

From saddle to sea to sky...

Former jockey and trainer of a Grand National winner, **John Kempton** gave it all up and took to the high seas with his wife Trish. And, the pair also have a passion for flying...



Welcome John, can you tell us something of your career to date?

As a young man being mad about horses and riding, my mind and course was set on becoming a veterinary surgeon, concentrating on horses, but I ended up a National Hunt racehorse trainer and steeplechase jockey. I had a reasonable amount of success training and riding a fair number of winners, including training the 1967 Grand National winner *Foinavon* (*This was one of those particularly well remembered Grand Nationals after many horses fell or refused at one particular fence, which is now known as Foinavon. Ed*).

Later in my life I completely changed tack, no pun intended, and my wife Trish and I became keen on scuba diving. I qualified as a Divemaster and Ocean Yachtmaster and, together with Trish who also became a qualified diver, purchased a large twin-screw motor yacht and established a 'live aboard' charter boat business. We took up to 12 amateur scuba divers for one or two week, all-inclusive holidays diving the English Channel, starting from Salcombe in Devon to

Main John and Trish Kempton with their Jodel DR1050-M1 *Sicile Record*, in which they have toured Europe.

the Channel Islands, Isles of Scilly or Devon and Cornwall Coast, plus the D-Day landings coast in France. We ran this business for 28 years until we retired.

What started your interest in aviation?

Trish, who had experienced flying in light aircraft with a friend in Canada, and I got interested in learning to hang glide but saw a newspaper article in our local paper headlined *Flying is Fun* written by Tony Knowles, Chairman of the Western Counties Microlight Club at Halwell, Nr. Kingsbridge in Devon (he now has a Piper Cub at Bodmin). It suggested that a flexwing microlight was fun and inexpensive to run. A hang glider with an engine – we could go places – that did sound like fun! So, we bought a secondhand one.

In what, where and when was your first flight?

It was in a Pegasus Flash 1 flexwing microlight at Woodlands Farm (now called Woodlands Roache) Nr. Bodmin, in Cornwall in November 1988. We then went on to undertake, over a number of years, a variety of Pilot training opportunities including completing our flexwing training at Woodlands Farm; did our three-axis microlight

training at Weston Zoyland; then NPPL SSEA training at Dunkeswell; and finally, JAR training at Ormond Beach in Florida in the USA.

How did you hear about the LAA?

We purchased a secondhand Rans S6 in 1994 which was registered under the LAA (then PFA) Permit to Fly scheme so joined the Association. We joined the local Strut, Wessex, and it has been a very positive influence, enabling us to enjoy many fly-ins, not only at recognised airfields but also at numerous small private strips we would not normally have visited. The winter meetings and talks have been a great place to learn more about flying and the experiences of others, and the newsletter and website are a great asset, full of useful information that has helped us over the years.

Effectively being a club, the LAA and its Struts are full of knowledgeable folk who have only ever been only too pleased to help us with any issues that we have had.

What types and hours have you flown?

We have flown the Pegasus Flash 1 and a Flash 2 Alpha flex-wings, the Rans S6 three-axis microlight, a variety of C152s, Aeronca Chief, Bolkow 207 and Jodel DR1052-M1. In all I have 1,400 hours.

Do you have a particular favourite?

Yes, it is the Jodel 1050-M1 *Sicile Record* that we currently own. It has taken us safely for nearly 700 hours around the UK and Europe. Before you ask, I do not have a worst type!

I gather from the hours flown you like to tour?

Yes, very much so. I would say that Trish and I are touring fanatics, we seldom fly locally and our reason for getting into our Jodel is to go somewhere – somewhere that we preferably haven't been before if possible. It could be a day trip or for several days, in the UK or across the Channel into Europe. Touring in a small aircraft is so exciting and each trip has its own challenges and we find visiting different airfields very satisfying, having flown into well over 200 with our various aircraft. And we are hoping to visit many more before we get too old (I am now 81).

We were introduced to touring after we purchased our Aeronca Chief from Norman Evan and his wife June. Norman is a very experienced pilot who had not only trained at RAF Valley as a young man but had flown and toured in light aircraft all his life. He had a Murphy Rebel that he built via the LAA permit route, and he led us on a few trips to the Alps etc, after which we were hooked. Touring was the sure way for us to carry on enjoying flying.

In the past we had toured Europe by motorbike and motorhome but find that touring via a small vintage aeroplane much more rewarding, pleasurable and exciting. There are a number of airshows and events that are great fun to go to, particularly if it is an event for old aircraft, or similar, to the LAA Rally and run by one of the European equivalent organisations. It is difficult to explain the immense feeling of pleasure we have when flying over foreign lands, especially over the lower mountains of

Bottom Earlier times. John and Trish's first foray into recreational aviation was in their Pegasus Puma flexwing.

Below inset Foinavon, trained by John Kempton, takes the last fence at Aintree for the run-in to the finish to become the winner of the 1967 Grand National.

Below Following some enjoyable flexwing flying, John and Trish moved to three-axis microlights with a Rans S6.

