

MEET THE MEMBERS



DAVE GIBSON

In February we met LAA member Martin Charlick who shares a Jodel Mascaret which he flies out of Henstridge. This month it's the turn of his aircraft owning partner and globetrotter, Dave Gibson.

Welcome Dave, can you tell us something about your current or past career?

I trained at Rolls-Royce on aero engines, then joined a French drilling contractor, rough-necked in the North Sea, moved to Libya for a few years, then Port Harcourt, Nigeria and finally Paris. I eventually left to spend the next 25 years running small manufacturing companies in France and the UK. I am now an engineer working on large insurance claims, mainly in the UK but occasionally elsewhere around the world.

What started your interest in aviation?

I always wanted to fly and on leaving school went for an interview with the RAF where I'd applied as a pilot. The interview seemed to go well but they said they would only take me as an engineer. I explained to the officer that if I worked on the aircraft, I flew the aircraft – he said that it didn't work like that and thus ended my short career with the Air Force and I joined Rolls-Royce. They not only ran a very good apprenticeship scheme, they also had a Flying Club so I was able to get my PPL.

Where, when and in what was your first flight?

My first flight was in 1966 at Long Mynd in a two-seat, side-by-side Capstan glider. One of the teachers at school was a gliding enthusiast and arranged a week's visit for about 10 of us to Long Mynd – it was fantastic. Then, no more flying until RR when I started to learn on one of their Austers.

(Above) Dave Gibson with the Jodel Mascaret he shares with Martin Charlick

How many hours and types have you now flown?

I have just under 800 hours now, mainly in light singles, mostly in the UK and France, although I also flew quite a few hours in Libya and Nigeria. The majority of my time is on Jodels, but I flew a few hours on a Pilatus Porter in Libya and a Bell 212 in Nigeria. One of the helicopter pilots was French and we got on well; he was an instructor and felt that the oil company would not object to me learning to fly one of its helicopters whilst ferrying passengers and freight around the Niger Delta, although we agreed it maybe better not to ask.

The Bell 212 looks quite nifty but is underpowered. He showed me how it will not hold height on one engine, and on another occasion when we were a bit overweight taking off from a bush clearing, the temperature gauges were hovering around the upper yellow zone as he dragged it over the approaching trees!

I found the controls were very sensitive, it handled like a motor bike. Occasionally, when the cloud was on the tree tops, we would fly along the rivers and I would be looking up at the trees.

It had no autopilot but my pilot friend showed me how to lock the controls in straight and level when we were in cloud – thereafter, unlocking

and making small corrections before locking again. I didn't like cloud flying much, there was nothing to see and we were always low, it really wasn't a good idea. The control lock was useful when I was learning – occasionally I would overcompensate and began to oscillate the helicopter – you should hear the 10 guys in the back shouting when they are rocking from side to side... great fun!

I had less time on the Pilatus but they are fabulous short field, rough terrain aircraft. With that high-lift wing and a 650bhp gas turbine, a good pilot can put it almost anywhere in the worst of conditions. I really admired the way our bush pilots could drop them down in waddis – apparently nothing worried them. Once I inadvertently signalled one to land downwind towards a small escarpment. The aircraft seemed to float for a long time and I thought it was going to hit the cliff, but then it appeared to drop and stop. Our pilot said afterwards that when he realised my error he used a little thrust reverse which he claimed always did the trick when making long landings on short strips. It certainly looked as if he did something – but in far away places, stories are not always as true as they might be. Does anyone know if thrust reverse can be used whilst airborne?

Do you have a favourite and worse type flown?

