



D-DAY MIRACLE MAN

This month we talk to Dudley Pattison, serial aircraft builder, woodwork course provider and Rally Homebuild Centre organiser

Welcome Dudley, would you like to tell us something about your career?

I started my working life in 1960 as a carpenter, apprenticed to my father's building company, John Pattison Building Contractors. I am very proud of my father who, at the age of 33, had 600 men working under him building two of the Mulberry Harbour caissons that were towed across the Channel shortly after D-Day to form a harbour.

D-Day, 6 June 1944, was quite a day for Dad. The invasion started, so he knew his Mulberries would soon be put to use, it was his 34th birthday, and to top it all, I was born. The story goes that the sky went black above Swindon with Dakotas and Stirlings towing gliders.

Dad ran into the house shouting "Minnie, it's started," (meaning the invasion) to which Mum replied, "So have I Jack!" That's why mum chose the name Dudley for me, a couple of Ds for D-Day.

At the end of the war Dad started his own building business, local to Swindon, with a partner. The partnership didn't last long (Dad always said the best partnership was just two people with one of them in France!) and he built a very successful business from nothing. He started by pushing a hand cart around the town to collect and deliver the required materials. Can you imagine that today? If you have ten men working on a site there are usually ten vans outside.

After 17 years, when Dad had retired, my brother Clive (another carpenter) was the

managing director and I was the contracts director; I had a disagreement with Clive which led to me leaving the company with nothing to go to.

About 18 months previous to this event, I had started a model company with a friend which we called Flair Products. Leaving the building company was a spur to try and turn it into something more meaningful. My friend had just been promoted in the jig design office of the local Austin Rover plant and was agreeable to me buying him out. It gives an idea of the scale of this buy-out when I say it was done for £360 for stock, design rights (we had two model designs at the time), and goodwill (not much of that at this stage).

So, on the first of January 1977, Flair Products was my only source of income, and a

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(Main) Duds with the Fury II and (right) his Rotec radial engined Flitzer Z-1R. Both won him trophies at the Rally, and both are now with new owners.

(Above) Duds' favourite shot of his Flitzer. Air Squadron Trophy winner 2014, and Albert Codling Trophy winner 2003. It shouts 1920s at you! (Photo Gary Thomas).

(Below) A young Duds at Calshot in '81. A contest was held to commemorate Britain's winning of the Schneider trophy in 1931 and Duds designed a Short Crusader to enter, and came fourth. Later he did win an R/C model Schneider contest so believes he is unique in winning the trophy with a model and a full-size aircraft.



small one at that. I remember that the turnover for the first year was £1,500. Jane, my wife, and I moved on steadily year on year and the company became very well known in the modelling world. My Magnattilla, Puppeteer and Cub designs especially became very popular with around 9,000, 12,000 and 15,000 kits sold respectively by the time we sold the company in '97. Although we were producing about 6,000 kits a year at that time, it was the model designs that we were best known for, and the kits only represented about 20% of the final turnover of £1.25m. The rest came from manufacturing and distributing all the other paraphernalia that is needed to get a model in the air.

One thing I did in my 'retirement' was to buy the design rights of Russ Light's Sherwood

Ranger from his widow in the year 2000.

My aim was to bring the design back to the market, but I hadn't realised the difficulties that would arise from not being able to speak to the designer. After two years of investment of time and funds, I had only just about sorted out the hundreds of drawings Russ left behind when I had to dispose of what I had named The Little Aeroplane Company.

After a false start with another purchaser, Paul Hendry-Smith eventually purchased the rights and the tooling, and formed The Light Aircraft Company at Little Snoring airfield. So at least TLAC remained.

Paul and his Dad, Ivor, have performed miracles and now the aircraft, alongside others in their stable, is available as a kit or a ready built microlight aircraft. I am just finishing a

Sherwood Ranger ST and look forward to the few days per year in this country that are perfect for flying an open cockpit biplane. I started SATCo (Swindon Aircraft Timber Company) in '07 to supply mainly plywood to the homebuilder. This was a bit like Topsy and started to take more of my time than I wanted to give it so I sold it to Tim Wood, who continues to supply plywood, sitka spruce and douglas fir. I am now properly retired - at last.

