



Beech for the sky...

This month we talk to former ATCO, race pilot, and current instructor and airline training captain, **Andrew Beech**

Welcome Andrew, can you please tell us something about your career?

I'm a training captain with a major UK airline, having joined them 15 years ago. I had two years on the Boeing 737 and since then have flown the Airbus 320. Throughout that time I've been based in the South West, although I originate from Hove in Sussex. The bulk of this flying involves 'line training' with new entrant first officers and captains on the day to day flying operation. Additionally, I get involved with command training and biannual checks for every pilot. We fly to more than 60 destinations from base, so there's plenty of variety.

My original goal was military flying. Having learned to glide and fly thanks to RAF scholarships, post A-levels this was the aim. Unfortunately, my eyesight let me down when it came to final selection and I was offered a commission as an air traffic controller. Whilst I considered my options, I opted to go down the civil ATCO route and got a NATS cadetship at Bournemouth. Subsequently I worked as a Twr/App radar controller at Birmingham, Dunsfold, Blackpool and Bristol.

Around the time that I finished my air traffic courses I got involved in the handicapped air-racing

Main Andrew Beech with his Piel Emeraude.

scene through my friendship with Vic Davies. He had been racing for some time, in a variety of aircraft, in addition to setting point-to-point speed records in the under 500kg class (in Taylor Titch G-CAPT). Together we bought the ex-Tiger Club Rollason Beta G-AWHV, which I subsequently did two full racing seasons with. Highlights were a couple of top five finishes and third in the Schneider Trophy, in a field of around 25. Sadly, half way through my second season, Vic was killed in the Titch in a weather-related accident in France and my heart was no longer in it.

I then turned my efforts toward getting a CPL and FI rating to use in parallel with my ATCO job. Latterly most of my instructional flying has been tailwheel/aerobatic instruction and with colleagues who wanted to get back into general aviation. When AVIA was operating, I flew the Tiger Moth for them in addition to the Tiger Airways Stampes at Gloster. Since both those operations ended, my instructional flying has been mainly at Kemble and Goodwood on the Citabria and Chipmunk.

Over the years I've also done some test flying/first flights (WAR FW190 and a plans-built Beta) and held display authorizations on the Beta, Chipmunk and Yak 50.

I worked at Dunsfold at the time that BAe pulled out and it became *Top Gear's* test track, among other things. As a result, I transferred within the company to fly their corporate aeroplanes at Warton. Having a small

fleet of four types resulted in all the pilots being qualified on two, mine were the Jetstream 31, which did the site to site shuttle, and the HS125 which resulted in some interesting trips far and wide.

This was good while it lasted but BAe started to downsize the fleet and I moved on before I was forced to. Several of my colleagues at Warton had already joined my current employer and with the prospect of a base where I wanted to be, and a quick command, I followed suite.

To be honest, I didn't think the whole low-cost airline thing would last. As commercial flying jobs go it's pretty good, as secure as it's going to get and typically only out of base maybe once every few months. The Airbus flying is as automated as you want to make it, at the end of the day by pressing two buttons you fly it like any other aeroplane. The advantage in operating out of the regional bases is that there is plenty of opportunity for visual approaches and hand flying, which I for one really encourage new pilots to do.

What started your interest in aviation?

Growing up close to Shoreham meant regular visits and lots of aerial activity when the annual show was on. I clearly remember B17 and Vulcan displays there in the relatively unregulated late 1970s, with some very low flying.

My grandfather had served in the RAF during WWII and I remember asking him lots of questions about P40s, Mustangs and Spitfires.

In what where and when was your first flight?

It was in a PA28 at the Shoreham air show in 1980. I was nine years old.

Where and when did you learn to fly?

I won scholarships to glide at West Malling and gained my PPL at Redhill. Later, I self-studied for my commercial written exams, and did my CPL, twin and IR training at Bristol when you could still do a 'non-approved course', i.e. whatever was required to reach the standard as opposed to a fixed number of hours.

I did my FI rating at Exeter, and aerobatics at Compton. From PPL to frozen ATPL with above ratings took about three years but it was all done around a full time ATC job.

How many hours and types have you flown?

Total 14,000, with around 3,000 on GA types. Type-wise around 60.

Do you have 'favourite' and 'worst' types flown?

From a pure handling aspect, likes include the Beagle Pup, Fournier RF6 and Chipmunk. And the Yak 50 has a fabulous amount of power – you could be in a warbird without the bills! Larger aircraft-wise the HS125-800 is very nice. Dislikes? The TB10 for its horrible interior, performance and lack of 'feel', and the Jurca Tempete didn't inspire me much either.

What aircraft have you owned?

