



May 2018

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Kent Strut*

Overseas reports!



Light Aircraft Association

Sun-n-fun 2018 Gary Smith

A small contingent from the Kent Strut attended the annual "Sun-n-fun" rally in Florida and this year, I was amongst them. The EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association) have been organising their "airventure" show at Lakeland airport for the last 41 years and having a permanent base has allowed them to expand and improve the event year upon year. Recently the EAA have funded an aviation college and during show week the students are treated to an aviation extravaganza in exchange for helping out with some volunteer work.

I chose the easy option of driving us to Gatwick to catch the direct flight to Orlando, then sat back and enjoyed being chauffeured around for the rest of the week. Non US citizens need to complete an ETSA security form prior to travel (which can be done on line for £14) and instead of just checking your shoes these days the paranoid American immigration desk now want a full set of finger prints and a "mug shot" too. We upgraded our car to a minivan this time and the "red rocket" we chose was double the luxury for virtually no extra cost, well worth the effort we thought.

It works out cheaper to rent a villa than reserve hotel rooms so we navigated our way across



Nigel Read - Hairy Editor

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31st May Meeting

Bush pilot Paul Catanach

Cobtree Manor Golf Club, ME14 3AZ 20:00hrs

www.laakentstrut.org.uk



town, settled into our humble mansion and prepared for the first day of the show.

The sun-n-fun show is held at Lakeland's Linda regional airport in Polk county, 50 miles south west of Orlando, just off "Interstate 4". During show week 60,000 air movements are not uncommon making it the second largest air show (after Oshkosh) in the world. Brian Hope pre booked a media pass since he is the editor of the LAA magazine, John was swiftly inaugurated as the "microlight correspondent" and myself the "engineering and technical support officer". So with media passes in hand we were set free to roam the 520 acre site and carry out our newly inherited duties.

First job was to find the flea market and deposit our old equipment. The US have not had to change to 8.33kHz spaced radios so three of our now "surplus" UK units were deposited on the table and we were ready to explore.

Quite unexpectedly it started to rain on the first proper day of the show and the masses headed into the hangers to surf through the latest gizmos, gadgets and hardware. It's always fascinating to see the latest developments and this year was no exception. There was no shortage of "glass screen" displays packed with even more special features, but you have to wonder how many "new enhancements" will ever be used. The US has signed up to "conspicuity" in a big way, mode S transponders will soon be the norm and ADSB is the new "toy" for 2018. One of the additional

attractions of ADSB to the US market is the ability to obtain weather information, something now being trialled in the UK (apparently).

Day two of the show was like waking up to a different season, bright sunshine, clear blue skies and a cool breeze, perfect for walking around the aeroplane park. The previous day's wet weather had delayed the arrival of many pilots but microlighters are a tough old bunch and more difficult to phase. The airport is the busiest place on earth for seven days but they mark out a grass microlight strip to one side and it looks after its self. A stream of weird and wonderful creations performed a continuous stream of touch and go's demonstrating their designs abilities while potential customers looked on.

One notable "microlight" was an open cockpit, tandem two seater, with a high wing. Power was provided by TWO rotax 912 engines mounted in the trailing edge – pusher style and with 200+ Hp available performance was outstanding. A 50 metre ground roll followed by a 30 degree angle of indefinite climb just had to be seen to be believed. Some of the microlights and ultralights can achieve amazingly short landings too if you have the time to be entertained.

Day three, we had maxed out on the show and were looking for some off base entertainment. Most people have heard of Jack Browns sea plane base at Winter Haven airport (Lake Jessie) and I thought it would be interesting to check it out for myself. During "show week" they recommend making a reservation but a fortunate cancellation afforded me the opportunity to go fly.

Jack Brown Seaplanes started in 1963, has trained 17,000 pilots and is presently run by his two sons Jon and Chuck. Half of their customers are there to complete the formal float plane training course whilst the remainder are just here for the pleasure, like myself.

The school has seven permanent aeroplanes comprising five J3 cubs a Super Cub and an Aviat Husky. The J3 cubs, of 1940's vintage, are powered by modified C85 continental engines making 95Hp and are very basic to allow for the additional weight of the floats. There are no electrics (i.e. no starter motor, battery or generator) and since they never leave the lakes there are no landing wheels etc to worry about. This is basic "stick and rudder" flying.

My aeroplane was tethered "tail to the shore" with the back of the floats gently resting on the ramp. The pilot embarking procedure is to walk along the starboard float then climb into the rear seat and strap in. Life jackets were on the parcel shelf but my instructor (Michael) said if I made good landings we would not need them and the alligators would go hungry (yes there really were alligators in the lake). Engine start procedure was simple, Michael walked along the starboard float, selected magnetos to both then, holding the door frame, lent forwards and hand swung the prop from behind (remember no electrics).