I love Jodels, I think they are super touring machines. I'm not particularly keen on tricycles with yokes, but the aircraft I liked least was the Bolkow – it seemed all wrong, having a Y-type stick on the pilot's right-hand side and a throttle



(Above) Flying in the Alps en route for Corsica

(Above left) Fingal's Cave on the uninhabited island of Staffa in the Inner Hebrides

(Left) I spent nine months in Thailand following the floods of October 2011. We didn't have much spare time, but on a trip back from a flooded factory, we came across two DC3s in a garden – all intact, wings, engines and undercarriages! A beautiful if somewhat sad sight.



on the left. Checking out on stalls, which I never enjoy, I pushed all the wrong things all the wrong way, most unpleasant and after that checkout I never flew it again.

The Grumman AA1B can be a bit tricky too. I flew one in Cannes, not because I liked it but because it was the cheapest aircraft on the airfield. The problem was that its stall speed appeared to be quite close to VNE. Once, I throttled back on approach and it dropped like a brick, and when I fell out of sight behind a palm tree, ATC screamed at me that I was too low!

What is your current aeroplane?

We moved around a lot for work but eventually, when funds allowed, I bought a 1/3 share in a rebuild project of a Rollason Condor, G-AVDW. Two colleagues re-covered the fuselage and wings whilst I fitted Cessna disc brakes to Jodel legs. CAA approved it as a Major Mod. I lost contact with the aircraft in a move to Yorkshire where I bought into a Jodel Syndicate G-ATLB. I took over the aircraft following a move to Suffolk, teaming up with Peter Nightingale and together we flew around France, Ireland and Scotland. On moving then to Dorset, Peter took over my share and I now have a Mascaret with my pal, Martin Charlick.

Do you have a favourite aviation moment or flight?

Like most people reading this I've had some fantastic flights, sights and moments. I rarely fly on my own as, in tight spots on long cross

countries, two heads are better than one. We have often taken our Jodel to France, including Corsica, the Alps and the Pyrenees. We've also been to the Scillies, Lundy, Ireland, the Hebrides and around St Kilda or Orkney, amongst others.

We've been to Mull several times, either staying at the Glenforsa Hotel on the airfield or camping and eating at the hotel. Brendan and Alison are always charming and the food is fantastic.

Refuelling at Oban, it is a short flight to Fingal's Cave, thereafter a range of island airfields before finally arriving at Barra to land on the beach. We were slightly uneasy at first but ATC was very helpful, advising an over-flight before setting down.

Once there, it seemed a good idea to fly on to Benbecula. The Air Traffic Controller let us use the Control Tower phone so I asked Benbecula if we could fly in. ATC pointed out that I should have given three hours' notice, but I said that we were never sure where we would be due to weather and didn't want to book anything too far in advance. He agreed and said he would accept us – but he wanted to know our route. I said we would fly directly up the west coast. He replied that would be OK but we had to remain absolutely on the east of the main road as they were on live firing of Rapier missiles that day, adding, "If I tell you there is incoming traffic, you won't have to look for it, it will find you." He thought this was hugely amusing. Yeah, very funny...

Air touring is the sport of kings and, with a

week's pass from our wives, aero-camping is really living.

Do you have non-aviation hobbies/interests?

Sometimes a bit of scuba diving, otherwise it's flying and gardening. I'm trying to get our garden on set-aside so the EU can support our weeds, but so far no luck.

Any aviation heroes – if so, who and why?

No one special, but every time we cross the Channel I think of the Lysander pilots, maybe from Tarrant Rushton, who flew to France at night by dead-reckoning and found the correct field. That is truly clever, not to mention courageous.

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

Yes, a few, the worst being my licence solo cross-country flight; I was to fly from Hucknall to Cambridge in the Auster G-AIJT, returning via Sywell. However, the weather had been vile for months and it seemed I would have to wait forever to get it done. Then after an eternity, one Saturday was less bad than the rest, the instructor took pity on me and said I could go.

Enthusiasm exceeded competence by a long way, but I took off and set course for Cambridge. After hitting low cloud at around 1,200ft just out of Hucknall, my confidence started to ebb and after around 10 minutes, I realised the wind was not doing what it should have been and I was lost. I remember feeling numb with no idea what to do.