A Luton Beta, as mentioned. And shares in two different



Top In a Yak 50 over the Needles on the Isle of white.

Middle left The Luton Beta, a great little race aeroplane.

Middle right A personal favourite, the DHC1 Chipmunk.

Above left I much enjoyed flying the BAe 125-800B out of Warton.

Above right Fun with friends in the Emerald.

Chipmunks, Yak 50/52, PA28 and TB10. I now have a Piel Emeraude, which I've solely owned for three years.

I like the Emerald because it can be operated comfortably out of a strip that's just 10 minutes from home. It's also affordable and easy to work on, handles nicely and is perfect for a two-up day out. The only downside is the lack of aerobatic capability. A CAP 10c ticks all the boxes, but a good one is three times the price and not on a permit.

Where did you convert to a taildragger?

I did it at Clacton on their Super Cub in 1991. I recall that it was just like riding a bike in that one moment you haven't a clue what you are doing, and then it clicks and you don't know what the fuss is about! From the Cub I went straight on to a Pitts S2B which was a bit of a jump in performance, it took a few trips for my brain to catch up.

Do many of your fellow commercial Pilots fly LAA types?

At the base we have around 180 pilots, but I would say less than 10 fly light aircraft regularly. Two own aeroplanes outright and a couple have shares. Skill set wise it's just very different. The basis of multi-crew commercial flying is effective communication and the ability to effectively monitor not only the aeroplane but

the other pilot. Additionally, problems are dealt with using decision making tools and a structure to get the crew to operate as effectively as possible.

These skills do transfer into light aircraft flying by, hopefully, managing the tasks well and being able to cope with malfunctions in a clear and effective manner.

What has been your best aviation moment?

In my first season of air racing I was really in at the deep end. I completed the required 100 hours P1 en-route to my first race. By the second year I was starting to feel a lot more comfortable and getting to know the courses. The final race that my co-owner/friend attended before his death was as good as it got. Perfect weather and a top five finish. Displaying at Old Warden also ticked a big box.

Any aviation heroes?

I think anyone who gave their life during WWI and WWII. For inspiration, Ray Hanna whom I was fortunate to meet a few times at Duxford. He flew the Beta that I co-owned when it was operated by the Tiger Club in the 70s. You couldn't wish to meet a more down to earth person, a display pilot second to none.

Any 'hairy' aviation moments?

I've had two engine failures in light singles. Most exciting was in a Beta turning final onto Shoreham's runway 03, as it used to be, at 500ft. It's a dramatic difference the additional drag that a stationary prop makes as opposed to it idling. My projected path was going to put me in a rough field just south of the railway embankment, with a good chance of turning over on touchdown. Thankfully, I just had enough energy to hop over the railway line and land just inside the airfield boundary. I clearly recall looking up at the embankment at one point. The Transair building now occupies this piece of land and whenever I visit, I'm reminded how lucky I was. The cause was a blocked carb jet.

When I got the chance to fly some more interesting aeroplanes with older engines and less than ideal glide characteristics, it was drilled into me to aim for a glide approach wherever you can.

This certainly made a big difference that day. A lot of engine failures occur during the initial or latter stages of flight. Reduce your 'exposure' by keeping within gliding distance from the overhead, downwind and onto final. Somewhere like Shoreham with an approach over the sea I'd rather hold overhead and wait for a gap to make a glide approach than drag it in over the water. Again, whenever practical, climb up into the overhead prior to setting course on departure.

Do you have an aircraft or vehicles wish list?

Car-wise I'd like an AC Ace but they're a Lotto job these days; prices on many classic cars have gone beyond the realms of reality in recent years. With an unlimited amount what about a replica Fairey Fantome. Looks like a better-looking Hawker Fury – if that's possible. Slightly more realistically I'd settle for a CAP 10.

Are there any aviation books you would recommend?

A personal favourite is Harald Penrose's *Adventure with Fate*, a superb insight into test flying pre- and post-war. Other good reads are Bob Hoover's *Forever Flying*, Neil Williams' *Airborne* and the self-titled *Yeager*.

Do you have other non-aviation hobbies/interests?

I've owned several sports cars over the years. The current one, a 1984 TVR 350i, I've had for 14 years. It's never broken down and part of the fun is having something to tinker with in the garage. Mindful of the fact that sitting in an aeroplane all day isn't exactly healthy, I'm out on the bicycle every day if it's dry.

Do you have any advice for fellow pilots?

Fly regularly, it's all about currency, not hours or types. In addition, practice glide approaches at every opportunity. I feel rusty if I don't fly my aeroplane every few weeks. Operating outside of the constraints of a flying club brings many advantages; the downside is a lack of oversight of recency and indeed standards. ■

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