



# Low and slow to Sywell...

Kitfox S5 OE-AMJ is based at Stockerau (LOAU), near Vienna, and was flown to Sywell 2019 by owner **Kerry Skyring** and co-pilot Derek Viner, winning the Malcolm Allen trophy for most meritorious arrival. Kerry tells the story...

**W**hat a great and unexpected delight it was to win this trophy. I know others flew further and there were many 'meritorious' flights to the Rally. Very humbly Derek and I say 'thank you very much' – not just for the award but for a terrific event. The flight was the culmination of much dreaming and planning and every minute of it was a joy.

Firstly, some details on OE-AMJ. It is a Series 5 Kitfox built from a Skystar kit at Stockerau by my good friend Hans Mühlberger, with a little help from me. It has the Rotax 912 ULS motor and a fixed pitch Austrian Wolf propeller. The first flight was in 2008 and after a couple of hours I took on the test flying, finally achieving full Austrian registration in the Experimental category in 2017. Yes, there's a story in why this took so long, but it's too boring to tell here.

So. What's it like to fly? The Kitfox S5 has more in

**Main** From left, Derek Viner and Kerry Skyring receiving the Malcolm Allen Trophy for Most Meritorious Flight to the Rally from LAA graduate engineers Joe Hadley and Mike Roberts.

common with the current Series 7 than the earlier Mk's 1 to 4. It is short-coupled, meaning good tailwheel skills are essential if you are to keep it on the runway. This applies for both take-off and landing, and especially on tarmac. However, the powerful flaperons and rudder are your allies and were certainly holding my hand the day I put it down on narrow tarmac in an 18kt crosswind.

I favour wheel landings on tarmac and in crosswinds but use three-pointers on grass or if there is a need to land short. The reward for learning the ground handling – it really is just training and practice – arrives when the wheels leave the runway. This aeroplane is very responsive in all axes, with a Pitts-like roll rate. Yes, it's neutral in directional stability, but just rest both feet lightly on the rudder pedals and it will behave. With two large pilots, 40kg of luggage and 104 litres of fuel, the Kitfox remains within weight and balance limits and leaves the ground in about 200 metres, cruises at 88kt and sips just 16 litres of fuel per hour.



“The sight of the White Cliffs of Dover shining in the sun off the starboard wing as we tracked Calais to Headcorn was as special as my first solo”



### The trip

There was a two-year gestation from conception to conclusion of the Sywell flight. For years I had been a mainly local flyer, but with semi-retirement the realisation dawned that dreams of touring Europe would remain just dreams unless I slayed a few demons, such as angst for the Alps and cold sweats in controlled airspace. Alpine excursions with Austrian friends, and then a flight to Italy in 2018, taught me that even a mug like me could learn this stuff.

Derek Viner co-flew the Italy trip with me and when I suggested our Sywell jaunt he was keen (to my delight) and flew into Vienna from London the night before our departure. For weeks we had been skyping, emailing potential routes, drawing up checklists, studying ditching procedures, reading AIPs, AIS, Notams and the other seemingly endless documentation.

Sywell lies 840nm and some 11 hours Kitfox flying time to the WNW of my base at Stockerau. We allowed

**Top** The Kitfox in its element, the Austrian Alps. The airfield is Niederöblarn. **Photo:** Kerry Skyring.

**Above left** Not a great shot of Dover's White Cliffs, but a great moment. Taken by Derek as I was busy checking our life vests and singing along to Dame Vera.

**Above right** Some real Low and Slow, flying at 1,200 ft across Normandy, approaching the Channel under a low cloud layer. **Photo:** Derek Viner.

two days for the flight, aiming to arrive at the Rally on Thursday afternoon, so that even with a weather delay we should still make it for Friday or Saturday. Take-off was delayed a little by pesky Danube basin fog, but once airborne and flight plan opened (not required for an Austria to Germany flight, but I chose to lodge one) we settled down to views of the Danube, spotting airfields, atomic power stations, well-ordered fields, farm houses and Autobahn intersections. Without doubt the best view of an Autobahn – I've driven too many – is from a Kitfox at 3,000ft.

The Austrian and German FIS functioned efficiently, providing traffic info and timely frequency change prompts. Three hours after lift-off we landed at Erbach, a small, grass airfield in the west of Germany providing the two essentials for Kitfox pilots – mogas and coffee.

