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SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Mid Kent Strut* of the



Light Aircraft Association

Mike's Mutterings

Mike Negus -
Editor

Dad, are we having fun yet?

by Neil Foreman



Here I sit at my desk almost 2 years after I qualified to fly a helicopter and over three years since commencing the build of my Rotorway Exec 162F kit. The aircraft has finally been granted a Permit to Fly and I've completed my conversion training. Now I can take to the air and have fun, as planned. Or can I?



Permit at last!

Logically, I should be ecstatic, celebrating the final achievement of one of the toughest challenges on my life. Sadly that joyful 'whoop' has, so far, failed to emanate

Janury Meeting - 31st January 2008
Golf Club at 8pm
AGM

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from my ever-cynical gob.

I'm not really surprised to find that I have the same feelings as a child on a rainy holiday, chugging reluctantly around a museum with his parents. 'Dad, am I having fun yet?'

My crusade towards rotary flight has been far longer and tougher than it said on the can, mostly due to the inexplicable, ad-lib antics of the CAA. It's painful story that I've written about several times in private communication and chatted about to some of you fellers at a strut meeting. Suffice to say that the final inspection, testing and conversion procedure for my helicopter that, I was told, should have taken a few weeks, actually took over two years. The excitement and enthusiasm I once had for the project has long since been eroded by the relentless wading, through whatever meaningless red-tape that the CAA chose to obstruct the path with. Officially, no doubt, in the name of safety but more likely with a view to:

1. Arse covering
2. Raising much-needed funds and
3. Justifying jobs with the threat of redundancy on the horizon?

The only reason I didn't throw in the towel long ago my personal, masochistic compulsion to see through to the end every project I embark upon. A quitter - I ain't.

But maybe I'm being a tad unfair to the 'Campaign Against Aviation'. Could it be that the forced delay has tempered my fervour and that I'm, only now, experiencing my true propensity for rotary aviation? My innate cautious nature and aversion to gambling in any form screams at me that I'm taking a

huge chance leaving the safety of the ground in a home-built helicopter. Jeez, I've never taken part in dangerous sports, or been involved in a big car prang. Although I've owned some flash motors I drive them like I'm driving Miss Daisy. I've never broken a bone, bought a lottery ticket or bunged a single cent in a slot machine on my numerous business trips to Las Vegas - 'Caution' is my middle name. What a boring bugger!!



But yes, I can fly safely - my instructors and examiners tell me so - as no doubt, so did those of the famous victims of recent fatal helicopter crashes. I'm just as human as they are (were). A fellow Rotorway pilot once told me 'There are Rotorway builders and there are Rotorway flyers but there aren't many Builder/Flyers'. He could be right.

When I recall my Solo cross-country qualifier of almost two years ago it's hard to believe that it was actually *me*

The right to bear arms is only marginally more intelligent than the right to arm bears.

flying that Robbo alone to Lydd and Goodwood then back to Rochester. As I try to age gracefully and battle through the general melee of life, gaining wisdom and learning from mistakes, I find myself making more and more of them, much to the irritation of my 20-20 Son and business partner, Matthew. None of these 'Senior moments' have yet been life threatening but at 2000 ft, gaffes are less easily forgiven. Experienced pilots tell me that my feelings are absolutely natural and that my confidence will grow and the fear will fade as I chalk up a few more hours. One supremely competent instructor told me the he only felt comfortable with his Rotorway after fifty hours - that was on top of his 3000 hours military flying. So I've a way to go yet.

Anyway, rant over, what does it fly like? Until I began my conversion training I had only ever experienced a five-minute flight as a passenger in a carburettor-engined Rotorway. That belated 'trial flight' included a disastrous thirty-second hovering attempt which was enough to convince me that this was a very different beast to the R22. Under current CAA rules it is not possible to train and qualify in a Rotorway in UK, so most pilots first qualify in a certified aircraft - usually an R22, then train for a few hours in the Rotorway to 'Convert'. Opinions and comparisons abound on the differences between the Robinson and Rotorway with the general consensus being that the Rotorway has less power but is generally easier to fly.

When I first made the decision to build my aircraft, the capacity to fly from home was the prime consideration and available power was the key factor. Would I be able to get in and out of my 50 metre-square field safely, or indeed

at all? Optimism overruled logic and I picked up the gauntlet, but I had to wait a few months wait before I flew a Robinson in and out two-up and several more months before a visiting Rotorway owner made a successful two-up landing and take off - phew!! As it turns out, my latest-version, fuel injected engine has ample power for two big boys like me and a full tank of fuel, to take-off in any direction from my little patch of green.

Performance of both aircraft is comparable at the recommended maximum power levels but the Robinson's big Lycoming engine is plodding away at a little over 2000 rpm with power in reserve whilst the Rotorway is screaming at a near maximum 4200 rpm and very little left in the kitty. Engine wear, maintenance and reliability are what you'd expect from an engine that is spanked at near full power for all it's working life.