Hand Swinging

With the engine running I dropped the water rudders (unhooking a wire in the rear cockpit and lower it to the floor) and we began drifting into open water.

There are two types of water taxiing. The first is the slow taxi where you apply 1200rpm (stick fully back) and motor slowly through the water at 5kts, like a boat. The second is the fast taxi where you lift the water rudders and initially apply full power whilst holding the stick fully back. As the floats accelerate the rear portion breaks free of the surface and you are skimming the surface using just the front of the float with much reduced drag. Reducing power prevents the aircraft taking off and you are now skimming across the lake at 25kts like a speed boat. What an amazing experience.

I followed through with the first take off: - check water rudders are lifted, carb heat cold, door open (you need to see the view), line up into wind, stick fully back, throttle open and wait. When the floats come up on the step, reduce stick back pressure and when it's ready to fly.... it flies.

As we passed over the clubhouse at 200ft it became apparent how close we were to the municipal airport of Winterhaven, 300 yards away. I asked if we needed to call them and the reply was "what with?" A glance around confirmed we had no radio (to go with the rest of the non existent electrics).

The J3 that Gary flew on the left

Our mission was to keep below 500ft at all times and do a splash and dash on as many lakes as we had time for. Michael was happy for me to take command since I had tail wheel time and J3 Cub experience (helpful for float plane operation) and 3 minutes later we were ready for our first "splash". Calm waters by the lake shore indicate the "upwind" end of the landing area and would be the aiming point for our final approach. Planning a left hand circuit from 500ft (instead of the usual 1000ft) felt very tight and low but landing checks are simple :- water rudders up, carb heat hot, throttle closed, set your rate of decent by looking out of the window. At 5ft, round out and maintain the height as the speed decays. When the lower half of the door begins to flap upwards on the J3 cub it can be assumed air speed is low enough and it will settle onto the lake. The important thing is to keep the stick FULLY back to prevent the floats nosing in. As the speed decays and the floats come "off of the step" the aircraft decelerates surprisingly quickly, like applying the handbrake in a moving car.

My first take off (in ideal conditions) was surprisingly easy and at 300ft Michael suggested another lake to our left. I dropped the nose for a low level run over the trees relishing in the fact that you don't normally get a chance to fly below 500ft with the door open on a beautiful summer's day, doing what you enjoy most. With several lakes "in the bag" we did a touch and go on what could best be described as a pond. Circuit preparation consisted of a curving downwind - base - finals turn, starting from 300ft, a 100yard run on the surface followed by a climb away. Apparently, due to the sudden deceleration on the floats it is possible to land on a lake that you simply cant take off from again!

Our return to base was to be a short landing technique, something the

boss had demonstrated hundreds of times before. So with 50ft on the altimeter at the lakes edge and the club house just 150 yards away (shockingly close in my opinion) the floats touched, we decelerated and were stationary with loads of water to spare. Truly amazing flying!

30 minutes of the most exhilarating flying for under £100, this has to go on any pilots bucket list.

Day three and Four were back at the show where we collected the money raised from the sale of the old radios. They did not make much but at least they have found a new home.

As a holiday destination Florida has many attractions that would appeal to the whole family. With careful planning it would be possible to take a 2 week vacation around Easter that could take in the Sun-n-Fun show along with a visit to the Disney theme parks, EPCOT, Sea world, Cape Canaveral, Cocoa beach, Air boat ride, Florida mall, Kissimmee old town etc. and there is no shortage of other entertainment and reasonably cheap accommodation.

Hope to see a few more people from the Kent Strut there next year.

The EAA's pilots and volunteers manage to keep going for six full days and there is something at the show for everybody. If you like microlights or light GA there are, spotters, war bird followers and air display watchers.



May Talk

This month's speaker, Paul Catanach was a bush pilot in Australia and has a humorous talk on the earlier part of his career with slides and aboriginal artefacts. Not sure if he plays the didgeridoo.



Geoff Collins "the bearded Photographer" who was our guest speaker last November has been busy photographing Chipmunks in Abbeville

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www.solleysicecream.co.uk**Radio upgrade and more next month**

Last month Peter Huxley provided photos of his panel upgrade to include an 8,33 radio but the text to go with them was missing. Peter has now provided an explanation but too late for this edition of *Skywritings* so I've held it over to next month.

There will also be some more of Gary's Sun-n-Fun photos.

Sometimes there is just not enough room!

Why are Gary and your editor looking smarter than usual this month? Just fancied a change but I prefer the younger look!

Dates for your Diary 2018

31st May Bush pilot

28th June Ripple Fly-in

29th July Sunday! BBQ EGTO

August no meeting - Rally

27th September WWII jet bomber

25th October

29th November

Christmas Dinner December TBA