

FROM QUICKSILVER TO PIONEER

This month we talk to Brian Lyford, builder, pilot and enthusiastic Strut member

Welcome Brian, what is your current day job/past career?

My day job is flying at every possible opportunity. I can do this because I have finally retired. As for my career, it was a draughtsman/technician for ten years from leaving school and then I returned to study to try to develop some sort of future so that I could support my ever-increasing family (I have five sons).

Since leaving Plymouth Polytechnic, as it was then, I gained employment as a freelance mechanical design engineer, mostly in the West Country. That continued until the late 90s when I finally became an employee for Nortel Networks in Paignton, where I live.

What started your interest in aviation?

Being born and brought up in Southall, on one of the flight paths into Heathrow, I got to see and marvel at many aircraft of the 50s and 60s. A special treat from my parents was a drive around the peri track to a favourite spot at the end of the main runway where we would have a picnic. Just try doing that now! This interest in all things flying was probably kindled then but it didn't come to anything until I got the



Brian Lyford advises us to fly regularly!

opportunity to try my hand at hang-gliding at Plymouth Poly, through the Students Union. Each attempt ended in disaster but enough adrenalin was released to hook me on flying.

A few years and a couple more children later, I started flying lessons at Davidstow Microlight School in Cornwall. Unfortunately, before my GFT I had to go and work in East Anglia and the flying had to take a back seat, so all stopped for some years.

In the 90s I had seen and came to appreciate the autogyro, mainly through the exploits of Chris Julian. I acquired a Bensen B8 with a view to getting a flying licence but again time and money defeated me. Finally I completed my flying lessons (fixed-wing microlight) on the Isle of Wight whilst working there in 2009 (well there isn't much else to do on the island in winter...).

What was your first flight?

My first proper flight that didn't end up in a tangle of aluminium tubes was at Davidstow in a MX Quicksilver, although one of those flights also came a bit close to disaster. I had not long been going solo when I took off and climbed to about house height, maybe a little more,



Brian's Pioneer P200: "It knocks the socks off anything else I have flown," he says. (Photo Stuart MacConnacher)

when the drive belt shed all its teeth resulting in a very loud scream from the engine and no thrust. An interesting decent, I remember putting the stick forward to gain some speed and authority then back as the concrete approached. I think I burst a tyre.

Are you a Strut member?

Having been a member of the LAA for some years, I had known about Struts for some time and back in 2008 or 2009 I joined the Devon Strut. This was when I started building my Pioneer 200M, the advice and help I received from fellow members proving invaluable. Recently I have attended a number of Wessex Strut functions and thought it only right that I should join them too – and not only because I get half-price landings at Henstrige. The Struts really do a great job in laying on events for us and they need all the support they can get.

How many hours do you have and what types have you flown?

Gosh, not as many as I would like: total number of aircraft is only about eight, and half of those for less than a couple of hours each. I've just had a look at my logbook and it shows P1 – 235 hours, dual – 71 hours. Of the P1, 200 of those hours are in my Pioneer. So not much experience really and to pre-empt your next question, to be honest I don't think I have enough experience to answer what is my 'best and worst' meaningfully. All I can say is that compared to all the other aircraft I have flown, the Pioneer knocks the socks off the lot. It climbs well, doesn't have any nasty stall or spin traits, and hardly needs any rudder – basically it is cheap to run and very docile. Then I would say that wouldn't it!

I also still have my Bensen and one day I would like to get a licence to fly it.

What has been your best aviation moment?

There are two flying moments that will remain with me. First was a year or so ago when I landed in Cherbourg. Such a feeling of satisfaction that I had crossed the Channel in something I had built in my single garage at home.

The second was when I flew to Caernarfon. It was a bit of a challenge with a cloud base of about 2,300ft and squally showers, and it

“With a cloud base of about 2,300ft and squally showers, it seemed like I was almost kissing the tops of some of the hills as I dodged the rain showers”

seemed like I was almost kissing the tops of some of the hills as I dodged the rain but what a reward with the magnificent Welsh vistas. I certainly recommend it as a fly-out.

Do you have other non-aviation hobbies and interests?

Apart from hunting for unattached women of a certain age and drinking the odd bottle of wine, not really. I did build a car once and half a house, and I'm three-quarters of the way through rebuilding a catamaran (a Heavenly Twin). Once that's finished I will park it in France and use it as a mobile base to fly to. I have enjoyed sailing but I now find it too time consuming.



Brian enjoyed some early training in an MX11 Quicksilver, one of the classics of the US ultralight aircraft scene

Tell us about your aviation heroes

Most pilots with more hours in their logbook than me. They all have experiences, good and bad, and some will share them with you. This rich vein of knowledge can be so useful.

Have you had any unnecessarily 'interesting' aviation moments?

Not so much a hairy moment but it was a situation that could have developed into something more serious... I had taken a fellow Strut member up to Turweston. Looking at my fuel gauge before setting out, I decided I had enough fuel for the return journey, so off we set. We stayed too long at Turweston and would have to return with our caps on backwards to make sufficient speed to be on the ground before nightfall. Once we were in the air on or way back, the fuel situation didn't look so promising. With the pressure of nightfall or the alternative of an expensive stopover, I foolishly convinced myself that we should press on. Fortunately my passenger was a wiser man and thought otherwise, he convinced me I should turn back and get more fuel. We did and finally landed back at base as it got dark, an interesting arrival.

Now I have a dip-stick and log of all the fuel I use, including what gets used when warming up the engine prior to a flight. If I were to build another aeroplane I would seriously consider the inclusion of a fuel gauge on the panel.

Do you have a wish list of aircraft?

I like to fly by map and stopwatch rather than GPS. It's a little more testing but rewarding. To do so you require good vision forward and down. I have a low-wing tractor configuration, not best for such exercises so I would really like to try a pusher aircraft so I could sit out front and have a much better field of vision. There is an Australian aircraft, single-seat, aerobatic, pusher configuration called the Ultrabat that ticks most of the boxes for me. If I had the funds, that would be high on the list of those to consider.

Any advice for fellow pilots?

Keep flying, regularly, and take as many youngsters up as possible, god knows we need a next generation to follow on from us for so many reasons. ■

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