



MEET THE MEMBERS

This month we meet aerobatic enthusiast Corinne Dennis

Current job/past career?
I am a cycle clothing designer and distributor, helping people to enjoy their sport in greater comfort.

What sparked your interest in aviation?
My older brother was always into aeroplanes and eventually joined the RAF (although I actually learned to fly before he did), so there were always books and Airfix kits hanging around our childhood home. I clearly remember as a child lying on the lawn staring up at the sky and thinking I would like to live up there amongst the clouds...

Much later in life a girlfriend rang me up and said, "I've thought of something brilliant we can do – lets learn to fly!" We had pretty much run out of other ways of getting into trouble at that point, and it brought back those childhood memories.

What aircraft, where and when was your first flight?

I had my first lesson at Full Sutton Airfield on my 39th birthday, and then flew twice

a week for the next few months and completed my course in 35 hours. There was no previous history of flying in the family other than brother Ben having had a few rides in JPs. I'd had no previous flights before my first lesson.

What types of aircraft have you flown?

Not many really; I learned in a PA-28, tried a C150 and then started aerobatics in a Robin 2160 and continued in the delightful Cap10B funded by a 10-hour scholarship from Diana Britten. I then bought a ¼ share in a Pitts S-1S, which was fab to fly, and a little beyond my landing capabilities at the time; unfortunately I did bend it... When I bought the lovely Extra 230 I vowed never to fly a Pitts again – now I am building one!

Do you have a favourite and worst type?

In my limited experience to date the Extra is a sheer delight; well-balanced and extremely well-mannered. Changing from the Pitts was like climbing out of a powerful go-kart and getting into a more powerful Mercedes. I

suppose the 150 and the PA-28 were the least fun, but that wasn't their fault.

Do you currently have an aeroplane?

I'm not flying at present as I am concentrating on building *Sunshine*, my single-seat Pitts. I bought him half built with some known, and many unknown, existing problems, anticipating a complete 'un-build' and re-start.

Since dismantling it, I stripped the powder coat from the fuselage and etch primed and painted it, constructed all new cockpit and engine panels, installed the fuel system, built the canopy and have now covered all the fabric areas.

The engine is now installed and I am currently embarking upon the wiring, having previously done the LAA Electrics Course. I hope to have him flying next year, but as I have no 'previous' at this game I may be way out in my aspirations.

What is your best aviation moment?

Probably getting my first ever medal

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for aerobatics – a Silver in the Standard Aero's Nationals in my first Pitts. I had been struggling for weeks after buying it, and then had two coaching sessions with Gerald Cooper who continued as my coach for the next few years. He took me from hopeless to a medal in a few short, fun-filled flights.

Do you have other non-aviation hobbies/interests?

Yes, a fair few including cycling, running, triathlon, walking, skiing, diving, motor biking, cooking, eating and drinking – and I've just started caving and exploring disused Cornish mines.

Who are your aviation heroes?

Diana Britten, who is the only British female pilot who has competed past Advanced level, and the ATA Spitfire Women of WWII, for obvious reasons.

Any 'hairy' moments and lessons learnt?

Hmmm, too many weather-related nasties transiting to and from competitions. The worst I can recall was returning to Yorkshire from a successful contest at Duxford, and departing in glorious sunshine. I omitted to get the en route wx, and didn't even process the news from my husband who was up at Donnington in a cloudburst.

I flew into it somewhere near Barkston Heath, having become too overloaded to speak to the relevant frequency, so couldn't easily get help. I grovelled my way up the A1 from Peterborough with both hands frozen on the stick, paralysed with fear. At least I had the presence of mind to wind the prop back, which did save it from damage. I had hardly ever flown in heavy rain before and just didn't know what to expect. The plane didn't fall out of the sky, and I managed to stay above ground level, and after what seemed like eternity a streak of light appeared through the black, and I knew I might not die. Never have the power stations on Yorkshire looked so welcoming.

Lessons learned? Always check the wx, turn back if its crap, if you don't and do get in the mire, LAND if you overfly a perfectly good airfield, even if it is military (actually that should be 'as early as possible') and lastly if you do get into trouble, talk to D&D.

An earlier 'look over the edge' was finding myself at the top of a vertical climb in the Extra with a completely jammed elevator. I managed to get the aircraft pointing at the ground, not knowing whether I was going to be able to pull out of the dive. I did, obviously, but the 10 minute flight back to landing became more and more frightening, not knowing if or when it would jam again.

The landing, following a Pan call, was thankfully uneventful. I returned the aircraft straight to its hanger and started taking the back end apart. The battery box of a noise cancelling headset was lodged in the very end of the fuselage. A lucky escape... lesson learned, be careful who you share an aircraft with!

What's on your aircraft wish list – to fly or own?

Mainly to fly the one I am building. And maybe build a two-seater next.

Any advice for fellow pilots?

Enjoy every day as it comes, we don't know how many we have been allocated. ■