

## MEET THE MEMBERS



# THE MGL MAN

This month we meet Paul Sistern of Parts For Aircraft Limited

### **W**elcome Paul. What is your current job?

I run my own company, Parts For Aircraft Ltd, which often involves long hours but is rewarding in many ways; not least the daily interaction with customers, who are usually fellow fliers, so we share a common interest and enthusiasm. Prior to that I worked for many years in the automotive division of Bosch, initially in sales and then in marketing.

### **What started your interest in aviation?**

I was born and bred under the flightpath at Manchester airport so from an early age I became fascinated by the aircraft flying overhead. That led to building Airfix kits and hanging them by strands of cotton from my bedroom ceiling. I also spent my pocket money on balsa wood and tissue paper gliders and rubber band powered models, flying them from the local cricket ground whilst dreaming about flying in the real thing.

### **In what, where and when was your first flight?**

I must have been about eight when I got my first flight in a light aircraft, so that would be some time in the mid-1960s. I remember it quite vividly. We were on a family day trip to Southport, where a Piper TriPacer was being used to give pleasure flights from a roped-off area of the beach. I sat in the front right-hand seat, my brother was in the back. I don't think I could see forwards past the instrument panel

(Above) Paul Sistern and his Jabiru SP470, operated under the LAA of course.

but I do remember the view from the side as we took off and did a 10 minute circuit over Southport.

### **Do you have other non-aviation hobbies or interests?**

Yes, I am a keen photographer but that also has its roots in aviation. Living close to Manchester airport, it was inevitable that my boyhood interest in aircraft would lead to plane spotting and a regular weekend pilgrimage to the viewing terraces at Ringway. Not satisfied with just noting down the registration letters I also started taking pictures, initially on a basic point-and-shoot roll film camera and then a 35mm Praktica SLR with a 200mm telephoto lens. I used black and white film and did my own processing in a makeshift darkroom at home. I even sold a few prints to other aircraft enthusiasts at school, which was my first venture into sales!

### **How did you hear about the LAA?**

I was aware of the PFA from my boyhood plane spotting and recall attending a PFA Rally sometime in the 1970s. It was at Sywell Aerodrome so things have gone full circle. Then many years passed and with a PPL in my pocket I decided to build a Jabiru. That was in

2001. As a result I joined the PFA and made contact with PFA inspector Ernie Russell, who sadly passed away a few years ago.

### **How has the Association helped you?**

Apart from making it viable for me to build my Jabiru SP470 in the first place, and to subsequently operate it, the LAA, along with the BMAA, has done the same for thousands of other like-minded people. These folk are my customer base, and I focus my business on LAA and BMAA members. The LAA Rally allows me to showcase the MGL Avionics range. Customers spending thousands on avionics naturally want to touch and get a feel for what is possible from the latest glass panel displays before parting with their cash. Thanks to the Rally, I can set up a stand and meet my customers.

### **How many types of aircraft and hours you have flown?**

I have over 800 hours in my logbook, around 700 on my Jabiru and the rest learning to fly in various Cessnas and Pipers and subsequent club rentals in similar aircraft. My favourite aircraft has to be my Jabiru, as I feel totally at home in it.

The worst aircraft I flew were in Florida, which is where I went to finish my PPL having been thwarted by too many bad weather days back home. There I flew some very tired Cessna 152 aircraft, in uncomfortably hot conditions,



(Left) Paul's Jabiru on the beach.  
(Above) Most memorable flight ever was over the distilleries of west Scotland's islands.

whilst listening to air traffic controllers deliver instructions at a machine gun pace. I was there for a week. I only needed to do a few more hours and a qualifying cross country flight, and then I was ready to take the test.

#### Do you have a favourite aviation moment?

I don't live near Manchester anymore. My wife is from Northern Ireland and we eventually settled there. All my most memorable flying has been within 100 miles of home. The scenery is fantastic, from the Mourne Mountains in the east to the rugged terrain of County Donegal in the west, and the spectacular approach into Carrickfinn Airport with the Atlantic on one side, Slemish mountain on the other.

But my most memorable flight, a few years back, was during the warm evening after a hot July day. The thermals had died down, the air was clear and I took off and coasted out towards the Inner Hebrides, the closest island of the chain being Islay just 40nm north.

As I descended towards Islay I could see large white buildings on the coast, and as I got closer the word LAPHROAIG could clearly be seen in big black letters painted on the sea-facing side of one of the buildings. I then spotted another big white building a few miles further up the east coast, and it had the word LAGAVULIN, also in big black letters. They were whisky distilleries, clearly identified for the merchants of yesteryear who would call by sea to load barrels. That evening I spotted another two distilleries along the coastline of Islay.

I routed north past Islay, and round the very mountainous island of Jura, before returning home down the west coast of Islay, coasting in at the Giant's Causeway on Northern Ireland's north coast. A very special two-hour flight that I have yet to better.

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

All the crews, technicians and boffins who were involved in Operation Black Buck during the 1982 Falklands war. Seven missions were planned against occupied Port Stanley airfield using Vulcan bombers and Victor tankers. The aircraft flew the raids from Ascension Island with a round trip distance of 6,800nm and a flight time of 16 hours. With no GPS in those days, navigation was conducted using an inertial system borrowed from the VC10 airliner. How they managed to rendezvous with the tankers, drop bombs on Port Stanley, and return unharmed is simply amazing.

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

I have been very lucky really. The worst thing that has ever happened to me was a flat tyre. I was landing at the City of Derry airport and suddenly found I could not keep the aircraft straight. Fortunately the runway at Londonderry is very wide and I managed to keep it on the paved surface. A call to the tower explaining my predicament resulted in two massive fire engines thundering towards me. Despite their size, they did not have a tyre pump. Lesson learnt: Carry the means of inflating a tyre to at least be able to taxi clear.

#### What does Parts For Aircraft supply?

First and foremost we are dealers and distributors for MGL Avionics, in fact we are one of their biggest dealers worldwide and I am incredibly passionate about the product range. I also sell a wide range of electrical items and hardware for people building or maintaining their own Permit aircraft. I have over 1,000 lines in stock. When I built my aircraft, some of these bits were hard to find,

so I saw an opportunity.

We are also dealers for Aircraft Spruce in the USA, and I usually bring in a consignment from them on a weekly basis. This is usually a mixture of stock for me and specific items ordered by customers – I am happy to quote for items from the Aircraft Spruce website.

We have recently been appointed as UK dealers for Talos Avionics, which complements but does not compete with the MGL product range. It is a new Greek R&D based company which has developed a fantastic bit of kit that connects via Wi-Fi to tablets and smartphones, turning them into a full blown EFIS, and all for a remarkable £579 including vat. Talos Avionics is also working on some other clever ideas, so watch this space.

#### How long has P4A been in business?

I started the business 10 years ago, so 2016 is a bit of a milestone. I was made redundant and decided that my passion for aviation, if channelled correctly, could generate a good income. My strategy has been to heavily specialise in MGL Avionics and not to sell any competitive or similar products. Effectively my company is MGL Avionics UK and I work very closely with the manufacturer.

#### Will you be attending the LAA Rally?

Most definitely. In 2009 we had the LAA Revival Rally, a small event at the current venue, Sywell. It was the first LAA Rally since I had started the business so I took a stand in the one and only marquee. It was successful and I have exhibited every year since.

#### Any advice for fellow pilots?

Yes. Call me and "go glass", you know it makes sense! ■

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