



# WOT A LIFE, PART II

The second part of our chat with former PFA Chairman, Currie Wot flyer and rare-breed cattle-farmer, David Faulkner-Bryant

**Y**ou were Chairman of our Association for seventeen of what many would regard as its most important years, when it grew from a small club to a well-established organisation, with offices, staff and a burgeoning membership. What do you regard as your most significant achievements.

Initially, we had a number of local representatives dotted around the country, and as I previously mentioned, I became the PFA rep for the Brighton area. Developing that idea into the Struts was very important because it offered a support network for members at a local level, offering expertise and experience about building, maintenance, airstrip flying and touring plus, overall, the friendship of likeminded people.

The Struts grew like wildfire and were instrumental in promoting our Association to a much wider audience and, therefore, boosting the PFA's membership.

Really getting our annual Rally going was very pleasing as it brought so many people together. I'm delighted that we still

*(Above) David has enjoyed a long and fruitful life in aviation, and it certainly isn't over yet! (Photo: Neil Wilson)*

have the annual LAA Rally and really enjoy attending it each year. Helping to promote groups was also very satisfying. By finding people locally who could share an aeroplane, ownership effectively becomes affordable to many more people.

I was also instrumental in establishing the FAI Awards, which involved attending various conferences and establishing ways to record world records and record-breaking flights, etc.

**What have been your most memorable moments in aviation?**

To be honest, there have been so many, but if I have to choose, then there are three that really stand out.

First was the maiden flight in my Currie Wot, G-ARZW. As I previously mentioned, I was

building my own Wot but buying Doc Urmston's aircraft meant that I could really give my flying the injection of activity it needed. That was a wonderful little aeroplane, one which took me all over the UK and into Europe.

Second was receiving the Prince of Wales Cup, on behalf of the LAA Rally team, for organising the largest gathering of aircraft in Europe at our annual event. The award was presented by HRH Prince Charles himself, and was his personal award on becoming President of the Royal Aero Club, following in the footsteps of his father, the Duke of Edinburgh, who was retiring from the post, having served his term.

Our Association was the first recipient of this prestigious award and we celebrated at a local restaurant afterwards, when the valuable glass goblet was filled with the very best wine and passed around the table – fortunately, without mishap.

My third magic moment was the incredible journey of Clive Canning, who flew his homebuilt





(Left)  
**Clive Canning** arriving at the LAA Rally, Sywell, after his flight from Australia.  
(Photo: David Faulkner-Bryant)

Thorp T18 from Australia to England. Clive met me at Shoreham, and then I flew with him to Sywell, to be greeted by our members at the Rally.

When I was in Australia, I'd said to Clive, who was then head of the Aussie homebuilt movement, that he'd be very welcome to attend our annual event if he could make it. I didn't expect it to happen but, two years later, there he was, the star of Sywell.

Sadly, Clive, a great friend, is no longer with us. He built two more aircraft and wrote a book, *Charlie Mike Charlie*, about his T18 and his record-setting flight, the first by a homebuilt from Australia to England. A wonderful story, and a wonderful friendship.

## Tell us about some of your more 'interesting' flying adventures...

Most of my flying has been enjoyable and uneventful, and has gone according to plan, but there have been a few incidents along the way!

Flying from Redhill to attend an air race in Germany, I was caught in poor weather and was forced to give up due to some very heavy rain – of course, I was flying open-cockpit, in the Wot – and overnights at Sedan. The next day, I pressed on to Sarrebourg, and finally headed to Colmar, for Customs, to cross the German border at Fribourg.

Upon reaching the high ground, before I crossed the Rhine, the weather forced me to stop again. I landed on an unattended grass strip to wait for an improvement in the weather, and looking at the map I noticed a canal nearby. As canals normally follow the low ground I decided to follow it, in search of a way



(Above) **HRH Prince Charles** presenting **David** with the **RAeC's Prince of Wales Cup**.  
(Photo: David Faulkner-Bryant)



## MEET THE MEMBERS

around the impasse of low cloud and fog. Flying at low-level beneath the clag, imagine my surprise when, going around a bend, the canal disappeared into a tunnel with rising ground on both sides.

A last-minute, instinctive change of direction, towards a lighter part of the sky, saved the day. I broke out into bright sunlight on the other side of the valley and was able to continue on to Colmar and Fribourg – where I discovered that the race had been cancelled! Previous gliding experience had reminded me that, at such critical moments, the quickest route out of a bad situation is heading for the lightest patch of sky.

Another occasion was when I was returning from the airshow at Biggin Hill, where I'd been displaying the Currie Wot. The engine started giving me trouble so I let down and landed at Dunsfold – this was back when Harriers and Hawks were being tested there. A chap came out and said, "You can't land here, mate!"

I explained the problem, and that I was returning from the Biggin show, so he got on the radio to his boss, who was back in one of the buildings. He gave the Wot's registration and his boss said, "It can't be that aeroplane, I'm watching him live on the telly, from Biggin Hill." It turned out, at that precise moment, the BBC was showing my display from the previous day!

### Do you have other, non-aviation, hobbies and interests?

I very much enjoyed motorcycle grass-track racing when I was much younger. It taught you how to look after your engine and bike while having great fun, and I enjoyed making many friends while doing it.

I also enjoy horses very much, as having four daughters who all had one each, it taught you how to enjoy and respect an animal. We very much enjoyed riding across Exmoor together as a family.

### Are there any aviation books you'd recommend?

Yes, hundreds! Many on engineering design and flying, but to name a couple that I think anyone would like, Clive Canning's *Charlie Mike Charlie*, and *West With the Night* by Beryl Markham, about her flight from England to the USA in 1936. She was the first person to fly non-stop in an east to west direction, against the headwinds.

### Do you have any unfulfilled ambitions?

Yes. My original desire to build the Miles Satyr biplane couldn't be fulfilled at the time but I cherished the idea of modifying a Currie Wot, and even obtained the necessary Pobjoy engine.

The project never got off the ground and I parted with the Pobjoy to help someone else achieve a dream, but I believe that LAA Chief Engineer Francis Donaldson is on the case!

### Do you have any aviation heroes?

There are so many worthy names that come to mind, from early pioneers, trailblazers, record breakers, test pilots and the brave men who defended us all in the bad times – not forgetting the designers and builders – and our present homebuilders. All of them are heroes, in a way, it's more a question of who we should leave off the list!

### Since retiring, do you still maintain an interest in flying?

I haven't really managed to retire yet! I still run my farm, where we breed those beautiful Highland cattle, and I continue with my wine business at our unique location on the Isle of Skye.

With my late friend, Tom Westman, we formed the Skye Flying Club some years ago, using his Chevron motor-glider from the 800m tarmac strip at Bradford. I managed to obtain permission and finance to build a hangar, which I still have a share in, but as of yet no aircraft to fill my space.

In the meantime, I'm making a grass strip at Ardmore, to tempt members of the Highland Strut and anybody else to call by for coffee and a chat – a warm welcome always awaits.

I'm working on my own SSDR at present – slow work but it's not over yet – and I flew a Tiger Moth last year!

### What advice would you offer your fellow LAA members?

Keep on building, keep on flying and *nil desperandum*! Remember the old saying, 'A winner never quits, and a quitter never wins.' That's why we have so many aircraft flying. Long live the LAA. ■



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