

## MEET THE MEMBERS



# THE LIGHT STUFF

We talk to Simon Goozee, who has had a fascinating life around military aircraft and flown recreational types from hang-gliders to light aeroplanes.

**W**elcome Simon, can you tell us about your career?

After three years at technical college studying mechanical engineering, I joined the Royal Air Force at 19 and served nine years as an airframe technician, generally known as a rigger.

The first three years I was on 72 Squadron maintaining Westland Wessex helicopters at Odiham and Aldergrove. The remaining years were spent on Aircraft Repair Flight at Abingdon but detached as required, undertaking structural repairs on all fixed-wing service aircraft, including naval, so lots of bird strikes!

After leaving the RAF in 1987 I spent a couple of years enjoying some R&R, hang gliding and windsurfing, and then started work at Flight Refuelling Aviation.

Initially working on Canberra major overhauls, after two years a position was offered in the target towing department. This role involved flying duties as winch/target operator on Baron, Conquest and eventually Falcon 20 aircraft and, as an already keen sport pilot, a job that involved flying was too good to pass up.

The work was primarily engineering-related, maintaining the towing equipment, building and installing tow cables – incredibly, the longest were 30,000ft to give good safety margins.

**(Above) Simon with his Kitfox G-FOXZ completed from an almost un-started kit and powered by a four-stroke Rotax 912UL.**

The majority of our work was in support of the Royal Navy operating in the dangerous areas around our own coastline, but frequently we would be detached to overseas bases. Gibraltar and Crete were always enjoyable, but the Gulf and Malaysia were a bit of a slog.

The ops in the prop fleet tended to use simple visual targets for gunnery training, the crew being a single pilot and engineer/operator. Handling duties tended to be shared as the flights could be quite long from the south coast to the Firth of Forth – a task and return to base without landing was achievable.

At the time the work seemed quite routine but looking back perhaps not quite so. One of the aeroplanes utilised a hatch in the floor through which the target – essentially a back to front windsock of about five metres length – had to be manually recovered. This was best achieved at very low speed but we did have a safety harness just in case.

At the other end of the spectrum, some of the targets were quite sophisticated with a degree of autonomous control (height-keeping) or

having specific radar or IR signatures.

Around this time, the early nineties, I decided to go for my Commercial licence having already gained my PPL for microlights in the early eighties, and my PPL(A) for light aircraft in 1991. A multi rating would enable me to log the flying time carried out at work.

Another significant aspect was to change my microlight for a light aircraft to assist in building hours. The twin rating was completed on Senecas in around five hours, but I decided not to pursue the Commercial licence. It did mark the beginning of my involvement with the LAA though as I built my Avid.

**What started your interest in aviation?**

Growing up until about nine years old near Biggin Hill and being taken to all the air shows at Biggin and Farnborough, I believe must have sown the seed. Captain W.E. Johns' *Biggles* books also have a lot to answer for. Later, as an impressionable 12-year old, a picture of a man on a Rogallo wing in *SHE* magazine made a major impact on me.

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

Aged about five I had a joyride at Clacton in a four-seater – all I really remember is that I couldn't see much!





(Inset) A very young Simon Gooze pictured with his trike unit.

(Above) The Avid Speedwing G-OZEE, Simon's first LAA aircraft, built in 1992.

(Right) The Mark Brown-designed Starlite composite single-seater, the forerunner of the two-seat Pulsar, which was built by Martin Faro.



### Where did you do your flight training?

I purchased my first hang-glider in 1978 and transported it on the roof of a Fiat 500 with a mattress, but I didn't start training until 1980 with Birdman at Marlborough. In 1979 I had seen Gerry Breen fly a fantastic display at Halton with a keel line power unit, having taken off from the roof of a car, but I didn't start 'triking', as it was called then, until 1981.

By then I was flying hang-gliders and the training comprised of being told "that's the throttle, don't go too far".

### How did you hear about the PFA/LAA?

In the late 1980s I was an inspector for the BMAA and was aware of the PFA. However, I didn't join until 1992 to enable construction of my first aeroplane, an Avid Speedwing.

### How did you become an LAA inspector?

Owning and operating permit aircraft forms the main part of my everyday life. There are alternative options but not for the types of aircraft that I find most interesting.

