

# MEET THE MEMBERS

From *On the Buses* to *Come Fly with Me*. This month we meet former London Bus driver Simon Pratt, who shares a Luscombe Silvaire at Farthing Corner airstrip with two fellow LAA members.

**C**an you tell us about your current job and past career?  
I was a London Bus driver for a number of years, but almost thirty years ago I took a plumber's course and changed careers. I now have been a self-employed 'one man band' for quite a few years.

#### How did you get into flying?

I wasn't an aero modeller, nor even had much of an interest in aviation at all as a youngster. When I was with London Transport I learned of their Flying Club at Fair Oaks and the idea of learning to fly appealed. Having made enquiries though, I soon realised I was not going to be able to afford it, so the idea went onto the back burner.

Then in 1995 I saw an advert in the local paper for trial lessons for £45 and decided to give it a go. It turned out to be with well-known local instructor Jim Stevens, who at that time ran Medway Flight Training from Farthing Corner airstrip, near Rochester. FC is very much an LAA airstrip so I discovered the Association pretty well from day one of learning to fly. I learned on Piper Cubs over a two year period in the typical 'pay-as-you-go' manner.

#### Did you get into LAA aircraft straight away?

No, I wasn't in the position to invest in an aeroplane outright and there weren't any suitable groups locally. I rented a Rallye and a Robin from Rochester mainly, but when somebody started the Robin with the throttle wide open and it ran into the Rallye, both of my regular mounts were written off in one fell swoop!

I then flew the C172s and AA5s of Cabair, who were then also based at Rochester, and did some flying in the Robins at Headcorn, but it was all getting rather too expensive and I was starting to do less and less flying.

Fate then intervened and I was offered a quarter share in the Luscombe Group that operates out of Farthing Corner. That was in 2001, I snapped up the offer and have been a member of the group ever since. We are now down to three members and have a different Luscombe, but we are a happy bunch who get on well.

#### What sort of flying do you do?

I have a bit of a competitive streak and have

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competed in the Top Nav competition a few times, and I like the odd spot landing. If the opportunity arose, I'd like to have a go at aerobatics. Generally though I like to visit fly-ins, usually with one of the other group members, or perhaps take my partner Fran out somewhere nice for the day. Fortunately she doesn't mind flying and tolerates my keen interest in it.

We do occasionally cross the Channel; France, Belgium and Switzerland have all been destinations, and I am hoping to visit Germany this summer.

#### As a Permit aircraft owner, do you get involved in maintenance?

Yes, I have done so more or less from the start. The group is a pretty mixed bag with one member who isn't remotely mechanically minded, but makes a mean cup of tea, and another who is very capable but is a very busy doctor. Unfortunately the fourth member, who has left, was our chief spanner-man so the mantle has fallen rather more on my shoulders of late. That's not a problem though as I enjoy fettling. We are fortunate in having a capable band of LAA members

at the strip who will help out when required, plus we have a helpful and knowledgeable LAA Inspector, Alan Bennett-Turner.

Following an unfortunate mishap, our previous Luscombe was written off but we bought a replacement last year. We have been polishing the unpainted surfaces and intend bringing it back to as near original as we are able.

#### What licence do you currently have?

I still have a UK PPL but might consider getting an EASA PPL so that after April 2015 I will be able to fly EASA aircraft should I wish to do so. I'm not a rabid type collector but I am interested in flying different aircraft and have hired a C172 on the odd occasion I want to take more than one person flying with me.

#### What lessons would you pass on?

Enjoy it! Flying is escapism from the trials and tribulation of life, it involves total mental commitment so you really do leave your troubles on the ground.

Part of my competitive nature means I regularly fly without a GPS so I can keep my nav skills honed. I'd certainly recommend new pilots build their navigational skills rather than rely totally on GPS. And finally take heed of the weather. Most of us get caught out in one way or another; my most 'interesting' experience was a low-level run into Dieppe, not our original destination which was an old favourite, Bagnoles. We never did get to Bagnoles that weekend.

#### How about aspirations?

Though like trying different aeroplanes, I've had a go in the Harvard at Kissingmee, took the reins of an AN-2 that came into a Luscombe Fly-in once, and even had a trial lesson in a Robinson R22, on the whole I'm happy where I am really.

We have a good group, a nice vintage aeroplane and, because it is on a Permit and the costs are shared by three people, affordability. I enjoy the social side of the LAA too, not just the Kent Strut of which I somehow found myself on the committee, but also the many friends and acquaintances I have met along the way. The LAA definitely works for me. ■



*(Picture: Ron Parker)*