



January 2009

# SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Mid Kent*



Light Aircraft Association

## Mike's Mutterings

Mike Negus -  
Editor



## Soaring Diamond Geezer?

By Karl Martin

Here is an account of my first successful 300 kms cross-country flight in a glider. All my earlier attempts had resulted in landing-out. There is no greater evidence of failure as a soaring pilot than landing-out. I should know. I've made six so far and none of them show any ambiguity about my soaring prowess, merde.

The location was Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State in South Africa. It is just south of the tropic of Capricorn on a vast plateau, mostly at 4,500 ft asl. In December with temperatures well into the 30s, density



## Out Landing

January Meeting

29th January 2009 - Cobtree Manor Golf Club - 8pm

**AGM & NATTER NIGHT**

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altitudes of 7,000 ft are common on the surface. Although I was flying a hot single-seater, an LS7 with a 43:1 glide ratio, aero tows took significantly longer than they would at sea-level.

Hereabouts, much of the land is used for growing maize on enormous fields, hundreds of hectares in area. So, landing-out on stubble or ploughed fields is not difficult or dangerous. However, it has been my experience that retrieval by road takes forever. One of my three land-outs took nine hours even though I was only 100kms away from the aerodrome. I walked for two hours to a dirt road and was eaten by bats and bugs for another six hours before the crew found me. Then the crew wanted me to buy them dinner. Luckily for me, it was so late that all local restaurants were closed. Lucky for them, I was too tired to kill three people in one evening. Instead, I enjoyed the charitable thought that I could give them rabies from my bat bites and they would suffer long slow painful deaths! I digress.

### Departure

I had chosen to be at the back of the glider grid so that thermals would be better developed by the time I was due to be airborne. Generally, this works to the advantage of a novice like me but has the price of a shorter flying day, about an hour on this particular day. It takes that long to launch six gliders at this altitude. When my turn came, I took a tow towards puffy cumulus clouds against a blue sky, a perfect soaring day. Soon I noticed that my ASI was reading zero. Tapping the instrument did no good. I advised the tug pilot of my situation and released over the airfield. I kept my approach speed constant by keeping the whistle from the air-vent constant. It worked well

and I landed without incident. Back on the ground a bug was found to have blocked the pitot tube. Apparently, pitot covers are for winters in South Africa. Forty minutes later, I was airborne with a working ASI. Now it was 1:30pm, quite a bit later than planned.

### First Leg

I released in a thermal at 6,500 ft and reached 10,000 ft fairly quickly. The cloud base was another 3,000 ft higher. If I could cruise in this band 10,000 to 13,000 ft, I would be following the advice of my parrot: "Get high, stay in the top one third of max height". If I descended close to 10,000 ft, I would have to find a thermal even though I was still 6000 ft agl. With this plan in mind, off I set for Hertzogville, my first turn point 110 kms away. By the time I reached it, I was exhausted from turning in thermals nearly all the time. I had taken ten thermals to keep as high as I could, so keen was I to stay much higher than my parrot's minimum. But it had taken me more than two hours to travel 110 kms. At this rate it would take at least another 4 hours for the remaining 200 kms. I would land in the dark at 7:30 or later. I must do better: take fewer thermals for higher climbs and fly faster, i.e. reprogramme parrot.

### Second Leg

Rounding Hertzogville, I headed east for my second turnpoint 80 kms away. Aha, an instrument told me I had a 9kph tailwind. I slowed down to a little below best L/D and headed straight for the waypoint. About an hour later I reached it having taken only 5 thermals. That was better, 16 kms between climbs as compared with 11 kms in the first leg.

### Final Leg

I had 120 kms to go on the final leg to make it back to my starting point. Now heading for home, I was facing a cross-wind, much better than a headwind (parrot says: "think positively"). Also, along this route was an airfield 30 kms ahead which I could use as an alternate. As I got closer to the airfield I noticed that the clouds, which had been all around me thus far on the flight, were disappearing rapidly. The sky was turning blue and I was getting nervous. After the airfield I would have no clouds marking out thermals, just blue sky. So I decide to go past the airfield as high as possible and if I got low after that I would turn back to land on it. My parrot advises 10kms glide per 1000 ft alt loss. So I could travel about 36 kms beyond the airfield and back if I found no lift, providing I could start at 13,000 ft. Using every bit of lift under the next cloud, I reached a little higher than 13,000 ft before accelerated into the blue. This was a calculated gamble. However, the air was so buoyant that I lost only 1000 ft in the next 17 km glide. Then I gained 200 ft porpoising through a blue thermal. Likewise in the following 16 kms, I lost 900 ft but gained 300. Decision point: do I go on or turn back? I was at 11,600 ft and had 60 kms to go. 60 kms would require 6,000 ft altitude if I found no lift. That would place me over my destination at 5,600 ft, giving a margin of 100m (about a 1km glide) over the circuit height of 5,500 ft. That's tight, very tight if I hit any sink whatsoever. So naturally, I pressed on. Within 5 kms I found a thermal which I took for a 1,500 ft climb. Gaining confidence with altitude, I pushed the stick forward and made an average IAS of 120 kph over the last 60 kms. Also, I averaged 24 kms between climbs for the whole leg. That's more like it. When I landed at 6:30, just

before sunset, I was tired but satisfied, ok I mean knackered!

