

# S.E5a PILOT

## DAVE LINNEY

This month we chat to former Harrier and Dassault Falcon pilot Dave Linney who now flies a Replica Plans WWI S.E5a for fun

**H**ello Dave, can you tell us something about your flying career?

Yes, I am actually retired from professional flying but seem to be at least as busy as ever! I gained a PPL in 1965, courtesy of an RAF Flying Scholarship, which I completed over a pretty intense 17-day period with Surrey and Kent Flying Club at Biggin Hill, flying Aircoupes and Chipmunks.

I left school in 1966 and had to wait until June of 1967 to join the Royal Air Force. I completed basic training on the Jet Provost Mk.3 and .4 at RAF Syerston, then moved on to Advanced Flying Training at RAF Valley, flying the delightful Folland Gnat. I was fortunate to pass out top of the course and I got my first choice of operational aeroplane – the Harrier. However, at that time it still had some teething problems and they hadn't yet started taking first tour pilots, so I stayed for two wonderful years at Chivenor flying Chipmunks, Hunters and the T7 Meteor. Eventually, in 1971, I made it to RAF Wittering to convert onto the Harrier, which I was destined to fly for the rest



of my time in the RAF, another 14 years. I served on No1 (F) Sqn twice, No4 (FR) Sqn in Germany, completed two tours instructing on the Harrier Conversion Unit and enjoyed a wonderful short tour in the Caribbean as boss of 1417 Harrier Flight in Belize.

Within two weeks of leaving the RAF in 1985, I was

down at RNAS Yeovilton flying Hunters, Canberras and, finally, Hawks, including lots of attacking Her Majesty's ships at 50ft and detachments all over the world, including Bermuda, Egypt, Cyprus, Sardinia, Greece and many detachments in Scotland and Gibraltar. When the RN decided to move the FRADU Hawks down to foggy RNAS Culdrose, I had the option of following them or flying the Falcon 20 with the same company, FR Aviation, from Bournemouth.

Probably against what my heart was telling me, I chose Bournemouth, doing essentially the same job as I had been doing with FRADU but also plenty of missile simulation, radar and comms-jamming, plus some interesting target towing again, almost entirely for the Royal

Navy. I flew the Falcon for 12 increasingly busy years, visiting many more varied parts of the world before retiring in 2007.

Since then I have continued to fly my S.E5a replica with the Great War Display Team, something that is often as challenging as much of the flying I had done in the past, but for different reasons. In all, to date, I have had 49 years of fabulous flying and, incredibly for the greater part of it, been paid to do so... Lucky or what?

### What started your interest in aviation?

When I was seven years old I was given a Christmas present of a Keil Kraft Jetex-powered Hawker Hunter, which in 1954 was just entering service. Little did I know then that I would fly nearly 3,000 hours on the real thing. Nevertheless, it started me on aero-modelling as a hobby, which I have continued to do to this day. When I received that Christmas present I knew that the only thing I wanted was to become a RAF pilot flying fighter aeroplanes. So for me, lucky devil, a dream came true – in spades!

### Where, when and in what was your first flight?

My first flight was in a Jersey Airway's de Havilland

**The Harrier, Dave's favourite aircraft and a type he flew throughout his career in the RAF**

(Photo: SAC Phil Major MOD)



## MEET THE MEMBERS

"I have always tried to learn from the misfortune of others, an easier way by far"



**Dave's Replica Plans S.E.5a which he flies with the Great War Display Team.**

**An FR Aviation (now Cobham) Falcon, flown to simulate missile attacks and a host of other duties**  
(Photo: Neil Wilson)



Heron from the grass at Croydon Airport in 1955. Wow – was I sold on flying by that.

### **How many types of aircraft and number of hours flown?**

In total I have flown 21 different types and have amassed just short of 12,000 hours to date. Most hours have been on the Falcon – 4,500, Harrier – 2,700, Hunter – 2,700, Canberra – 700, Hawk – 500 and the S.E.5a – 400.

### **Is there a favourite and worse type flown?**

Undoubted favourite has to be the Harrier, despite what Winkle Brown thinks of it! Almost anything that gets you airborne can't be all bad but I was not very impressed with the Seneca.

### **Currently owned aeroplane(s).**

I have Replica Plans S.E.5a, G-BDWJ, which was built by Mike Beach in the late 1970s. It was the first Replica Plans S.E.5a to fly in the UK and is finished to represent Zulu of 85 Squadron, which was led by both Billy Bishop and Mick Mannock in 1918. I have owned it since 1999.

### **Do you have a best aviation moment?**

Really too many to mention but a couple are

etched in the grey matter. Sitting above and behind, shadowing a Fokker Triplane hopping over small French villages along the valley of the river Somme was simply superb. The other is a two against two Harriers versus Norwegian F5s in the fjord just west of Hammerfest, 200nm plus north of the Arctic Circle in northern Norway, with the blue glacial ice as a backdrop. But there are oh so many more....

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

Yes, any sport other than football but I only actively play golf and cycle these days. Formost of my younger life it was squash and cricket.

### **Any aviation heroes – if so who and why?**

Possibly not the most popular choice but I was greatly inspired as a lad by the story of Douglas Bader in the film *Reach for the Sky*, such single-minded determination. Yes, he could often seem arrogant and rude but what an inspiration to people with disabilities. My real heroes though were those brave men who flew and fought, and so often died, in the First World War. They even flew in the winter, at heights up to 20,000ft in excruciating cold,

with no oxygen and with no escape, and the constant fear of fire in the air or a long plummet to certain death... courage indeed.

### **Any 'hairy' aviation moments? If so, any lessons learnt?**

Naturally a few. The closest perhaps was a near mid-air in a Harrier in Germany, missing by a conservative estimate by 3/100ths of a second. Overall I have always tried to learn from the misfortune of others, an easier way by far. Advice? Who am I to say but I guess absorb all the flight safety material you can and try to learn from it. Never be afraid to make the safe decision, despite what your peers may think (they would probably secretly agree). Adopt if you can, a principle of 'If there is any doubt – there is no doubt.'

### **Do you have an aircraft or vehicles wish list to fly or own?**

To fly, a Mosquito, but to own, a full scale S.E.5a.

### **What advice would you offer pilots?**

If you really want something enough you will find a way to achieve it. And if you ever get bored with flying – stop doing it. I don't expect too many people will need the second one. ■

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