



AEROBATIC AVIATRIX

This month we talk to enthusiastic aerobat and airshow performer, Lauren Richardson

What is your current day job and career to date?
Having trained as an electrical and electronics engineer, and being interested in aviation, I worked at Little Gransden with Mark Jefferies helping with the based Yaks there. Later I worked with Rupert Wasey at Hercules Propellers helping with marketing and advertising. I also put the metal protection on the leading edges of some of the props, which helps extend their life. I currently work as a defence electronics engineer.

Why aviation, what started your interest?
My love affair with aviation started at about 10 years of age watching airliners go past the window at home. I was brought up near RAF Halton. I saved up as much money as possible as at Halton they let civilians join and learn to fly at the flying club, which I eventually did on Cessnas.

In what, where and when was your first flight?
It was at RAF Henlow in PA-28 when I was 13.

How did you hear about the LAA and how has it helped you?
When I bought my Pitts I was told I would

need to join the Association because it was an LAA aeroplane. I received a lot of help and encouragement from the outset, as Rob Millinship was very helpful with advice when I was sorting out the aeroplane.

Without a doubt the Association has enabled me to afford flying and to look after my own aeroplane, which I could not otherwise have afforded.

The Pitts is pretty easy to work on, as well as there being good sources of readily available parts. I am very much a hands on owner, carrying out the maintenance on my aircraft myself. Of course my inspector, Roger Targett, has helped with advice and has been very encouraging ever since I bought the aircraft. I have been a member for four years.

Why did you choose to get into aerobatics?
I very much like the challenge and discipline it brings. I had a break from flying for a couple of years and then went for an air experience flight in a Pitts S-2A and decided, while at the top of a loop, "this is for me".

I then did a tailwheel conversion course and decided to buy my own aeroplane, as I do about 100 hours a year and hiring or sharing wasn't affordable or going to work.

I started flying aerobatics in 2012 at Peterborough Conington with 160 hours total flying time and have not looked back since.

Aerobatics are not for everyone however, I think it's very much like Marmite, you either love it or hate it. It takes some getting used to at first as the brain gets fully up to speed with the sensation, but building up steadily and sensibly overcomes any issues.

Of course I also enjoy flying over the open countryside between various airfields and shows, but I think that aerobatics really teaches you to learn your aeroplane. I agree with John Romain (when he was also interviewed for this column) that knowing your aircraft really does help if you encounter a problem.

Would advise others to try aerobatics?

Of course, why not at least try it once! Just go and have a go, be it in a Slingsby, Grob or a Citabria, whatever is available at a local airfield. If you then think you might have a taste for it the British Aerobatic Association offers an Aerobatic Day where you can learn much more. They also offer a 'Buddy' system where active or past competition pilots are willing and able to help you. Visit their website www.aerobatics.org.uk

What is your current aeroplane and what else have you flown?

My Pitts Special S-1A was originally built in 1982. She (definitely a she) has a 180hp Lycoming IO-360 engine and can cope with +6G to -3G. She has a Hercules modified aerobatic propeller made specially to suit my needs with the aeroplane.

I have flown about 20 different types, including Rupert Wasey's Flitzer which is a lovely machine, as well as both the Extra 300L and Sukhoi SU-29 aerobatic aircraft.

I have about 430 hours total, of which 260 are on the Pitts Special. Do I have a favourite – of course, my Pitts! And I do prefer taildraggers.

What has been your best aviation moment?

I have had a couple actually. Going to the airshow at Welshpool (my very first airshow booking) and being welcomed into the aerobatic display family was great. All of those on 'The circuit' help each other as you go around the shows. The other was becoming The British Women's Champion in 2012. I had competed in most of the rounds that year, so got more confident as the season went on. That was a very proud moment.

Do you have any aviation heroes?

Captain Eric 'Winkle' Brown, for all his achievements on the early jets when he encountered so many unknowns. Amy Johnson for her sheer guts and determination in the days when navigation was solely by dead reckoning. Going all that way in those simple aeroplanes across so many virtually almost uncharted areas was terrific. I have been asked to perform at the Amy Johnson Memorial Airshow at Herne Bay a few times, so it's been great being able to be there, helping to remember one of my aviation heroes.

Have you had any 'hairy' moments and learnt as a result?

Yes, I have learned that you should pre-flight the plane without others around. I had to make a quick landing once, when most the oil came out of the engine as I had forgotten to tighten the oil filler cap. This was because I had too many things going on, and people around me when I was getting ready for my flight. Luckily I got back to the airfield before any damage was done.



(Main) Lauren Richardson and her Pitts S1-A.



(Above) In action with the Pitts Special.

(Left) Rupert Wasey's 'lovely' Flitzer which Lauren has also flown.

What aircraft or vehicles are on your wish list?

I'd love to fly a Hawker Sea Fury; it's just about the ultimate piston engine machine. And I really enjoy motorcycles, new and old; I am being sponsored this year by Blades Motorcycles, who have supplied me with a Triumph Street Triple, which I am very excited about.

What else are you involved in

As I like engineering, I have teamed up with a group called STEM – short for Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics who, with the British Women's Pilot Association (BWPA), visit schools and colleges

encouraging young people to take an interest in these subjects and show them that they can be interesting, exciting and fun.

Any advice for fellow pilots?

Practice your forced landings and keep current, especially with crosswinds, as this keeps up your skills level. I think it is best to fly little and often rather than leave it for some time waiting for 'perfect weather'. I also believe that you should not only find your limits but expand them bit by bit, as this also increases your skill and prepares you untoward circumstances should they arise. ■

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