"Hey Dick, have a look at my logger. I think I have done my first 300 kms."



*Karl (with his crew?)*

"Hmm yes, it looks like you've qualified for Gold distance. Well done." Later he said: "I don't believe it. Do you know that you had an average speed of about 65 kph for your 300 kms" "That's the slowest ever on our records. It doesn't affect your claim for Gold, or the fact that you will buy beers tonight, but if you want to do 500 kms for a Diamond XC it will take you about 8 hours at that speed. We don't have landing lights here, nor do our gliders have lights!"

I asked my wife where she wanted to go for our anniversary. "Somewhere I haven't been in a long time!" she said. So I suggested the kitchen.

Later I discovered that the world speed record for 300 kms is 161 kph on average. A New Zealander, Jenny Wilkinson, holds it. She is probably 17 years old! Next, I am up for Diamond. Will that make me a geezer? (Karl for entertainment value you are a solid good geezer - Ed)

### Nothing To Do With Anything But It Made Me Chuckle - The Story of the Mirror and the Lipstick

According to a news report, a local High School recently was faced with a unique problem. A number of girls were beginning to use lipstick and would put it on. That was fine, but after they put on their lipstick they would press their lips to the mirror leaving dozens of little lip prints. Every night, the maintenance man would remove them; and the next day, the girls would put them back. Finally the principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the maintenance man. She explained that all these lip prints were causing a major problem for the custodian who had to clean the mirrors every night. To demonstrate how difficult it was to clean the mirrors, she

asked the maintenance man to clean the mirrors. He took out a long-handled squeegee, dipped it in the toilet, and cleaned the mirror with it. Since then, there have been no lip prints on the mirror. There are Teachers, and then there are Educators!

### A Topical Tip From Nigel Read - All You Want to Know About Icing

Nigel sent the following website which if you follow it will tell you all about icing on the ground and in the air and with a hint of a further cold snap in the long range forecast it could prove useful <http://aircrafticing.grc.nasa.gov/courses.html>

### Roger Chaplin - Helpers Honoured

Last year as I am sure we all remember saw an accident which badly injured Roger and came close to costing him his life. Fortunately if this word can be applied on this occasion he crashed just off the boundary of Farthing Corner and therefore a number of Strut Members working in the hanger at the time together with the farm owner Harry Foulds and others were able to render immediate assistance putting themselves in harms way.

I know the individuals concerned are

The last fight was my own fault. My wife asked, :What's on the TV?"... I said "DUST!"

Remember..... Marriage is the number one cause of divorce. Statistically, 100% of all divorces started with marriage.

very modest about their part in the rescue so it was gratifying to learn that their deeds were to be recognized by the City of London Police Service one of whom was involved at the aftermath.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> January Paddy Jordan , Alan Bourner and Bruce Alexander plus Harry and his helpers were invited to London to receive a Certificate endorsing their actions. Simon Pratt the fourth member was on holiday and thus unable to attend but a certificate was accepted on his behalf.



*Paddy & Alan with their Certificate*

Well done the Lads!

Roger continues to make slow progress but we are able to report that repatriation home from hospital is now on the cards and from there ongoing treatment will be planned so 2009 for Roger and Kim should start to be a little more positive and I am sure you will join me and the committee in wishing them all well for the future.

### Millen Aviation

Disappointing news from Rochester Airport is Millen Aviation have packed

it in and presumably given the current prognosis for the economy may well not be the last flying school to go but on the upside maybe it will awaken people to the idea of more affordable flying with the LAA and put some fun back in to their lives.

### .....And Now More Positive News on Luscombe G-BSNT

Now I know that I tend to beat on about it but don't forget I am more than happy to publish your thoughts on your own pride and joy so until you do expect more of this sort of thing. Our Luscombe is as you may be aware, operated by a small group of four and has been undergoing what has been a rather protracted bit of TLC. It all started with a need to recover the wings and the list of 'while we're at it' we'll just do this which then became that and finally the other. An optimistic timescale was put on a start in January 2008 straight after the Christmas Hols and to be back in the air end of March. Well of course this is aviation we are talking about and as the work progressed, slowly , it became apparent that this maybe would be more of a Summer completion and then Autumn and finally here we are just about 12 months on and we are just about ready to be signed off with a very real prospect of a return to the air before the end of January - whoopee!

A whole year of aviating without a permit renewal before next winter. But what we have is a new smart coat of paint with an authentic trim scheme for the year of manufacture, sadly the bit I always get excited about, an overhauled prop, the engine has had a look at with a new exhaust system, new four point harness and tail pull and some

smart new leather trim in blue to match the seats. Very Nice! Obviously with such a major overhaul with bits added on and replaced not to mention the new wing recover and paint a reweigh was necessary and was gratifying that the end result was only a couple of pounds different to the book weight. On behalf of the chaps I would like to thank a number of individuals that have lent assistance along the way which supplemented my fellow members travails, my chief contribution being making the tea and daydreaming but it does reinforce the attitude and spirit of the LAA at Strut level when fellow members offer both practical assistance as well as advice.

