



THE WHITE STUFF!

This month we talk to Dave White about his lengthy career in aeronautics and his passion for flying GA aircraft and helicopters...

Welcome Dave, can you tell us something about your current day job and past career?

I'm currently the Engineering Director for a small and growing company, working with a great team on the boundary between manned and unmanned aviation.

Immediately prior to that, I was a safety and airworthiness consultant engineer, working on such programmes as the Lockheed Martin F-35B, RC-135 Airseeker, the Raytheon Sentinel and the Chinook flight control system upgrade, as well as on many smaller aerospace projects, both civil and defence.

Before that I was an engineer working in flight-test and various engineering roles at Boscombe Down, eventually leaving as the 'Head of Profession' for aerodynamics, handling qualities and systems integration for all types – fast jet, heavy aircraft, UAVs and my first enduring love, helicopters.

My highlights of the 27 years in the job include the people; a year running a technical

(Above) Dave at the controls of his modified Jodel DR1051, which has two-position flaps and a Lycoming O-235. (Photo: Dave White)

team assessing all contenders for the UK competition eventually won by the Apache; a high-intensity, two-week period assessing eleven different helicopter types for the tri-service helicopter training school; being a part of teams clearing various ship and helicopter combinations, including the first time a Chinook had been on a UK aircraft carrier – we joined HMS Ark Royal at Gibraltar on the day Robert Maxwell disappeared from his yacht, having left the same port and I'm pretty sure we had nothing to do with that; being honoured with an invitation to the sad event that was the Harrier retirement celebration; and working on Typhoon and the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. So many memories, and I'm still amazed at what they let a 23-year-old graduate engineer do, and how quickly it came to seem normal!

What do you specialise in?

At work, I now call myself a systems engineer which, in a way, means that I no longer specialise – I do a bit of this, a bit of that and a lot of mentoring. I likely learn more off the young engineers than they do from me. There are some impressive youngsters around at the moment – were we like that? Actually, perhaps I *do* specialise, in learning new things, and re-learning things I used to know years ago!

What started your interest in aviation?

I grew up on a dairy farm in Cheshire, which was immediately adjacent to the Avro airfield at Woodford – I was shaken out of my pram by Vulcans on the engine test bay. Then, on my first day at junior school, I made a great friend, Mike, who was as aircraft mad as I was, but neither of us was quite as keen as his father, who used to take us to airshows all around the country during the summer. A day trip to the Yeovilton show, from just south of Manchester, was nothing out of the ordinary for us.



Chinook ship trials on HMS Ark Royal – Dave is in the jump seat. (Photo: Dave White)



Unashamedly a helicopter fan, Dave's seen here flying a Denel Rooivalk above the coastline of Cape Province, South Africa. (Photo: Dave White)



(Above) Dave flying a Cub, which offers low-cost fun on a warm summer's evening. (Photo: Dave White)

In what, where and when was your first flight?

A Vickers Viscount, from Manchester Ringway to Ronaldsway on the Isle of Man. I was probably about five. My first GA flight was aged about fourteen, in a Beech Sundowner from Ringway with a family friend – appropriately enough, given the aircraft's name, it was a night flight.

Where and when did you learn to fly?

At Biggin Hill in 1984, on C150/C152s, while I was in the sandwich year of my degree. I was taught by a marvellous instructor, Cyril Knight, who worked for King Air and was ex-RAF, ex-airlines and with over 10,000 hours. I only belatedly realised how lucky I was to have him teach me, rather than a younger hours-builder.

Towards the end of my training, I knew when I'd done something wrong because Cyril would take the cigarette out of his mouth to speak, otherwise he was very spare but pointed in his verbal coaching.

One particular memory of the course – apart from my first solo, naturally – was the



Landing his Jodel at Henstridge for the Wessex Strut 40th Anniversary Fly-in, 2017. (Photo: Dave White)

return from my qualifying cross-country, when I was informed that I was number eleven in the circuit!

What are your number of types and hours flown?
Around 35 GA types, and I've also flown about

a dozen helicopters, all for short periods and none of them very well. I've about 1,200 hours total General Aviation time, plus around 500 as test aircrew in military and civil helicopters, some of which was hands-on, when I could manage it.

MEET THE MEMBERS

Do you have a favourite and least favourite type you have flown?

