



A LONG-TERM LOVE OF ADVENTURE

This month we talk to Ron Perry, glider and tug pilot,
LAA Coach and Smaragd owner...

Welcome Ron. Can you tell us something about your career?

After dropping out of a Communication Engineering Degree at Plymouth Polytechnic – remember those? – I had a brief spell as a Hotel Maintenance Engineer in my home town of Torquay, hence my membership of the Devon Strut.

I then moved to a career in motor insurance, which took me to Bristol, where I worked until I retired eight years ago.

Why aviation? What started your interest?

Like a lot of today's pilots, I joined the Air Cadets at the age of fourteen – it was cheaper than the Scouts!

The 1528 Torquay Squadron was very active, flying-wise, and in 1969, at the age of sixteen, I was dispatched to Chivenor in North Devon, to obtain my A&B Gliding Certificate (three solo circuits), which I completed after 28 winch launches.

In what, where and when was your first powered flight?

My first powered flight was in an ATC Chipmunk at RAF Colerne, a few months before I did my glider training at Chivenor.

(Above) Ron with the Smaragd, which he and three fellow owners operate from Warren Farm on the Quantocks.

(Photo: Ron Perry)

(Below) Ron retains his interest in gliding, being a tug pilot at his local gliding club.

(Photo: Ron Perry)

How did your aviating progress?

I joined a civilian gliding club after soloing with the ATC and became an instructor at 21. After obtaining a Silver C certificate, I decided to try power flying. In those days, all you needed to convert a gliding Silver C certificate to a PPL was three hours solo and the General Flight Test. I was gliding at Dunkeswell at the time,



MEET THE MEMBERS

so the flying club was experienced at converting glider pilots to power. Their training aircraft was the Rallye 100, which flew very much like a glider but with the benefit of an engine.

I managed to solo after an hour and 25 minutes, and completed the PPL with only eight hours, five minutes in my log book – those were the days! No Navigation Flight Test was required, in view of the Silver C qualification, so my first powered cross-country was with passengers on board.

I couldn't afford to fly much more than five hours per year in club aircraft until 1988, when I joined a twenty-man syndicate at Bristol, operating a Robin HR200/100. Suddenly, power flying became affordable. I started stretching my wings to such places as the Channel Isles, the Scillies and Eire. The group didn't own a life-raft, so my kids' blow-up, plastic garden settee was put on the back shelf of the Robin! I shudder to think what comments we would have had from a rescue lifeboat or helicopter crew.

A new, twenty-man syndicate was then formed at Bristol around a Piper C180 Cherokee – with a life raft! – and I was one of the founder members. It was a great touring aircraft with good short-field performance, however, a trip to Lundy Island did cause a few eyebrows to be raised! In 1990 I obtained my IMC rating and, shortly after, my Night rating – both great fun.

About that time, I discovered an even cheaper way of flying and joined a syndicate based at Mendip Gliding Club, operating a Sheibe Falke SF25B. It burnt only about two gallons of mogas per hour and had a six-gallon tank. That's got to be the cheapest powered flying possible, and even though the Falke only cruised at 60kt, it didn't preclude decent cross-countries.

I visited fly-ins in Belgium and Eire – on one Irish trip we were overtaken by the fast ferry from Fishguard to Rosslare, our ground speed having dropped to somewhere under 40kt in a stiff westerly.

Back in 2010, I started towing for the gliding club in an 80hp Rotax-powered Falke. After a while, I bought a small share in it so I could fly it when it wasn't being used for towing. The Falke has an excellent take-off and landing performance, so it's enabled me to explore some quite small microlight strips.

However, when ringing strip owners for PPR, I have to question the width of the strip,

rather than the length, as the Falke's wingspan is over fifteen metres.

How did you hear about the PFA/LAA?

In 2003 I was at the gliding club when a Nord NC850 flew in. Chatting to the pilots, it appeared that the aircraft was operated under the PFA, and costs associated with maintenance, etc, were very reasonable.

A friend and I decided that this was the route to go down, bought a German-built Piel Emeraude and formed a four-man syndicate. I'm still in the syndicate and have well over 1,000 hours in this aircraft. The Cherokee, though, had to go!

With only four in the Nord syndicate, longer, two-week foreign trips were possible, and I've visited most western European countries, including Sweden, Ireland, Switzerland and the Czech Republic.

Have you a particularly favourite trip?

One of the most memorable trips was from Cheddar to Rechlin-Lärz Airfield, north of Berlin, for a fly-in. The organiser had then set up a trip to Penemunde on the German / Polish border. Landing on the runway where Hannah Reich had been a test pilot was very special.