What started your interest in aviation?

In the early post-war days when I grew up, the population was very air-minded and Dad started building model aeroplanes with Clive, who was eight years older than me; come to think of it, he still is. So, it wasn't long before I was building chuck gliders. I

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remember a period during which I walked to The Spot model shop in Swindon and blew all my pocket money on a Keil Kraft Spook or Vega chuck glider kit. I have to say they never lasted long in the hands of an eight-year-old.

In what, where and when was your first flight?

When I was 11, on a family holiday to Great Yarmouth, without a word to Mum (who would have vetoed it), Dad took my sister and me for a ride in an Auster which was doing short pleasure trips. I remember the pilot turning off both mags (as I now know them to be) over the sea, I suppose just to scare us. I don't know who it was of course but he must have been an idiot.

My next flight was the following year, on a DC3 taking the family to Jersey for a holiday. I vividly remember looking out of the window and saying "Dad, Dad, look at the wing tip, it's going up and down." Dad replied, "That's good son, if it didn't it would snap off." A comforting thought.

How did you hear about the LAA?

I don't remember how I first heard of our illustrious organisation. I do remember phoning Bill Rose, who was the Strut co-ordinator for the Oxford Strut, in probably '83, to ask to join their Strut. Bill said that the next meeting was the annual Christmas dinner to which I was most welcome. Bill was one of those people who instantly became a good friend. Jane and I went to the dinner and I stayed an Oxford Strut member until I started the Swindon Strut (now Wilts Flyers) in '99.

We know that you are something of a serial builder, how many aircraft have you built?

Two Catto CP16s, one for a customer and one for me which I wasn't brave enough to fly - have you seen one? Three and a half Goldwings, a microlight well ahead of its time in the early '80s but with totally uncoordinated controls. The half came from me finishing one for another agent. An Isaacs Fury II, a superb airframe ruined by my unfortunate choice of a poor second-hand engine. A Van's RV-4, just brilliant with a CS prop. A Stummelflitzer Z-1R, a stunning aeroplane but I didn't find it easy

to keep on a relatively narrow strip. A Groppo Trail which does exactly what it says on the tin and is a relatively quick build. And the ST Ranger just on being finished. That makes a total of 10 ½, but the two CP 16s were really just assembly jobs.

Which medium do you prefer?

Wood, it is warm to the touch, light, strong and is so adaptable. Small errors are easily rectified (not that I ever make them of course) and there are none of those itchy fibres flying around the workshop or the nasty odours that attend a composite build. I had enough of that with the Goldwings to last a lifetime.

Although I prefer wood I don't mind working in aluminium, having built the RV4, and I have an RV7A kit on order. The 'A' variant (nosewheel) is a nod to my advancing years. Crosswind landings on a hard runway in a taildragger just seem to get more and more difficult.

Was the Isaacs Fury a challenging build?

Even though it was my first 'Group A' build it wasn't too challenging. I had help from Robin Morton, my inspector at the time, and knowledgeable friends, but John Isaacs' drawings are just exemplary. As I remember it there is only one instruction note in the whole set of drawings, the drawings are so good they don't need instructions, assuming the builder can read a drawing of course.

One or two things I struggled with but I didn't contact John as I didn't want to bother him with questions. At that time I was running Flair and was sometimes plagued with unnecessary questions from modellers, so I knew how he might have felt. I was probably wrong as I met him when the aircraft was nearing completion, and unlike me, he was a real gentleman. I have many awards now around the house but two items that I prize above most others are two congratulatory letters received from John about my efforts building his design.

Any aviation books you would recommend?

There are the Tony Bingelis instructional books of course, I found the one covering instruments was very useful when I built the RV4. I always recommend that new builders get

hold of an Aircraft Spruce and Specialties catalogue. Yes, I know it's on line, but it isn't the same as a hard copy. By showing you everything that is available from them, and that is just about everything you will ever need, it sheds light on how many components can be fitted, connected, controlled etc. I found it invaluable whilst building the Fury.

