



AT THE HEART OF THE STRUT

Dave Silsbury is an aircraft builder, restorer, pilot as well as being an LAA Inspector and founder member of the Devon Strut

Welcome Dave. What is your current day job/past career?

I originally started helping in my parents' hardware store when I was a youngster, as my father passed away when I was 11, so I helped my mum. Looking back, that gave me the confidence to deal with customers. We eventually sold the business and, at 19 I moved on to Harris's of Devon, an agricultural machinery company who specialised in estate and garden machinery. I was there for 20 years, dealing with larger machinery and I learnt how to fix things and see how they were originally designed. I became self-employed some years later, as an aircraft engineer and restorer, which I did for 30 years and I'm now retired.

What started your interest in aviation?

I started building models before joining the local ATC 2377 Squadron at 13 years of age. We went on summer camps at Rodborough and flew in Chipmunks; we even went to Wildenrath in Germany one year. At 16 I attained my gliding certificate thanks to a flying scholarship with the ATC at Exeter and

(Above) Dave Silsbury has been an LAA member for almost 40 years. "Without the LAA I wouldn't be able to exist the way I do," he said.

then moved onto civil gliding at Perranporth. I learnt to fly powered aeroplanes there and got my licence in 1969. I was due to fly the club's glider tug, but it got sold!

In what, where and when was your first flight?

I don't recall the date but it was in a Chipmunk with the ATC, at Plymouth.

Do you have other non-aviation hobbies/interests?

I like playing the piano and enjoy classical music. I also enjoy walking our much loved dog Penny, a Labrador/collie cross.

When did you join the LAA?

I joined when I started building my first aircraft, an Evans VP2, in 1979. I was a founder

member of the Devon Strut around that time too. The LAA really enabled me to get back into flying at an affordable rate, as I had dropped out for a few years. I flew the VP-2 for some time and put around 130 hours on it - it taught me a lot about building, maintaining and how to fly properly and safely. I then decided to build a Pietenpol Air Camper.

How has the LAA helped you?

Oh, in so many many ways. Without it I wouldn't exist in the way I do, and I have been able to afford flying in the past. The best thing you can do is join a local Strut, as these usually contain people who have experience in building, maintaining, flying and touring. You often get embroiled in discussions about things that you don't realise may be of use at the time, but become good knowledge in your decision making, be it being a pilot when airborne, or on the ground when you are fixing something.

How long have you been an LAA Inspector?

I became an inspector in 1992 and I look after an average of about 43 aircraft a year. This includes all sorts of work, plus I am also



(Above) Dave's Legend Cub built in 2012... can you tell the difference from a real Cub?

(Below) Dave gets to fly some interesting types, here a Fairchild PT23 Cornell.



(Above) Dave with one of his current aircraft, a Currie Wot.

(Right) On the front cover!



licensed to carry out first flights if required. I have very much enjoyed meeting such a wide variety of flyers and their aircraft and helping them enjoy safe, affordable flying.

What's your total number of types and hours flown?

I have about 2000 + hours as P1 and have flown 43 types. My favourite are the Jodel range of aircraft. They are an easy machine to work on, and fly well. They land in most places and takes off in them too. They also make nice little tourers.

What aircraft do you currently own?

I have a Jodel D.112 and a Currie Wot, and I am currently building a Turbi and a Pietenpol Sky Scout, which is a single-seat version of the Air Camper.

What else have you owned and built?

I have owned a mixture of types. The Evans VP-2, G-BHZF, was the first; that I built between 1979 and 1983 and it first flew from Dunkswell in October 1983. As I said, it taught me a lot about building - and having

patience. I then built a Pietenpol

Air Camper which was magic to build. It was obtained from someone else in Beckenham, Kent, along with a stock of timber and the fuselage sides. It won The Air Squadron Trophy for best homebuild at the 1988 Rally. Rumour got back to Henstridge quickly that it had won, so when I got back, a trophy cabinet had already been built for it!

I have also built a Curry Wot and a Legend Cub, plus I 're-profiled' an SE5a. Apart from the builds, I have also had an Issac's Fury and a Jodel DR1050.

What advice would you give to builders?

Do take your time. It is better to take three years and end up with a wonderful aeroplane, than rush it and have something that isn't. Have a practice (talking wood here) with a piece and if it turns out fine that's great, if not, that piece has probably taught you what you need to know to get it right. Don't be afraid to waste some wood or spend time on things, it

will not be a waste in the end.

What has been your most memorable flight?

I had a great flight delivering the Pietenpol to its new owner at Mainz in Germany. I routed via Ostend and overnighted there before going on to Lelystad where they were holding an airshow, so I watched that and then navigated my way by map via rivers and towns etc. It got a bit tight for daylight towards the end as I couldn't originally find my first waypoint and had lost time, but I had the sun behind me and saw some pylons that were on the map and knew straight away where I was and that I would be ok to get to the field in time.

Do you have any aviation heroes?

There are many, but the late Robin Bowes was a great natural pilot and is much missed.

Have you had any 'hairy' moments?

Test flying a Petrel Amphibian and landing it in Salcombe harbour was a heart in the mouth experience because I wasn't sure if it would float. Fortunately it all worked out ok and I didn't need to swim!

MEET THE MEMBERS

Are there any aircraft you would like to fly or own?

I enjoyed flying a Van's RV-9 from at Dunkeswell, which was fun but my dream machine I would like to fly and own is a Hawker Hurricane. What a lovely machine – it still had some wood in it you see! I have taxied one, so who knows, perhaps one day.

You clearly prefer wood to metal to work with then.

Yes. Wood, it is so much more flexible as it is easy to sand down, move in the direction you wanted it to (after some work) and is generally, to me, more fun. Metalwork isn't really my thing.

Where did you learn your aircraft engineering skills?

They are mainly self-taught, from my various build and repair jobs, previous employment and friends in the Strut who have helped. Also, having to get on with it and work things out by yourself is in many ways the best teacher.

Do you go aerial touring at all?

No very little, as time constraints have meant just local flying, but I know many people prefer



Dave and his D112... Jodels are a favourite possibly because they're wood.

it and have gone to many pastures new. The LAA 70th Anniversary Relay and Tour looks like a good opportunity to get in a few miles and see a lot more of the UK.

What advice do you offer fellow pilots?

Four things come to mind. First, to all pilots who have learnt to fly and then dropped out

as club aeroplanes are often too expensive to hire for a whole day, take a look at LAA type of aeroplanes, and consider either sharing or forming a syndicate, or start with a Jodel type aircraft. This will keep you current, give many hours of enjoyable and affordable flying, while giving you the chance to learn new skills. You will also make a lot of new friends, as local like-minded aircraft owners will have a common interest and can help.

Second, look after your aeroplane and hopefully it will look after you. Don't put off regular maintenance. I know the Permit lasts a year but keep on top of things, maintain and repair throughout the year – it is safer and also makes life easier at Permit time because you know your aircraft is in good fettle.

Thirdly, if you run into bad weather, turn around. And remember, the most important thing is to focus on flying the aeroplane.

And finally, don't be afraid to go around if 'the picture' isn't right on approach. Scrappy landings usually start from a scrappy approach. This particularly applies if your mates are on the ground watching! No sensible person is going to criticise you for putting the safety of yourself and your aeroplane first. ■

Dave's Currie Wot, finished to resemble a WW1 Royal Aircraft Factory SE5a.



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