My greatest conversion challenge was the change from a governed throttle on the Robbo to manual on the Rotorway. I flew a few hours in the 22 with the governor off and it was a relative doddle. The massive available torque of the Lycoming engine combined with accurate mechanical correlation between the carburettor and the collective lever minimises in-flight throttle changes. Slight tweaks on take off and landing are all that is required. The less-torquey and more-revvy Rotorway, however, demands almost constant attention to keep the engine rpm safely at 100%. Tiny throttle movements can have the revs racing or dying, setting off the 'high-low rpm'

warning buzzer with alarming regularity. Not only was I learning to fly an aircraft with significantly different control characteristics to the one I qualified in, but I had yet another control in the mix for my already-overloaded brain to handle.

But, after a few hours practice with an instructor muttering 'throttle, throttle, throttle' every few seconds, I eventually became more tuned to the Rotorway's sensitivity and I can now appreciate how, in time, a Rotorway pilot would become subconsciously aware of the engine note and control the throttle automatically. For now though, I continue to be grateful for that warning buzzer - the only one ever fitted to any UK Rotorway, and I shudder at the memory of the CAA's attempt to make me remove it simply because it wasn't a kit component, even though the stock Tacho has an output terminal for exactly that purpose.

One major advantage the Rotorway has over the Robinson is the inertia of the main rotor blades. The far heavier Rotorway blades can tolerate up to five seconds dilly-dally time before dumping the collective in the event of an engine failure, before the rotor rpm drops to an unrecoverable level. In a Robinson you get around a second and a half before the cac hits the fan - possibly literally! There are of course many more pro's and con's. Not least that the Rotorway is exceptionally pretty compared to every other entry-level helicopter, but that makes panel-

Marriage is a relationship in which one person is always right, and the other is a husband.

off pre-flight inspections long and laborious. And perhaps most significantly, the running costs are currently far less than those of a certified aircraft, but moves are underfoot that may drastically change the self-maintenance rules of ownership thus eroding the cost advantage.

So, in summary, The Exec 162F is everything I expected, but the hassle of ownership is all I hoped it wouldn't be. I had a fantastic time assembling my aircraft, enjoying every minute. I had a less-than-fantastic time learning to fly and a frustratingly miserable time battling the CAA for it's Permit. Even though I am now qualified, I must admit that I'm struggling with the confidence thing and I plan on having a few more hours with an instructor. However, there are only two in UK - one near Manchester and the other near Oxford. Neither is full-time and neither have Rotorway instruction high on their list of favourite pastimes.

My personal dilemma is this. I have only recently begun to enjoy the fruits of my past 35 years' hard graft. The future for my family is looking comfortably rosy. Our world is a big, wonderful place and I plan to see more of it before popping the old clogs. Why the hell would I want to jeopardise the future doing something that I'm not even sure I enjoy very much? Life is way too short without running the unnecessary risk of making it shorter. Furthermore, the CAA's apparent disincentive for owners to improve

One day, a man came home and was greeted by his wife dressed in a very sexy nightie. "Tie me up," she purred, "and you can do anything you want."

So he tied her up and went flying.

the safety of their aircraft continues to yank at my chain. It's a sad fact that my helicopter could be made significantly safer and more reliable with the addition of tried and tested third party upgrades freely available to US owners, but to fit them legally in UK would again mean battling the CAA - something I have neither the time or inclination to do. I recall that they even made me remove my little certified Robinson fire extinguisher because it was not an approved component. Madness.

Anyhow, I've done what I set out to do - to build and fly my own helicopter. Mission accomplished. You may, by now, have gathered that bullshit and me don't get along very well. The abundance of it in the Rotorway world could well prove a factor in my decision to continue flying - or not. For the time being, I'll stick with it and see how I feel with a few more hours under my belt. A couple of things are for sure though - if the 'fun factor' doesn't override the 'fear factor and I can't learn to live with the bull', it'll be goodbye Rotorway and no looking back.

Happy New Year.....

If it's not too late the Committee wish you all the best for the New Year and of course safe flying.

With the start of a brand new year we also have a re branding of the Association which for those who have been absent from planet earth, either through alcoholic indulgences or other influences of the more exotic kind, we are now known as the Light Aircraft Association which probably reflects the more modern image it is intended

to project. Our sister publication has also been re-titled and you should have received your first copy so folks after years of debate it has happened.

Of course whilst a change of name is all very well the membership remains the same but the intention is to try and bring the Association to a wider audience particularly those new PPL's who are maybe looking for some new direction and some of the old hands looking at the more modern kit built or factory built versions which offer an exciting choice.

Of course within the Association the old values will surely hold good with the traditional builders maintaining their requirement for support through Engineering and the Inspectors, whose services are invaluable, not forgetting the classic types some of whom may well come under the Associations umbrella for the first time in the not too distant future. At the core lies the Struts, again surely due for re naming to comply with the updating and without whose members there would not be the enthusiasm for our sport that currently exists. Due this year will be the result of the on line census which will give an insight as to the mindset of the membership and a lead in which direction the L.A.A will be taking over the near and medium future.