I have read many books written by pilots of both world wars but First Light by Geoffrey Wellum, who was a fighter pilot in the second world war, is superb. A review on the rear dustcover stated that the reader felt as though he was in the cockpit at 20,000 feet with the author, and that's very nearly true.

A far more relaxed and gentle read is An Aeroplane Affair by John Isaacs. Just lovely.

How has the LAA helped you?

Just by being there and allowing me, and many others, to build our own aircraft at home with minimum hindrance from authority. Some think that the rules are too stringent, that we should be more like America which has a much more relaxed attitude to 'experimental' aircraft. I disagree. I know that waiting for a modification to be passed can sometimes take an age, and I have personal experience of getting a design stressed and accepted by the LAA (and I know why it is called 'stress' now!). But we don't get the nightmare aircraft that you sometimes hear about coming from the States, where, as I understand it, there is sometimes only one inspection right at the end. How can that be a proper inspection?

When do you start planning the Homebuilder Centre for the Rally?

Usually on the last day of the Rally - I target people to establish if they want to be there again. So that is really the start for the next year, but then it goes quiet until around March when I start trying to get exhibitors.

Is that a challenge?

That is a nice understatement. Isn't it a strange quirk of folk that when a general appeal is sent out there is little to no response. Brian and I put three appeals in the magazine earlier this year, as I had so few confirmed exhibitors. All



Duds' current mount – the Groppo Trail, basically a tin Piper Cub with folding wings. He'll also soon be flying his latest build, a Sherwood Ranger. (Photo Peter March)



(Left) Duds was a Goldwing agent but built this example for himself. It was different, but well ahead of its time. (Photo Pete Huntley)

(Below) The Fury II was a lovely aeroplane after an initial engine problem was sorted. Pooley Sword winner 2000 and Albert Codling Trophy winner 1993. (Photo Bob Grimstead).



that magazine space brought forward just one person willing to show his build. The strange thing is that once you get exhibitors there, they enjoy the experience. Far more pleasure is gained from the Rally when you are actually a part of it. Useful contacts are made, sources for hard to find items are passed on from some of the hundreds that pass through the tent, and a good time is had by all. I'll be looking for exhibitors again very soon – so please do think about bringing your project or parts.

How many types and hours do you have?

My logbooks show 3,100 plus hours spread over 36 types being: C120, C150, C172, PA12, PA18, PA19, PA28, D120, D150, DR400, Rotec Rally 2B, Goldwing, Turbulent, Condor, Starduster Too, C42, T600N, T300, Isaacs Fury, RV4, StummelFlitzer Z1Ra, Groppo Trail, Rans S6, Chevvron, Skyranger, Starduster, DH82A, Jungmann, Wagabond, Superfloater, Sherwood Ranger, Jabiru, X'air, Bolkow Junior,

Minicab, and MW7.

Do you have a favourite and a best forgotten?

Favourite? That's a difficult question. The DR400, RV4 and Jungmann would all be pushing for the top spot but for different reasons. The Robin is just such an easy aeroplane to operate, is roomy and comfortable and has a useful cruise speed. The RV4 handles incredibly well and goes like a rocket but it isn't really an aeroplane that passengers would enjoy. And what can I say about the Jungmann? A wonderful aircraft that oozes character.

Best forgotten? The two vying for this spot would be the Chevvron and the MW7 but neither due to the design, more the circumstances in which I flew them, so it isn't really fair. I will explain.

I was asked to test fly an MW7 that was at Lower Upham (Wilts) where I am based. Francis had warned me that they had a

tendency to go over onto their back if the stick wasn't hard back on landing. It wasn't nice to fly and had a very high stall speed. It had gained 18kg somehow and the undercarriage was in the wrong place. Besides that it was perfect! How it ended up I know not, as it was sold. I know Mike Whittaker and I am sure that this example was certainly not as he had intended it to be.

When I was a microlight instructor one of my students bought a Chevvron and wanted me to train him on it. I was operating out of Redlands near Swindon, which has a 700m strip. It wasn't really long enough as the motor was a Konig of only 40hp. Flown solo it was fine but when dual it was marginal. In the end, after three or four sorties, I refused to do it at Redlands so arrangements were made to take it to Membury Airfield (where the Chevvron was built). I was still uncomfortable as it meant flying over the M4 after take-off at a low height and an abysmally low rate of climb.