I will generously not mention the piss taking which is given quite unmercifully and gratuitously from some quarters. No names no packdrill! So we have seen over the year a colossal rise in both Avgas and Mogas but fortunately market forces have seen the latter back to more acceptable levels as I understand Avgas is still way out there bucking the trend. Already I am hearing talk of maybe a little less foreign touring what with the abysmal state of the Pound against the Euro and more domestic trips which I for one find appealing as haven't really ventured further North other than an hours flying time or so. Maybe it is time to dust off those thoughts of the trip we've often discussed to the Scillies, Wales, the Scottish Western Isles or wherever. No doubt in the coming months plans will start to be laid...

### **Strut Dinner Cobtree Manor Golf Club — Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> January**

Time is marching on and you are kindly invited to use your amended booking form which actually this time advises of where it is , **Cobtree Manor Golf Club**. I

nearly got it right until someone pointed out the slight lack of correct information .....Doh! We look forward to the pleasure of your company and hope to see you all there.

### **Annual General Meeting - Mid Kent Strut - Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January 7.30 pm Cobtree Manor Golf Club**

Notice is given of the above which if previous meetings are concerned will be a fairly swift affair and thereafter the evening will settle in to what we like best, a good old natter.

### **Courses at LAA Turweston**

You may recall the recent initiative of practical aspects of (aeroplane) building being run at LAA HQ in the recently refurbished building, indeed our own Strut Co-ordinator has been involved on demonstrating the art of aluminium bashing (he's built an RV don't you know) which has drawn favourable comments in our sister publication Light Aviation Magazine. I understand these courses are now being booked with a high take up such is their popularity so if this is something you are interested in have a chat to Gary or Brian for a large injection of enthusiasm for the price of a small drink from the bar.

### **New Year's Resolutions.**

**By Brian Hope.**

New Year is the time for resolutions, but how many of us actually ever stick to them? I had an interesting chat with our Strut co-ordinator, Gary Smith the other day and his approach to resolu-

tions was somewhat more positive than most. Rather than concentrating on changing something negative - like giving up drinking or eating too much, he reckoned on planning to do something positive - fulfilling a long held ambition for example. This seems eminently more practical to me, after all the over indulgence has usually started again within a few weeks, but the ambition can be chipped at for many months throughout the year.

So, one of the things I have threatened to do for more years than I care to remember is to participate in the Dawn to Dusk competition. I've never yet come close to competing, so this year I am going to develop one or two ideas and give it a go. How about you? What is it that you have wanted to achieve but have always allowed life to get in the way. I know for many that making that first trip across the Channel is something that gets put off for all manner of reasons, but to be honest it is such a straightforward exercise that there really isn't anything to worry about. Also, you are fortunate that within the Strut there are a number of experienced pilots who have made the crossing on numerous occasions and will be only too willing to offer advice, and even invite you to join them on a trip. The 'Le Touquet for lunch' set is maybe, a bit of a cliché, but as one who has travelled much farther afield, I really like Le Touq and am quite happy to go there for lunch thank you very much!

For the more adventurous I would suggest one of the foreign rallies, the RSA (French Homebuilders) has been a favourite of mine for many years. Currently held at Vichy (July 10/12), it is an easy flight of around four or five hours, with not too much airspace or inhospita-

ble terrain to worry about, and the event itself is pretty laid back and enjoyable. Several Strut members make this annual pilgrimage, so if you are up for it then why not let me know, you will be welcome to join us in a 'same way same day' formation.

Earlier in the year (May 22/25) there is an interesting trip to Kyritz in Eastern Germany, with an excursion from there to the German WW2 rocketry establishment at Peenemunde, and to Rechlin where some of the early German jet aircraft were developed. A rather more involved trip perhaps, but nothing a competent PPL wouldn't be able to cope with, and again there will undoubtedly be a number of Strut members making the trip.

One final event worth considering for a first time is Schaffen - Diest Oldtimers (Aug 14/16) in Belgium. Always a popular event, it is only a couple of hours flight time from the South-east and usually attracts some interesting vintage and classic aircraft that you rarely see in the UK, The food and entertainment is also usually pretty good too.

Of course, the weak pound will not make touring on the continent as affordable as it was just a year ago, but there has been a slight improvement in the last week or two so I am keeping my fingers crossed that the exchange rates start to return to something more reasonable by the time

Airplanes are near perfect,  
all they lack is the ability  
to forgive

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the season gets underway. At least the fuel prices are back down to something more acceptable and in Germany at least, many of the airfields sell mogas.

One final event I should mention is the LAA Rally at Sywell on September 4/6. Whether you manage that trip across the oggin or not, the LAA Rally has to be a must. Take you aircraft and tent and have some fun - I'll see you there.

Never test the depth of  
water with both feet

There is no problem so  
complex that it cannot  
simply be blamed on the  
pilot.

**Dates for your Diary**

Jan 29	AGM & Natter Night
Jan 31	Strut Annual Dinner
Feb 26	Builders Night