

# DEVON STRUT'S DAVID MILLIN



This month we talk to Jodel owner and Devon Strut Chairman David Millin

## **T**ell us about your current and past career?

I am the Managing Director of Sea & Sea Limited in Paignton, having originally joined them as After Sales Manager in 2000 and carried out a management buy-out in 2003. We are distributors for various brands of recreational diving equipment which we wholesale and supply to end users such as the emergency services, MOD, local government and industrial organisations.

It's interesting how life has its twists and turns because as a youngster I did not know what I wanted to do when I grew up, and probably still don't! I left college, and being conscious of being unemployed I accepted an apprenticeship with car dealer Moxhams of Torquay, where I worked on Austin Morris and any other British Leyland types that came our way. Latterly, the company acquired the dealership for Rolls-Royce and Bentley, then



Ferrari, Saab and Lotus. It was through the Rolls-Royce network that I moved to Kuwait in September 1986 and ran the service centre for the Rolls-Royce and Bentley dealership. I spent almost four years in Kuwait before moving to the United Arab Emirates where I managed after sales for Rolls-Royce and Bentley, Aston Martin Lagonda and other marques. I left the UAE for a brief but exciting project in the Republic of Georgia before finally returning to the UK in 1998.

(Above) Dave in his Jodel

## MEET THE MEMBERS

### Where did your interest in aviation start?

I have no idea of the psychological cause, if I did I could more easily indoctrinate others! What I do remember as a very small child was looking at the Airfix aircraft kits in Woolworths. I eventually had a go at one and used almost all of the contents of the tube of plastic cement. It was a bit of a mess but I soon became adept and my collection rapidly expanded. I also recall my father waking me up, seemingly in the middle of the night (it was probably only eight o'clock) and getting me up to watch a film about Spitfires shooting down 'the Hun'. So my interest in aviation burgeoned.

### What are your memories of your first flight?

My first flight was many years ago in a Cessna 172, or something similar, from an airfield in Cornwall but it was so long ago that I do not remember any details other than that I found the whole thing quite interesting. My first commercial flight was in 1986 in a Lockheed Tristar from Heathrow to Kuwait. However, the first flight where I had the opportunity to have hands-on was in Rockwell Commander G-BOLT, out of Exeter. This fired my interest but it was not until years later that I had a couple of flights in a Canadian Beaver microlight and then in a Pulsar (chalk and cheese) with Sheik Hussain Al Mowala in Umm Al Quwain, UAE. These flights were the germination of my flying career.

### How long have you been in the LAA?

It seems like forever but it has only been about seven years, about the same amount of time I have been in the Devon Strut.

### How many types have you flown?

I started flying in 1994 but had a lay-off for about five years after returning to the UK in 1998. During this time I have accumulated about 360 hours and I've had the pleasure of experiencing over 40 types. I have not taken off and landed all of them but at least enjoyed a feel for them in the air.

Of particular note, on holidays in Florida, I've enjoyed an aerobatic lesson in an SNJ (Harvard/Texan) at Kissimmee and experimented a couple of times with water take-off and landings in Piper Cubs at Jack Brown's Seaplane Base. Other delightful

experiences were being let completely loose with a Boeing Stearman at Fantasy of Flight and the magic of a Grob two-seat 103 glider flight at Seminole Lake Gliderport, Central Florida.

### Which are your favourite and worst types?

There are so many wonderful aircraft and so many different sorts, it is impossible for me to choose just one. I suppose I would have to join the many and say the Spitfire is up there and on a completely different level and without wishing to appear blinkered, I would have to say that I enjoy flying my 1957 Jodel D117 enormously. I don't really have worst type.

### How about that best aviation moment?

I could ask if you want a list as there have been so many amazing experiences, such as landing a Skywalker microlight on a road somewhere in the Emirates, taxiing into the car park and being saluted by the soldier guarding the front door of the establishment I was visiting; or hurriedly taking off from a beach over the head of an inquisitive police patrol car that was coming to check me out. I even had a emergency landing due to a faulty propeller in the same aircraft. Prior to the Jodel I had a Rans S6 in which I enjoyed so many lessons as I became used to UK flying. The Jodel has helped me to spread my wings farther and there have been many rewarding flights as I continue to learn and develop.

### Any aviation heroes? If so, who and why?

My knee-jerk reaction to this was anyone who flies is a hero but then I considered some of people I know and thought, perhaps not! Seriously, chaps such as Stanford Tuck and Geoffrey Welham come to mind but there are so many who have pushed through unbelievably adverse situations and then consistently come back for more. I recently stood in silent awe with some other fortunate Strut members, listening to one of the few. He recounted his experiences in a quiet and very understated manner – those guys are the real heroes.

### Do you have favourite aviation author and any recommended books?

I enjoy reading about most aspects of aviation

(fact or fiction) and I am currently getting to grips with *Wind, Sand and Stars* by Antoine de Saint Exupéry. However, I share the good old favourite with many, *Sagittarius Rising* by Cecil Lewis.

### We've all had 'I learnt about flying from that moments, tell us about yours

There have been plenty of interesting moments in the past and I do not doubt there will be more to come – you never stop learning. The most mind-focusing experience however was running into low visibility and losing sight of the ground while executing a late 180° turn in a Rans S6. More on that another day!

### Which aircraft and places to visit are on your wishlist?

Once again we are spoiled for choice as there are plenty of seductive options of aircraft to fly or own. As I said, the Jodel is a good all-rounder and fulfils most of my needs. However, one day I would like to move on to something faster and more complicated (but I am not in any hurry to do so). I would like to own a type with some sort of interesting history and one that has aerobatic capabilities. Perhaps a Chipmunk would satisfy me? I am up for trying any aircraft.

With regard to where to fly, I have not yet been to many aerodromes outside of the West Country yet, so I have a lot to explore but I would certainly like to fly to France.

### What is your current aeroplane?

Jodel D117 G-AXCG. It simply tick lots of boxes and is the ultimate value for money.

### Any advice for other fellow LAA members?

Yes, don't biff in! I have been upside down on the ground in a Rotec Rally 2B (which was an early American microlight) with bits of propeller scattered tangentially for 200 yards. Avoid that sort of thing if you can. Use your intuition and gut feeling about things. Listen and learn from others and don't mind being on the receiving end of 'my brother's keeper.' If in doubt, don't do it. On a less severe note, I would advise, or rather, remind LAA members that the LAA is a huge resource of assistance and information. Make use of this resource and cultivate the synergy which comes from it. ■

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