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What aircraft do you currently own?

I am still flying the Groppo Trail that I finished last year and I will fly the Sherwood Ranger next year, as I will keep it tucked up in the garage at home over the winter. The plan is to sell the Trail when the RV-7A is nearing completion, as I only have hangar space for two aircraft and I don't want to own three at one time as I have done previously. With three it seems that every day one of them needs to be insured or have a permit renewed!

What's your best aviation moment?

There are two that will remain with me forever. One was a flight in my Goldwing when I was accompanying Bob Simpson, also in a Goldwing. We were returning to Bob's strip at Ledbury on a perfect summer evening. The light mist forming in the hollows of the landscape gave an ethereal touch to an extremely smooth flight. The best form of flying is probably two similar single-seat aircraft together. Bob was then a fruit farmer and bought a Goldwing kit from me on the understanding that he would help me build it through the winter when he had a quiet period (thereby keeping the cost down). We became firm friends and

remain so to this day, even though, within Bob's hearing, I would tell Mike who worked for me at the time, not to worry about the finish too much on Bob's plane as it was only a microlight and I didn't have to fly it anyway!

The other was winning the Schneider Trophy on my first foray into air racing. It didn't go down very well with one old racing hand. I had a secret weapon of course, Barry Conway. Barry had been a Hunter and Phantom ground attack pilot in the RAF before going onto the heavies. When he retired, he built a beautiful WAR Series FW190, which he still flies. When I asked Barry how he could so accurately direct me across the course at 500 feet and 140 knots, he replied that he used to do it at 400 knots in a Hunter! That, added to my pylon model racing knowledge (the same principles apply), seemed to give us a worthwhile advantage.

Do you have any aviation heroes?

Not one particular hero but people like Albert Ball, Mick Mannock and even Richtofen. Pilots in the Great War flew aircraft that were not the most reliable of machines and had similar performances to the aircraft we fly today. They

had to fly up to 20,000 feet in open cockpits - and fight as well. It doesn't bear thinking about.

Any 'shan't do that again' moments?

Whilst carrying out a formation landing in my Robin, on the right of Pete Smoothy's Robin at Leicester, I got in a little too close to Pete and got caught by his wingtip vortices which rolled me to the left. I passed behind Pete and went around for an uneventful landing but it taught me to stay just a little further away in future!

Do you have any other hobbies?

Does drinking count?

Can you offer any advice to fellow pilots?

Yes several really, all of which a well-known but people still ignore them and damage aeroplanes.

1 Always land a nosewheel aircraft as if it is a taildragger. That nosewheel isn't there to land on, it is just there to prop the engine up.

2 If you do a bad landing and bounce, open up and go around. If you hang on for the third bounce it will probably do damage.

3 Never hesitate to throw away an approach and go around. With some pilots it is almost a matter of pride not to go around but if you have doubts and press on regardless, it can ruin your whole day, or maybe someone else's.

That final point was well illustrated in an accident I was involved in at the Badminton Air Day in July '89.

A misty start to the day delayed attendees' departure, so when it started clearing, everyone arrived within a short space of time. At the time of the accident there were 27 aircraft in the circuit. The Luscombe that landed after me (in the Starduster), should have gone around, but didn't. I didn't know anything about it at the time, waking up some days later in intensive care.

Three factors collectively saved my life. I was wearing a Peltor helmet (Peltor very generously gave me a replacement when I started flying again), an ambulance was on hand with oxygen to help me breathe (one of the many injuries was a punctured lung due to broken ribs), and at 45 years of age I was as fit as a fiddle. My aim, during a very long recovery, was to attend the next Badminton Air Day in my own aircraft. I just made it. It was the first cross-country I did in my newly-acquired Jungmann. ■



It doesn't take a lot of imagination to realise that Duds was badly injured after a Luscombe landed too close behind and ran into his Starduster. Not unreasonably he urges pilots to go around if they are in any doubt at all of making a safe landing. (Photo Peter March)

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