then onwards to turn over Gaydon and then home to Wellesbourne Mountford.



“I’m inclined to say we scrub Upper Heyford and head straight home” I suggested.

“Funny that, I was about to suggest the same thing” laughed Amanda, “we can probably still get to Gaydon though as it’s on the way to Wellesbourne.”

Climbing through 300ft she called Brize again - “Brize Radar Golf Sierra Papa is back with you climbing through three hundred feet and turning onto a heading of zero two one degrees”

“Golf Sierra Papa roger, I understand your next port of call is Upper Heyford?” replied the super efficient and friendly controller – who had obviously been briefed well by our Ops team.

“That was the plan” Amanda explained, “but the light and weather is worsening so I think we’re going to QSY to Wellesbourne via Gaydon.”

I did a rough calculation and suggested we head 021° to Gaydon. I figured we should be there in about 14 minutes. By now there wasn’t much to see apart from street lights and car headlights but the Airbox GPS confirmed our heading was taking us towards Gaydon.

Reluctantly we said goodbye to the ace controller from Brize shortly after we passed Moreton-in-Marsh disused airfield. We thanked him for his wonderful support and he wished us luck in the competition.

GAYDON

We didn’t expect to get any response on the radio at Wellesbourne but we knew the gathering of Take Flight members in the club house would be listening out for our return.

As we approached Shipston on Stour Amanda transmitted what she thought would be a blind call...

“Wellesbourne Traffic this is Golf Bravo Yankee Sierra Papa – a PA28 returning to yourselves on the Dawn to Dusk challenge. We’re currently passing Shipston on Stour at one thousand eight hundred feet to join overhead Gaydon.”

“Golf Sierra Papa Wellesbourne reading you strength five. Runway in use is one eight right hand and the QFE one zero one three. Welcome home Amanda – the runway lights are one and the kettle’s

boiling!” It was Frankie, Wellesbourne’s inimitable controller. It transpired that she had heard about our flight and offered to come in and man the radio until we were safely down. We had arranged for the lights to be switched on but having somebody on the radio was an unexpected bonus.



In ever worsening conditions we reached Gaydon at 20.45 and snapped a quick, albeit blurry photograph [left] as we whistled past on the way to Wellesbourne.

Gaydon was another ‘must visit’ on our list of airshow venues. Although it is no longer in use as an airfield the base is a former V-Bomber base and its airshows in the 1960s are the stuff of folklore.

The base was built during World War Two and was used mainly for training bomber crews using Wellington Bombers. After the

war the airfield was then placed under care and maintenance until the early 1950s when it completely remodelled with one single massively long and wide runway.

On January 1, 1955 the RAF’s 138 Squadron operating Vickers Valiants formed at Gaydon as the first V-bomber squadron and the airfield was home to the Valiant (and later Victor) until 1965.



The base ultimately closed in 1974 and was bought by British Leyland to be used as a proving ground for new cars.

Taking the 1960 show as an example the static park alone is enough to make an aviation enthusiast salivate.

USAF types included B-47 Stratojet, B-66 Destroyer, F-100 Super Sabre, F-101 Voodoo and F-104 Starfighter and these were joined by an Avro Lincoln, assorted Canberras, Valiants, Victors, Vulcans and Hunters.

The flying display included a B-52G Stratofortress, a pair of B-66s and a pair of F-101s, a Lincoln, Shackleton and of course the obligatory V-bomber trio performing a noisy scramble to the delight of the crowd.

Unusually, for its day, the show also included a large amount of ‘warbirds’ including the SE5A and Bristol F2B from the Shuttleworth Collection, Swordfish LS326 (then operated by Fairey), Rolls Royce’s Spitfire XIV G-ALGT and Spitfire AB910 and Hurricane PZ865 from what would later be referred to as the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

FIELD IN SIGHT

From Gaydon we could see Wellesbourne and Frankie continued to chat to us as we made our approach to runway 18.



I flew us down the centre line and concentrated on the lights towards the end of the runway, trying not to think about the crowd of people that would be watching us land.

With full flap we were approaching slowly and I pulled back the power to idle just as Sierra Papa squeaked down onto her main wheels at 20.50.

“Lovely” Amanda said with a smile

“Thank you” I replied with an even bigger grin on my face.

G-BYSP had done us proud today and never missed a beat. Amanda gave the top of the instrument panel an affectionate pat and thanked ‘SP and I couldn’t help but follow suit.

We retracted the flap and did a 180 degree turn before clearing the runway at Bravo.

“Did you like that?” I asked, knowing full well what the answer would be.

“That was fantastic!” said Amanda. “Same time next year?”

“Just try stopping me!”

WELCOMING PARTY

As we taxied in to Take Flight I caught a glimpse of the wonderful Avro Vulcan that takes pride of place on the airfield. Of course it can’t fly these days but the crowds turn up in their masses just to see it start its engines and taxi around the airfield.



In June a small airshow was held at Wellesbourne with, among other things, the newly airworthy Vulcan flying over

the top of the resident one as it did a fast taxi down the runway. The sight and sound was amazing.

With that in mind we classed Wellesbourne as the 26th airshow venue we had visited during the day – a total we were very pleased with.

“Amanda/Steve, I’m going to shut down now but I’ll see you in the club for a glass of something fizzy in a few minutes. Oh, and can I be the first to congratulate you – you should be very proud of each other.”

“Thanks Frankie, we’ll see you in a few minutes”

“Thanks Frankie – the first drink’s on us” I chipped in.