As I'd also been a BMAA inspector, and prior to that a BHGA Safety Officer, and having finished full-time employment in 2009, the inspector role provides me with some useful function and interest.

### Is engineering in the family?

My father was a toolmaker, he would have marvelled at the way complex parts are made today. With most trades the real learning starts on the job, in my case on the squadron. I believe with aviation it's not necessarily obtaining knowledge that's most important, it's more developing a mindset or approach.

### How many types have you flown?

I have flown around sixteen different types of aircraft including twins and a number of different microlights, both fixed-wing and flex-wing and one prone unit. I've recently dusted off and been flying a trike unit of my own design from the early nineties, as it comes under the sub-70kg 'nanolight' category.

I have over 2,400 SEP hours logged and around 500 on microlights, with perhaps 400 hang-gliding. The bulk of my SEP is on Avid, Kitfox and Starlite.

### Do you have a favourite or least favourite type?

I am probably most at home in my Kitfox, the type can be quite variable but mine has the four-stroke engine which provides relaxed simple and economic flying.

A contender for the worst would be my own design foot-launched supine unit. When

attempting a level surface take-off my foot went into the propeller at full power, fortunately without serious injury. I didn't continue with it!

### What aircraft do you currently own?

I own Starlite G-FARO, built in 1990 by friend Martin Faro, sadly no longer with us. My Kitfox G-FOXZ which had been a pretty much un-started project that I finished in 2004, and my Pulsar G-CISE, another partial project that I took over in 2009 and did not complete until 2016. Oh, and the 'nano'... not sure that counts!

### What's your best aviation moment?

My first flight in Avid G-OZEE ranks high. I didn't carry out initial testing due to lack of experience, Eddie Clapham kindly did that. Hang-gliding has also provided some memorable flights, cross-country flying just below cloud base is impressive, or the dramatic mountain flying in the French Alps. Albeit a long time ago.

### Have you flown abroad on touring holidays?

In the mid-nineties a group of us, mainly in Avids, used to make the trip to Montardoise for the fly-in organised by the French agent. They were great fun, though perhaps not the first one when, after engine failure, my return was courtesy of P&O.



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I almost feel a little ashamed, after reading about other people's fantastic trips, to admit to being quite content with my relatively local flying – my proverbial piece of string is not very long and is probably shrinking.

### Do you have any aviation heroes?

Sir Alan Cobham for his incredible achievements. Also, like most I am in awe of the ATA personnel and their important work – as distinct from many years pursuing pleasure flying which is really of no consequence.

### Have you experienced any 'hairy' moments?

Understandably target towing provided a few, lightning strikes are not uncommon usually resulting in the loss of the target and the cable but minimal damage to the aircraft or systems.

On one occasion as engineer/operator on the Conquest, we lost pitch control after taking off in slush but after reducing power and

descending below icing level it freed off – after a few very long minutes.

In light aircraft I've had a few power-related issues but only two full engine failures, one in France as already mentioned, and another while flying an Avid Speedwing when the engine seized abruptly just before the upwind end of the runway. Fortunately, always expecting a two-stroke engine failure meant I was able to get it down safely.

A more recent hairy moment involved a very close encounter with a helicopter in the circuit where luck, or the correct term, providence, saved the day.

### Do you have any non-aviation hobbies?

I've enjoyed metal detecting for the last few years. It's very relaxing and occasionally rewarding (not in monetary terms). It's something to enjoy in non-flying weather but for some reason it's rather oddly perceived.

### Any books you would recommend?

*First Light* by Geoffrey Wellum is compelling and very humbling. And I wish I could re-capture the thrill of those *Biggles* stories read as a boy!

### Do you have an aircraft or vehicle wish list?

With unlimited funds I'd probably end up with a fleet, but I am interested mainly in simple, elegant machines, much like the Pulsar and Starlite – and they also de-rig.

### Any advice for fellow pilots?

If you're building then keep it light, if you're maintaining take your time, and if you're flying keep it safe. ■

(Below) Most recent addition to the fleet is **G-CISE**, a Pulsar Simon completed from an uncompleted kit in 2016.



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