



# Displaying a wealth of talents...

This month we talk to long-time air display pilot, former airline pilot and Tiger Club CFI, **Peter Kynsey**

**W**elcome Pete, can you tell us something of your career?

My flying career started with instructing and moved on through helicopters, air taxi and private jets to the airlines. I had a parallel career going on at the same time involving competition aerobatics, air displays and flying old aeroplanes. I've been based in the UK, apart from a brief spell in Africa and Malaysia. I now fly for various collections of mostly WWII fighters, plus my own aeroplanes, I am also CFI of the Tiger Club at Damyns Hall.

## What started your interest in aviation?

My headmaster could identify every aeroplane that flew overhead, at that time it was Constellations, Ansons and Dakotas. He'd stop our cricket matches to tell us what was flying above us. That sparked an interest which I thought I could make a career, especially after my university tutor said that some of his graduates were washing dishes in restaurants.

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

It was with Captain Macey in his Auster 5 at Shoreham, in the late 1960s. We flew to Brighton pier and I was hooked.

**Main** Peter Kynsey with his Cosmic Wind at last year's LAA Rally.

## Where did you do your flight training?

I was fortunate enough to get a 'special flying award', given to those who were unable to join the Air Training Corps, which paid for 30 hours at Halfpenny Green.

Selling my Triumph motorbike paid for the remaining five hours. It was all done in four weeks, and at the time I still couldn't drive a car.

## How did you hear about the LAA?

Through magazines I suppose. I saw it as a way to keep flying on a tight budget, although that didn't really work out. I bought the plans for a Taylor Monoplane in the very late 1960s, but it was nearly 20 years later before I successfully put an aeroplane together, a Pitts S-1T.

I also briefly flew with the Montgomeryshire Ultra Light Flying Group in their Tiger Moth from a hill on the Welsh Borders in the early 1970s. They were affiliated to the PFA, which I seem to remember encouraged these flying groups.

I've been a member of the LAA since the early 1970s or possibly even earlier.

## How many hours and different types do you have?

It is 25,000-plus, which is inevitable if you fly for a living. The 6,000 in tailwheel aeroplanes have been the most fun though. I've never counted types, but it's a few hundred for sure.



### Do you have favourites or otherwise?

I just like being in the air, so they're all good really. I suppose my dream hangar would have a Grumman Bearcat in it somewhere. I was quite glad not to have to fly the Molt Taylor Mini-Imp twice, too many new ideas in one aeroplane.

### What aircraft have you owned?

First was a Rollason Turbulent. Then various Cubs and Pitts, a Laser 200, Cessna 170, Citabria, Republic Seabee, and a Garland-Bianchi Linnet.

Now I have a Super Cub, Husky on floats, Jungmann and the Cosmic Wind, plus a few gliders.

### How long have you owned and raced the Cosmic Wind. Is it claustrophobic?

It's not claustrophobic at all, it's rather like the Tardis! It was looking rather forlorn in 1985 so I bought it. A very good LAA inspector and CAA engineer, Geoff Masterton, repaired it.

F1 racing was popular then and the low flying rules for racing were different. The minimum height was 25ft. When the flag went down, three rows of three abreast launched together. Proper racing. I raced it a bit, only in the UK and France. The wings don't come off easily any more so shipping it elsewhere isn't really an option. Aerobatics is where it really excels. A Dawn to Dusk competition entry took me to St Moritz, Courchevel and

**Top left** One of those well-known pairings, Pete Kynsey with his Cosmic Wind, *Ballerina* which he has raced, but considers its *force majeure* to be aerobatics.

**Top right** Pete is heavily involved with the Tiger Club and is seen here in a Turbulent on skis.

**Above left** Pete displayed the Fighter Collection's Grumman F7F-3P Tigercat (G-51), which sadly returned to the US in 2007.

**Above right** Ski flying 'off piste' is an exhilarating experience in the high Alps.

Alpe D'Huez in it, with a barrel roll over the summit of Mont Blanc.