Any other aviation interests?

I continued gliding for many years, ending up with two diamonds, having part-owned a Slingsby Dart 15 (300km diamond goal), Pik20B (500km diamond distance) and, finally, a Slingsby Kestrel 19.

I was also Chief Flying Instructor, twice, for my local club and continue to fly as a tug pilot there. I've also flown weight-shift microlights (Highway Sky trike) and hanggliders (Birdman Cherokee).

I had a go at paragliding a couple of years ago but handling the chute on the ground was far more challenging than a hang glider.

How long have you been a Class Rating Instructor and LAA Coach?

I became an LAA Coach in 2000, during the early days of the LAA Coaching Scheme. I find it immensely satisfying and hope that the pilots enjoy flying with me. You also get to fly a great variety of types. As I come from a gliding background, I tend to include plenty of engine failure practise in my biennial flights!

How many hours and what types have you flown?

I've flown 37 glider types and sixty powered types, and to date have flown into or out of 243 different airfields. I've over 1,000 hours gliding and 1,975 powered. My aim for this year is to crack 2,000 hours and 250 airfields!

Do you have any favourite or worse types?

Aircraft are very much horses for courses, really. For sheer ruggedness and great short-field performance, I think the Rally/Kolliber 150hp is the business. However, one of the nicest is a friend's Van's RV-9 – it has excellent speed, range, nice handling, is economical, has a low stall speed, good glide angle and is now eligible for Night /IFR. Perfect? Nearly, but I wouldn't take it to Lundy Island!

I don't have a worst type – I've enjoyed all the aircraft I've flown. Some people might think a 1930-designed Luton Minor with a parasol wing and VW engine would be unpleasant, but a fellow LAA Coach – take a bow, Ian Mitchell – let me fly his and I loved it!

Do you have any aviation heroes?

There are so many. Sir Francis Chichester >



One of Ron's favourite aircraft, a friend's Van's RV-9. (Photo: Ron Perry)



Ron has a small share in this Rotax Falke, which has surprisingly good short strip performance. (Photo: Ron Perry)

MEET THE MEMBERS

made long oceanic flights with not much more than a piece of wet string and a conker for navigation. No magenta line. And Chuck Yeager – what a life!

Do you have a best aviation moment?

The Germans were so accommodating when it was decided that the famous Berlin Tempelhof aerodrome was going to close. They actively encouraged GA pilots to fly in, and being one of a formation of Emeraudes landing there was magical – you could almost hear the ghosts of the Dakotas which took part in the Berlin Airlift.

Have you had any 'hairy' aviation moments?

I've had four engine failures in total. One was during a cross-Channel flight from Kent to Schaffen-Diest, but the engine at least waited until we were over Belgium, so we kept our feet dry. All four failures resulted in no damage, so they weren't so hairy. Gliding experience helps immensely when the motor quits. Lesson learnt – engines do stop, so be prepared!

What's on your aircraft or vehicles wish list?

An Antonov An-2 would be fun – think of all the friends you could take with you!

Any non-aviation hobbies?

A couple of years ago I bought a 1929 Austin 7 Chummy, which I drive regularly. There are plenty of bits to fiddle with and you see amazing reactions from small children and other drivers.

I also have a Reliant Scimitar SS1 two-seat sports car. It's a very rare car and, yes, it has four wheels! It's quick, with a Nissan turbo engine and a lightweight body, and is nice to have a blast in after travelling at Chummy speeds.

I've also raced Merlin Rocket sailing dinghies for years, and since retiring have enjoyed lots of foreign touring in our camper van. We visited fourteen countries last year.

Any advice for fellow pilots?

When flying cross-country, always have an escape route in mind and be prepared to use it. Secondly, embrace modern navigation systems – know how to use them and switch them on! Finally, keep your Practice Forced Landing skills up to date – don't rely on that engine running forever! ■



(Above) Ron's wife in their Austin Chummy, which he drives very regularly. (Photo: Ron Perry)



(Above) Ron and his wife are avid travellers – if not touring in their aeroplane, they're off in a campervan and visited fourteen countries last year! (Photo: Ron Perry)

Aircraft Insurance Are you paying too much?

- Get an instant quote online
- Spread your premiums for free
- Select the cover you want
- 24-Hour claims hotline service

visicover

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority

To find out more
go to **Visicover.com**

Visicover is a unique service that lets you buy and manage your aeroplane or helicopter insurance online whenever it suits you.