French, Italian and Swiss Alps, and the Massif Centrale.

We try to find airfields that are within walking distance of interesting towns or villages to make our trips more pleasurable, information from the town's tourist office is usually available for ideas of what to see and suggestions for accommodation if needed.

Route planning, usually done well in advance, is all part of the fun and there is also a certain pleasure on completing a trip, especially if all went well. We also meet and talk to so many very nice people on our trips.

Do you have a 'best aviation moment'?

We have had many super aviation moments and flights on our travels, some of which we touched on above. One that does stick in my mind was when we were on a flight plan from Losij (Croatia) to Venice Lido (San Nicolò) when, nearing Venice, ATC told us to divert and land at Marco Polo International VCE – the fourth busiest airport in Italy – to clear Customs due to a G8 Summit meeting being held nearby. So, in our little Jodel, we joined for a four mile final in between a row of airliners and then, on landing, a Follow Me vehicle led us to parking. With Customs dealt with, we joined a queue of very large airliners to await our turn to take off to complete our flight to Venice Lido – not necessarily our best aviation moment but a memorable one!

Another memorable flight was in spring 2015, Bolt Head, Salcombe to Sardinia. We set off from Bolt Head, taking a couple of days to get to Fayance (LFMF), a gliding airfield near Cannes in the South of France. Crossing the Mediterranean, our next stop was Ajaccio (LFKJ) on the west coast of Corsica, where we hired a



Meet the Members

car for a few days to see the island. Back in the Jodel for an hour's flight and we landed at Alghero (LIEA) in Northern Sardinia, an airport not used to handling light aircraft. There was no GA or Aero club to be seen, but they were very helpful and found a parking place for us, so we were able to stay a few days, hire a car and have a look around the island. We had wanted to go to Cagliari in the south but were told neither Alghero nor Cagliari stocked avgas, so we had to return the way had come. We visited three more airports in Corsica, Figari (LKF), Propriano (LFKO) and Calvi (LFKC) before heading home back across the Med. What an exciting and memorable tour! Corsica is an amazingly beautiful, mountainous island and well worth a trip.

Have you any aviation heroes?

Yes, Sir Francis Chichester. He was such a pioneer in aircraft touring and navigation, flying from England to Australia and then crossing the Tasman Sea East to West (New Zealand to Australia), being the first person to land on Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. He is the first aviator attributed to using *Off course Navigation* techniques and his only method of fixing his position was to take sun sightings with a sextant. This must have been a very difficult thing to do in a moving aircraft. As a Yachtmaster I know only too well how difficult it is, having used sextants on small boats. Then, after the sight was taken, he had to make long hand calculations in the cockpit, using his own developed sight reduction tables. It was an incredible piece of navigation.

His advanced navigational procedures and innovations followed him through his life, some being adopted by the RAF and the Air Ministry during WWII, and then when he sailed *Gipsy Moth IV* around the world in later life, becoming the first single-handed circumnavigator to have done so.

Another hero is Jeffrey Quill, OBE, Chief Test Pilot for Vickers Aviation who test flew every mark of Spitfire. His work on the aircraft aided its development from a promising but untried prototype to becoming an instrument of the RAF's victory in the Battle of Britain. He served with the Fleet Air Arm testing / perfecting the landing of Spitfires and Seafires on aircraft carriers.

In 1933 Jeffrey Quill was in the RAF Meteorological Flight at Duxford where, wearing electrically heated

Right No doubt, owners of the type will now tell you that an Aeronca is the gold at the end of the rainbow. John and Trish certainly thought it was!



suits and flying open cockpit Armstrong Whitworth Siskin biplanes, he headed a team that flew twice daily (except Sunday) on scheduled flights up to 25,000ft to collect data at 1,000ft. intervals, regardless of unflyable weather. On landing (sometimes crashes), the info was telephoned up to the Met Office in London.

Have you had any 'hairy' aviation moments?

Wow! I think flying has many exciting moments but surely that is the draw and why we enjoy it so. But I do have two moments that I probably wish to forget.

The first was in my Rans S6 when on my way to Bodmin; just as we approached the moors at about 1,500ft, the engine overheated and stopped (due to a fan belt breaking) but fortunately my PFL training kicked in and we landed without any problems.

The second was in my Bolkow 207. On taking off from a bumpy grass field, we got airborne too early and ended up heading for electricity pylon/cables that were at the side of the runway. The resultant avoiding action taken damaged the aeroplane beyond economical repair but fortunately we were not injured. I think the lesson learned was that the take-off has just as many perils as do the landings

Do you have an aircraft or vehicle wish list?

Maybe a Tiger Moth to fly for fun, as there's not enough room in it for touring.

Do you have other hobbies and interests?

The only other hobby we have now is walking, which is an enjoyable way to keep us fit.

What advice would you offer fellow pilots?

If you haven't experienced the fun of touring in a light aircraft, especially across the Channel and into mainland Europe: GO DO IT! It will put the spark back into your flying and you will have a lot of fun. ■

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