A favourite is difficult to pick. Is it the Extra, the tough-as-old-boots Yak 52 or an L-4? A Cub on a summer's evening, the Rooivalk helicopter, flying floats in Florida or even the ancient Cessna C172 on which I was taught basic bush-flying by an, um, eccentric South African? Sometimes, it's difficult to separate the experience from the aircraft...

I do love my Jodel, though. In some way, I've enjoyed everything I've flown, but the one I enjoyed least was an Ogar motor-glider.

What aircraft have you owned?

I've owned shares in two Jodels and two Yaks – a 52 and a 50. At one stage, I had shares in all four aircraft simultaneously, and I never did fly the Yak 50, partly because I was working a lot overseas at the time so every flight in the 52 was a re-consolidation. The Yak 52 was a marvellous money pit. I 'take the Fifth' when my wife asks me about any of that!

My current aircraft is a Jodel DR1051 Special, with a Lycoming 115hp engine in place of the original 105hp Potez, and a modified wing, to replace the original underside airbrakes with simple, two-position flaps.

She's a perfect mix of strip and touring machine, built in 1964 and has been based at Wing Farm since 1967, when Earl Trollope, the strip's owner, imported her. She was damaged in the October gales about twenty years ago and modified by Earl Trollope and Tim Dews, who has an aircraft repair business at Wing Farm.

Have you ever built or restored an aircraft?

I am building a Van's RV-7, very slowly indeed. The empennage is mostly complete and I'm a fair way into the wings. The enthusiasm is there but, because of work, the time currently isn't.

What type of flying do you prefer?

Any excuse to get air under the tyres, really. I do very much enjoy touring and have been into Europe many times. The problem I'm finding is that the further I go, the further I want to go!

Crossing the Channel is far simpler than many GA pilots think, partly because of the apparently confusing procedures, which aren't really, and I'm a bit of an evangelist

about getting that message across. I frequently travel into France and Germany, and have also visited Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland, but unfortunately not yet Spain – my previous attempt was thwarted by weather over the Pyrénées.

Have you tried any other types of flying?

As mentioned earlier, I really enjoy flying helicopters but need a Lottery win or a generous benefactor to do more – if you're out there, please contact me. Many of my regular flying pals are glider pilots, so I get some exposure to that world and have soloed in a K21. Gliding really shows up bad habits – especially in the use of the feet – and I thoroughly recommend it to those who are yet to try it.

I also enjoy microlight flying but can't find the right switch in my brain for weight-shift, and I've done a very small amount of hot air balloon flying as a passenger and would love to learn more about that. Aerobatics is a discipline I keep coming back to, and if float flying was easier in the UK I'd convert my FAA Rating to an EASA one.

What's been your best aviation moment?

Until I, inevitably, think of something else, it's a toss-up between aerobatics in an open-cockpit Great Lakes biplane over the Arizona desert or flying a Rooivalk helicopter along the pristine white sands of Cape Province, South Africa.

Do you have any major interests outside aviation?

Local history is a blooming interest, and I've started to teach myself electronic system design which, like many things, is something I should've started years ago.

Do you have any aviation heroes and favourite books?

Too many, particularly the long-distance pioneers, including those who proved the Atlantic ferry routes in WWII.

Regarding books, *Think Like A Bird* by Alex Kimbell always comes immediately to mind when I'm asked that question. I also

reckon that the distinguished – and delightful – David Morgan's tremendously honest and contemplative Falklands memoir, *Hostile Skies*, will eventually come to be recognised as a classic.

Any 'hairy' aviation moments?

I've been very fortunate, touch wood. One thing that comes to mind is the very first time I flew with a passenger. I extended the Jodel airbrake and the metal lever sheared off in my hand! It was only worrying until I realised that I had the 10,000ft runway at Boscombe Down in front of me.

There are also a couple of flight test-related events, but they aren't really relevant here and are best told over a beer anyway!

What's on your aircraft wish list?

I'll be keeping the Jodel and the RV-7, but to flesh out the hangar there'll be a De Havilland DHC-2 Beaver – on floats, naturally. Oh, and a Gazelle helicopter. I expect that you could get a deal on the latter pair, if you want ideas for a birthday present!

Any advice for fellow pilots?

If you get the chance to fly or even be a passenger in anything different, then grab it. You'll almost certainly enjoy it, and it's all part of filling that experience bag. ■



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