

SLING BUILD



How do you commemorate 70 years of the LAA? By doing something different but what? That was the question being mulled over following last year's successful LAA Rally when we decided that many of the 70th Anniversary initiatives would be centred on the 2016 LAA Rally to be held at Sywell Aerodrome on 2 – 4 September 2016.

Meetings earlier this year threw up a number of ideas, many of which are now taking shape and one, which even we thought more than a little off-the-wall, rapidly sprouted legs and started to run.

That idea was to build and fly a kit aircraft in just seven days. It's something the EAA has done at Sun 'n Fun and Oshkosh but never, to the best of our knowledge, tried outside of the US. We published the idea as part of our 70th 'Wish List' and very quickly The Airplane Factory (TAF) in South Africa, builders of the all-metal, Rotax powered Sling 2 and 4, contacted the office to say they were interested in the idea.

We had a couple of conference calls and the enthusiasm of everybody concerned won the day. Sure it will take some doing and the logistics will be challenging, but yes we can make this happen.

So the gauntlet was thrown down: 7 x 10 = 70th anniversary. In seven days,

LAA RALLY TO FEATURE 7-DAY KIT BUILD

This September will see something never before attempted at the annual LAA Rally: to build a complete aircraft and fly it within seven days!

Brian Hope reports

(Main) **The Aircraft Factory will be giving Sling aircraft its UK debut at this year's LAA Rally.**

(Bottom left) **Grab a rivetting gun and join in the build team.**

using 10 people – that's 70 working days – we will construct The Airplane Factory's latest four-seat aircraft which will launch the Sling brand into the UK market and the aircraft will be test flown at the Rally. Make no mistake, this is a serious challenge. The Sling is no fast-build kit of sub assemblies. It comes as a flat pack that has to be riveted together. The 70th Anniversary LAA Sling Build Challenge was born!

The build will commence at Sywell, four days before the start of the Rally and, all being well, will fly before the end of the event seven days later.

The Airplane Factory has built more than 200 Sling aircraft, so many would say that this challenge should only be a bit of a

stretch for such an experienced team. But half the team will come from the UK and will have had absolutely no experience in building an aircraft before. These novices will be joined by The Airplane Factory's first two UK customers, Tim Hardy and Andy Beggan, or to be more accurate, Tim and Andy's wife Leila, who jumped in ahead of him to participate in the build.

The Airplane Factory will be bringing over three workers from the South African plant who have never owned a passport or even been out of Johannesburg before, let alone South Africa, but have earned this trip through hard work and dedication.

In the spirit of 'Ubuntu' – a South African word which means by belonging to each

other we participate in our creations – this will truly be a unique blend.

The team will be managed by Mike Blyth. Mike is the designer and a founder member of The Airplane Factory and his motto is 'failure is not an option'. He has proved this by becoming a World Microlight Champion. The business was founded in 2005 when Mike designed the Sling from scratch and then joined forces with James Pitman, who became his partner and friend.

The Airplane Factory has carried out two previous building challenges, the first involving a Sling 2 and using a group of lifestyle journalists as their 'builders', some of whom had never even been in a light aircraft let alone had any visions >

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of constructing one. But they all completed the task whilst having a lot of fun and the aeroplane was successfully flown from South Africa to its new customer in Poland.

So why do it again? Because The Airplane Factory loves a challenge and passion drives the guys to do it faster and do it bigger.

The 70th anniversary build will not only produce and demonstrate the building of a beautiful aeroplane but it will also show that you do not have to be an engineer to complete this build. It is a dream anyone can fulfill with a bit of guidance and coaching.

Worksheets will be given out to each individual team member and they will be instructed as to who does what. The order of the build is critical to the success of the challenge. Gesipa has also risen to the challenge and the company is kindly sponsoring its new cordless rivet guns to avoid having noisy compressors on site.

So do come to the Rally, 'Sling' by to see how the team is getting on, drop in to meet the designers and founders of the company and give the team a shout-out – we would love to see you!

A Sling has actually visited the UK and the LAA previously when James and Andrew Pitman were on the return trip of the '2013 Sling 4 to Oshkosh Adventure'. Mike Blyth and his son Gregory, had flown the first production-built Sling 4 from the factory in Jo'burg across the Atlantic Ocean to Oshkosh Airventure in Wisconsin. James and Andrew,

BE A TEAM MEMBER!

We are looking for enthusiastic participants to join the Sling team for the seven-day period of the build. No build experience is required, just a keenness to learn and follow instructions, and be a team player with a sense of fun. Accommodation arrangements have not been finalised and will likely involve sharing, and may indeed be in tented accommodation at Sywell. Participants will be responsible for their own transport and sustenance.

If you are interested in being considered for a place on the team, please contact Penny Sharpe at LAA HQ (email: penny.sharpe@laa.uk.com) in the first instance.

We also require volunteers to help out particularly prior to and after the Rally to set up and break down. If you can help please also drop and email to Penny.

Thank you.

MD of the business, brought it safely back home via England and stopped in at Turweston Aerodrome to meet with Francis Donaldson and discuss UK approval.

Although no mean feat, that trip was actually a walk in the park for Mike and James as experience had been gained from two previous record breaking flights. In 2009 they flew their production prototype Sling 2 from South Africa to Oshkosh and then continued on a circumnavigation around the globe, a trip of 45,150 kilometres.

Not satisfied with having achieved this remarkable feat once, they felt that their first

prototype Sling 4 also needed to have a proper 'test flight' and in 2011 they left within a couple of weeks of the aircraft's inaugural flight and flew the opposite way around the world. On this trip the team to set the record for the longest straight-line flight in a single piston engine aircraft, flying directly from Rio de Janeiro to Cape Town on a flight that took 28 hours and covered more than 6,000 kilometres of the Southern Atlantic Ocean.

The Sling brand is currently sold across Africa, Australasia, North and South America, Taiwan and France so the next natural stop has to be England.

The 70th Anniversary LAA Sling Build Challenge will debut the company's products in the UK and The Airplane Factory is planning to establish a 'Build Assist' facility at Gloucester airport. This will be an environment where builders will be given the same coaching and tools to build their plane in a fun and sociable atmosphere. This could be in the form of individual or syndicated ownership whilst always conforming to the LAA's 51% owner build requirement.

The Airplane Factory UK and build centre will be run by Mike Dawson. Mike is a South African engineer with extensive international experience having worked for BMW and Jaguar Land Rover for many years. Mike has been involved from end to end design, development, testing, manufacturing, after-sales and customer service, but his passion has always been in aviation and coaching.

The 70th Anniversary LAA Sling Build Challenge is but one of the activities that will make our 2016 Rally an extra special event. Plan to be there as you would not want to miss the show. Sywell 2-4 September – put the dates in your diary! ■



(Above left) **A member of a former seven-day build working on a skin.**

(Above middle) **Coming to the UK this year, Sling two and four seat aircraft.**

(Above right) **Fuselage construction.**

(Right) **A former seven-day build team hard at work in South Africa.**