### You fly many types of WWII aeroplanes – how does a Spitfire fly compared to the ME-109 (Buchon) with the Merlin engine?

The Spitfire IX would be the closest comparison, it has great handling at low speeds but the ailerons get heavy at high speeds. All 109s had a very heavy elevator for a fighter, and they went on to build 33,000 without doing anything about it. Countless thousands were lost in take-off and landing accidents, and the view out is very restricted. Life is much easier in a Spitfire.

### One of the biggest and most powerful WWII warbirds was the Grumman Tigercat. Was it a challenging aeroplane to master?

As a nosewheel aeroplane it's not that difficult, all you really need to know is how its systems work and how to handle large round engines.

Providing both engines keep running it's all good. You do need to have a plan of what you'll do if an engine quits at low speed, as you need to act quickly and correctly, but you could say that about every light twin ever made. Like a Mosquito, it has a significant risk period between rotating and achieving enough



speed to be able to control it on one engine. For an engine failure immediately after take-off your first action has to be to reduce power on the good engine to climb power, which is slightly counter-intuitive. You might be better off closing both throttles and sliding to a stop, rather than trying to continue flying and then losing control.

Aerobatics just needed a plan for engine failure when the speed was low, and then fly so you always had an option.

### What's it like being part of Duxford Flying Legends Balbo displays?

Leading the Balbo for the first time was a bit daunting, back in the late 1990s. Now it follows a well tried and tested formula but still concentrates the mind.

To get up to 30 aeroplanes joined up quickly means getting everyone off the ground in under four minutes. That, and rearranging the formations into an orderly circuit pattern for landing requires everyone to follow the briefing exactly. There is hardly any radio chat. If there's total silence you know it's going well.

Flying Legends works well because it is largely the same pilots each year. We have been flying together for years and know what can and can't be done. Introducing only a small number of newcomers each year helps to maintain this. In fact, it would be difficult to recreate this at any other airfield.

### What has been your best aviation moment?

It's not really about the aeroplane, it's about where they can take you.

Standing on a glacier at 14,000ft, perched on the edge of a wave bar in a glider at 20,000ft over mountains, aerobatics among the clouds. How lucky we are to be involved in something that lets us experience these things.

### Do you have any aviation heroes?

Nobody in particular. Those who pushed aeroplanes to the limits of their range across oceans and continents in the 1920s and 1930s, with no weather



**Above** Pete operates an Aviat Husky on floats in the SE of England and can provide float training.

forecasts and by dead reckoning, really have my utmost admiration.

### Have you had any hairy moments?

I try to learn the lessons before it gets hairy. The term 'risk assessment' has unfortunate connotations with the unpopular 'elf and safety', but it's only by doing them almost continually, so that they become instinctive, that you can recognise the hairy moments creeping up on you. So many accident reports seem to read like the *Charge of the Light Brigade* – any interested observer on a hill would have just shaken their head. Tunnel vision often accompanies high stress levels, and we become oblivious to the obviously worsening situation. Being able to recognise the onset of this is a life saver.

I do a fair amount of air testing of old aeroplanes with old engines, which inevitably leads to a few interesting moments, usually centred around the engine. It's useful to be able to diagnose a problem while it's occurring. Mind you, going back and saying it doesn't sound quite right is an engineer's nightmare!

### Are there any aviation books you would recommend?

*North to the Orient; Listen! The Wind*, and others by Anne Morrow Lindbergh. *The Sky Beyond, Frigate Bird*, and others by Patrick Gordon Taylor, and *Red Ball in the Sky* by Charles F Blair.

### Do you have non-aviation hobbies?

I never get bored in mountains or in a library. I enjoy skiing, tennis, scuba diving etc.

### Any advice for fellow pilots?

Whenever the odds start stacking against you, stop. ■

A white Jabiru J430 aircraft in flight against a blue sky with some clouds. The aircraft has 'Jabiru' written on the side and tail. Below the aircraft, there is a banner with the text 'Jabiru Leading the Way'.

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