Another flight plan filed (thank you Skydemon) and we continued west crossing the Rhine into France over that much disputed terrain, the Alsace plain, and on to

## Trip to Sywell

Troyes, SE of Paris. Troyes was chosen as an overnight stop for its self-service fuel and Customs, the latter necessary because our next leg to Headcorn would see us leave the Schengen zone.

### The Channel

All pilots will relate to the sense of anticipation and slight nervousness felt ahead of a new challenge. This had been with me constantly in the days leading up to this trip.

I grew up in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, absorbing all of the aviation imagery and literature of the time, but never once imagining something as momentous as flying my own aeroplane – and one I'd had a hand in building – across the English Channel.

Above my desk as I write, there is a collection of *Biggles* books and the bookshelf to my left holds many aviation classics. My other aeroplane is an Auster, so yes, I'm an aviation Anglophile and the sight of the White Cliffs of Dover shining in the sun off the starboard wing as we tracked Calais to Headcorn was as special as my first solo.

Many readings this will have crossed this water so many times it seems like a trip to the supermarket, however, 'firsts' such as this really do only come once.

Honestly, if it wasn't for that small voice telling me that land was the better option to have below me I would have circled the Kitfox in front of the cliffs while rendering my own version of *There'll Be Bluebirds Over...* but with consideration for my co-pilot and the beckoning of the Kent coast put paid such errant behaviour.

With Headcorn in sight we set up for a left downwind to 28, noting a dramatic increase in aircraft sightings and radio traffic in comparison to the continent. Derek was on lookout while I concentrated on setting up for the perfect arrival but when he called 'Spitfire taxiing!' on final, you can imagine the double-take. I did manage a passable wheeler in front of the Boulton Academy two-seat Spitfire as it took day trippers up from Headcorn on that warm sunny Thursday.

I can't imagine any airfield providing a better introduction to UK light aviation. Families were picnicking, fearless youths were skydiving, a Cap 10 was aerobating and light aircraft were coming and going. A pilot's heaven on sun-soaked grass. We refuelled, had lunch, and estimated a take-off time which would have us arriving Sywell for our 1620 slot time. We were now nine flying hours into the journey and each leg flown had been almost exactly three hours. At each fuel stop we'd taken on just under 50 litres, meaning we still carried more than three hours flying time in the tanks on landing. Now, that's a nice feeling...

### Almost there...

The final leg to the LAA Rally took us east of the London TMA, crossing the Thames with the estuary to starboard and the Dartford crossing to port. This was another visual delight with London city visible in the haze and that 'oh this is special' feeling pervading the cockpit once more.

Derek is experienced in UK radio lore, so I left him to deal with London Information and then Farnborough Radar as we tracked north of London and south of Luton, before turning onto a northerly heading for the run to Pitsford Water and the joining procedure for the Rally.

Obviously, it's a good thing when there's not too much traffic however, after investing so much time in



**Above** About to cross the Rhine from Germany into France. This must be one of the most obvious and iconic borders in mainland Europe. **Photo: Derek Viner.**

reading the AIS and writing arrival check lists, there was almost a sense of disappointment when we find ourselves flying the joining pattern alone. This was not what we'd trained for! Instead, we enjoyed a nice little tour of the Northamptonshire countryside before giving our 'leaving' call, reporting final and being welcomed to Sywell by the excellent information service.

The Rally is well covered by other reports, so I won't waste words here except to provide some impressions from a first-timer and new LAA member. Any airfield that combines grass runways and Art Deco architecture is going to be a winner with me, but add to this the relaxed atmosphere, great marshalling, more aircraft than a koala can bear and, at the end of it, the Malcolm Allen trophy ... Again, thank you very much to all concerned.

### The crew

*Kerry Skyring:* The owner and pilot is an Australian freelance journalist who lives and works in Vienna. Yes, an Auster owning Australian living in Austria.

*Derek Viner:* The co-pilot and is one of Australia's best-known industrial risk engineers. He owns a Luscombe Silvaire in Australia and loves to spend most of the European summer in the UK.

• NB: I've learnt that Malcolm Allen flew a Jodel D9, so I feel a connection with him as I also own a baby Jodel. ■

## Kitfox S5 OE-AMJ

### Specs

**Motor:** Rotax 912 ULS 100hp  
**MTOM:** 663kg (703 kg in USA)  
**Empty Wt:** 364kg  
**Cruise Speed:** 88kt  
**Endurance:** Six hours at 75% power  
**Vso:** 40kt at MTOM  
**Take-off dist:** 180m at MTOM over 15m obstacle  
**Landing dist:** 305m at MTOM over 15m obstacle