



Tony Young in the cockpit of a Tiger Moth

MEET THE MEMBERS

This month we chat to **Tony Young**, long-time stalwart of the Wessex Strut and known to many as the proprietor of Aircraft Coverings, which runs the Fabric Tent each year at the LAA Sywell Rally

Current day job/past career?

On leaving school, I worked at home in the family business, farming and wholesale butchery. I was Young Farmers Junior Champion Ploughman at 16, going on to become Senior Champion and then West of England Champion. Jean and I married in 1958 and took a rented farm. It was a restricted tenancy (seven years) that led to my involvement with the PFA and eventually Aircraft Coverings Ltd, which I started in 1989 as the UK and European Distributor for the Poly-Fiber System. I'm getting on for 80 now and still at it!

Why aviation, what started your interest?

A conversation with Bradford's May & Baker chemical rep ended with, "Oh and by the way do you know anyone with a helicopter? We need some bracken sprayed on Dartmoor."

Having never been higher than up a ladder to a roof, six months later I had leased a helicopter and hired a pilot to go crop-spraying. So started 40 years of flying. If anyone had told me the day before that I would fly for a living I would have just laughed.

Your first flight – in what, where and when?

A Hughes 300 with dual controls, off our lawn three weeks after it had arrived.

Involvement with the Association?

I joined the PFA in 1972 and it must have been sometime in 1976 I mentioned to Stan Lauder, PFA Secretary at the time, that there was no Strut locally.

In the next magazine he put in a note that said 'Tony Young wants to start a Strut in the West Country. Contact...!' A few did, plus I got a list of West Country members and sent

out some cards for response. Our first fly-in was the Sunday before Easter 1977 and our most recent was Easter Monday this year.

Total number of aircraft and hours you have flown?

Had to dig my logbooks out and spent two evenings going through them for this one. The things I had forgotten, nostalgia or what! It looks like 82 different types and 145 different aircraft, give or take a few. Thanks for asking the question! Hours: 10,000, about 50/50 fixed and rotary.

Favourite and a worst type flown?

My favourite is definitely the Husky (I had it for 35 years) although I enjoyed the helicopters immensely.

The worst was a homebuilt Gatard Statoplan Poussin at an RSA Rally in Brienne-Le Chateau, France. It belonged to the chap that ran the local RSA branch and as I was 'Head' of our Strut, he invited me to fly his aircraft.

No elevators, just elevons, took off at 50, cruised at 50 and landed at 50. I only flew it once!

Current aeroplane(s)?

Just my lovely Stinson but I'll never get to restore it now – not enough time! Oh and a part-built Practavia Sprite. Ditto

Your best aviation moment and flight?

Many, but I suppose bringing the Husky back. I bought it as standing in Tehran and flew it home over five days, with Chris Hodgkinson (instrument rated, in case). And winning The British Helicopter Championship with Bob Curtis.

Any aviation heroes? If so, who and why?

Not really. Although I admired Neil Williams,

what a talent, and a great loss to British sport aviation.

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

How much space do you have available? An engine failure on a test flight off the end of Henstridge's cross runway at 150ft, about where the grains bins are now. I went past two intended sites and got down in the third choice.

I've had five engine failures all told, three fixed-wing and two in helicopters, both of which were snow ingestion causing a flameout but they both relit on the way down. I've had two near-misses on wire strikes in the helicopter too. I once came face-to-face with an Aerospat Squirrel in very poor viz running around the edge of Salisbury Plain Danger Area. Then there was the time I had to 'dump the pole' when a JetRanger was just about to put his skid into my rotor disc in the hold at the British Grand Prix, Silverstone, ferrying passengers in and out. At the 1983 BGP, I did 129 landings in one day! And falling asleep in the Husky at 6,000 feet on an absolutely flat calm evening on the way home after 10 hours' flying (don't worry, I woke up!). That will do for now.

Lessons learned? Concentrate... and always stay awake!

Aircraft wish list – to fly or own?

Not really. I'm not a 'Spitfire guy'. I did fly in the Lysander that was based at Henstridge and was pleased with that.

Any advice for pilots?

As above – concentrate. And never try to show off to passengers or bystanders – that's when things start to go wrong and you don't notice until it's too late. But most of all have fun! ■