I taxied us back to the club and made yet another hash of parking Sierra Papa on the pan outside the club – this time with a mass of spectators watching and cameras flashing in our direction. I shut down at 20.55 and Bob Shuttleworth and his son Oli helped push her back into the right place while

Amanda and I sorted our paperwork and stowed our headsets.

We opened the door [left] and were met with a big cheer and applause from the fellow club members who had been following our progress throughout the day.

Marina Angelides was on hand with a camera to capture our exhausted but elated expressions as we climbed down onto terra firma for the last time that day and Take Flight owner Mike Roberts shook us both by the hand.



After a number of attempts to spray champagne over the crowd (ala Lewis Hamilton) we finally got soaked before taking a welcome mouthful of Reims’ finest.



The first person I wanted to call was John Baker, who had worked so hard throughout the day. At Flightworx HQ at Earls Colne John, along with Adrian and James from Flightworx had looked after the logistics and planning of our day – and I wanted to say a big thank you as soon as possible. Never before had I experienced such as smooth running Dawn to Dusk entry and I'm convinced it was down to John and the team on the ground.

The next half an hour was a complete blur as we collapsed into a Take Flight's luxurious leather sofas and contemplated 'forty winks.'

Mike and the team were having none of it though and we were whisked off to the pub for food and celebrations until 02.00 the next morning...

STATISTICS

The route flown by the team on August 14, 2009 covered a straight line distance of 925nm.

This figure does not include the various ILS vectors we flew at Farnborough and Newquay or the racetrack pattern of circuits we flew at Nuneaton during our air to air photo sortie. It also does not include the orbits we flew at airfields such as Coventry, Sywell and Duxford as well as the waiting overhead South Cerney as we tried to contact Fairford in vain.

Drawing a figure from the Airbox GPS gives the total distance flown during the day as 978nm.

This converts into 1,126 statute miles – thereby shattering our self imposed 'thousand mile' target.

The team flew for a total of 10hrs 35mins (635mins) but that time relates only to the 'airborne' time and does not include the time from start up to take-off or landing to shut down. If this extra time is taken into account (i.e. chock to chock) the team was in command of the aeroplane for 12hrs 20mins (740mins).

During the day the team landed at 22 current or former airshow venues and overflew/photographed a further five.

G-BYSP consumed a total of 522 litres of 100LL Avgas. This consisted of 88 litres on the Isle of Man, 140 litres at Coventry, 68 litres at Duxford, 145 litres at Newquay and 81 litres back at Wellesbourne. This fuel cost a total of £745.38.

Working with the distance flown (978nm) it is possible to calculate that the team averaged 1.87nm (2.15 statute miles) per litre. This equates to about 0.41nm (0.47 miles) per gallon.

Using the cost of fuel alone (and excluding maintenance and other costs) the Take Flight Dawn to Dusk Airshow Challenge flight cost, on average, 76p per nautical mile (66p per statute mile)

The flight was completed at an average speed of 93kts (107mph).

The team also established (subject to ratification by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale) three UK National Speed Records. These are as follows:

Isle of Man to Doncaster – 131nm flown in 121minutes giving an average ground speed of 65kts (75mph)

Duxford to Newquay – 254nm flown in 189 minutes giving an average ground speed of 82kts (94mph)

Newquay to Kemble – 125nm flown in 76 minutes giving an average ground speed of 99kts (114mph)

Between us we consumed four cartons of orange juice, twelve 500ml bottles of water, two cans of Red Bull, four cups of coffee, two sandwiches (courtesy of IOM Special Branch!), one apple, one banana, six breakfast bars, two flapjacks and an assortment of sweets. We clocked up 14 'comfort breaks.'

Of my three Dawn to Dusk entries to date this has been by far the most successful but also the hardest. The proximity of some of the airfields meant we often had very little time to climb, get onto heading and change frequencies before it was time to descend once again. We also suffered from the weather but thanks to Amanda's Instrument Rating we were able to out climb the worst of the conditions.

There were an assortment of controllers whom made our day much easier – not least those on duty at Cardiff and Brize Norton.

Never before had we achieved so much in a Dawn to Dusk entry. Our past best was 14 airfields and 10hrs 35mins so were ecstatic to log 22 airfields (plus four overflights) and 12hrs 20mins this year.

I hope you've enjoyed reading about our day.

Roll on 2010...

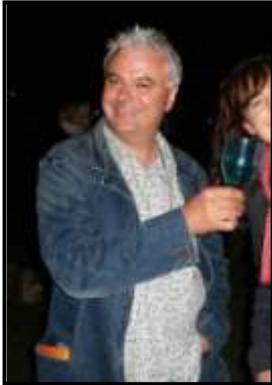


Steve & Amanda

THANK YOU

Amanda and I would like to register our thanks and appreciation to the following people...

Mike Roberts – owner of Take Flight Aviation, our principal sponsor



Mandy Pantall – Director, fly2help Foundation

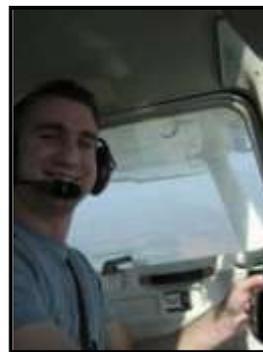
Guy Stockley – Duty Ops Manager (Afghanistan)



John Baker – Duty Ops Manager (Essex)



James Wiskin - Flightworx



Adrian Kinsley – Flightworx

... and the Photographers who kindly recorded our day:



Paul Fiddian



Jo Hunter



Glenn Stanley



Marina Angelides



Andy Kitney