One thing I have discovered in the 15 years I have been associated with the Strut is the fact of its constancy, by that I mean that it is always here due largely to the enthusiasm of the various committee members and co-ordinators together with a core of members over the years to keep a place that occasionally people return to having been off the scene for a period of time for what-

ever reason and it was particularly pleasurable to have contact with several members being such a case in point. More pleasing both decided to put pen to paper to produce a couple of fine articles on some of the more exotic spectra of our sport but nonetheless both have their roots firmly within the Association.

Those of you that attended the meeting at which Neil Foreman gave a fascinating if not frustrating talk on building his Rotorway Exec 162F which thankfully is now permitted to fly but have all those frustrations taken the shine off, read Neils article to see. One thing is obvious the standard of build is exemplary and just when you think things can't get any better we have another Rotorway in the pipeline courtesy of Bruce Alexander our very own AME and Luscombe driver, so the possibility exists of a brace flying within the Strut, surely a sight to salivate over! I think we all wish Neil the best and truly hope he does get full payback for his Herculean efforts.

The other Member who surfaced for an overdue visit is Steve Pearl who was based sometime in the early '90s at Farthing Corner and flew for a period one of the PFA (as was) most basic homebuild types the Evans VP1 but in the words of that famous old song popular with the late Queen mother 'baby look at me now'. Steve went commercial and has ended up flying corporate Biz Jets of the most exotic kind and has kindly put down his thoughts on the operation of this

The scientific theory I like best is that the rings of Saturn are composed entirely of lost airline baggage.

branch of flying holds. Through the theme of the article though is his obvious fondness for his more simple form of flying at the start of his career. I know Steve has been through a busy period and finding the time to produce the article has taken some doing particularly with me bending his ear so a big thanks and I commend it to the membership. It will appear in next month's copy of "Skywritings.

Future Meetings

31st January is the **Annual General Meeting** of the Strut and it would be good to get a big turnout as there will be one or two changes in the offing.... Kick off will be 8.00 pm so get in early for a drink beforehand and catch up with your chums as I am sure there will be lots to catch up on since the last meeting.

On the **28th February** we will be welcoming perhaps one of the rarest of veterans from WW2 one **Mr Des Paige** who flew gliders with the Glider Regiment and landed not once but twice on two of the largest aerial operations to place troops behind enemy lines, the ill fated Operation 'Market Garden' otherwise the Arnhem drop and the more successful Rhine landing. This will I believe be a first for the Strut and if you want to hear first hand what it was like you know the date!

March 27th has yet to be finalized so watch this space however Brian has asked me to let you all know that he has arranged for **Ken Craigie**, PFA LAA Chief Inspector, to give us a talk at the **April Meeting** on the **24th**. This always a popular call so

make sure you have this in your diary.

May 29th should see another first for the Strut as we have booked a talk by the operators of the **AN2** the largest biplane currently flying and we are promised a very amusing and interesting talk from the operators of this enigma from the Antonov Beureau from the former USSR. So we have a fairly full start to the year to provide a varied and interesting set of speakers not forgetting of course time a plenty for the normal social discourse.

Last Meeting in November

We were pleased to welcome Tony Richards, aerobatic pilot and by his own admission one of aviations journeymen carving a living from this grand world of aviation of ours. Chief pilot at the Tiger Club at Headcorn from where he practices the black art of aerobatics so if you have ideas and I know of one or two of my compatriots that do of pursuing that line of persuasion then you have the man.

Tony came across as very laid back on the ground, but very focused and professional once airborne and he obviously

loves his trade. Me I prefer the straight and level route any time but nonetheless a very interesting evening.

Around and About

Peter Kember, another Strut Stalwart has been busy in his professional capacity defending airfields from unacceptable planning conditions and worse. A press release was issued from Kember Loudan Williams Ltd confirming successful outcomes involving the following airfields amongst them Sywell Aerodrome, Hampstead Norris Aerodrome, Thatcham, Berks Little Haugh Hall, Norton, Suffolk, Monewdon Aerodrome, Woodbridge, Suffolk and last and certainly not least our own headquarter base Turweston. Peter who along with other flying friends has also within the last the last year purchased Laddingford Aerodrome in Kent and is very active on the Europa front having built several and currently operates the Tri Gear version. More power to your elbow Peter.

Aeroplanes, we look forward to some



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interesting developments within the Strut when for example we should see the maiden flight of Ian Mcleods Pietenpol currently under preparation at Farthing Corner, Graham Hammonds 4 place Jabiru should resume testing at Headcorn, our own Luscombe is currently starting a major overhaul and wing recover which will see it turning out in a brand new colour scheme. Not forgetting Mike Tooze's Vari Eze starting its next 25 years !

No doubt there are others which it would be good to hear about, with pictures of course.

We have ideas for a hands on builders workshop which would be held all day and proponents of the major construction mediums will be persuaded to impart their knowledge and expertise on we hope an eager bunch of tyro builders.

Dates for your Diary

Jan 31	AGM
Feb 28	Des Paige, Gliders
Mar 27	Watch this space
Apl 24	Ken Craigie, LAA