

ROBIN NEWS

May 2015

The Met office say that this April was the sunniest since records began and I am delighted to say that our members have taken advantage of this and some good weather in March to enjoy plenty of flying!

The Malta fly-out was responsible for many early starts/long hard days as we struggled to get the ideal three aircraft combination airworthy, certified and ready to go. F-GORA, our new DR400/160 had to be transferred from the French to UK register with a new C of A and G-BGWC to be retrieved from its major works in France and re-certified. Should be easy under the harmonised European-wide EASA regulations? In my dreams – or nightmares as it turned out!

In the end, the DGAC (French CAA) and our CAA themselves bent over backwards to help, Pete put in terrific work and we were fit for action just in time.

I am supremely grateful for Tom Bills' massive planning input to the expedition, leaving me to get on with preparing the planes (which he helped with too!). Tom's impeccable planning and management continued throughout the trip and was a major factor in its success.

Meanwhile, the other seven of us each had roles to fulfil too - all contributing brilliantly apart from me, who as "mechanic" did not actually have my services called upon!

The weather was generally very kind to us and we had a wonderfully interesting, enjoyable, memorable and sometimes exciting time. We have done many long-range fly-outs, but although this one did not go intercontinental, it must claim top rating for enjoyment and satisfaction!

Tom Cruciani has written an excellent article on the fly-out for publication (hopefully) in Pilot Magazine. Pilot's rules require the article not to have been published prior to submission to them, so we shall have wait for that. Meanwhile there is a good range of photos and videos on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/robinflying.

NEW MEMBERS

The group's training wing continues to go from strength to strength and has started to attract students from further afield than ASW. Lyn has fitted in brilliantly with the group and now has 12+ students. Thanks to her modest demands, training has been integrated seamlessly with our normal group flying without disruption.

A number of PPLs have also joined us in the past few months – most, but by no means all, from ASW. This brings our active membership to around 50 in total, which is probably approaching the limit of our comfort zone for not upsetting the character of the group. The average age of members has gone down (youngest 15 years old!) and we now have 6 lady members. We wish all new members a very warm welcome.

AIRCRAFT

Predictably, we ended up doing much more work on G-GORA before the Malta trip than originally intended. However, this did mean that she was in excellent shape for the expedition, on which she performed faultlessly. By flying with only 2 POB and lighter than the 180s each with 3 POB, GORA was able to keep up comfortably in the cruise though dropping back slightly in long climbs. In all she has proved a delightful, quiet and docile machine much enjoyed by all who have flown in her.

G-BGWC emerged from her lengthy rebuild at Le Mans just in time for Malta, fortunately functioning perfectly straight out of the box and exceptionally smart – plus a massive 23kg lighter than before the works! Since we cannot sustain 6 Robins for the group in the long term, we are about to put BGWC up for sale. She is a superb machine, out-performing CCZX, but has the double-edged sword of a very expensive modern and complex avionics fit. Whilst ideal and highly desirable for the well-versed instrument pilot, it has sometimes proved confusing and over the top for lesser mortals – like me!

On the subject of avionics, we are responsive to members' expressed interest in IMC flying. Though we own the necessary equipment, the fact that it is currently spread between the various aircraft and our stores is unhelpful! The situation should be much improved in the next few months but we do already have sufficient capability for training for the IMC Rating and renewals.

Because she was needed for Malta, CCZX missed her slot for re-covering in France so has had to go to the back of the queue. Although the hail damage is unsightly, it does not affect her airworthiness. We anticipate keeping her for the longish term and lavishing further expenditure on her (avionic and cosmetic) on return from France later in the year.

G-IGLZ is due to emerge from hibernation at the end of May ready for members to learn tailwheel skills or aerobatics - or just to enjoy. Around 15 members have checked out on Giggles so far and I think all have found the experience highly rewarding and enjoyable – eventually! Flying a taildragger tends to start off as intensely frustrating, as the plane seems to want to take control and go in any direction except where the pilot wants. However, pilots soon overcome this phase and begin to appreciate the precision that taildragger teaches and the huge improvement in their handling skills - which transfers to the Robins too.

COSTS

A significant fall in the cost of Avgas has enabled us to put off an increase in the flying charges for the time being. We pay a discounted price for fuel at Exeter, which has been extremely reasonable but is now starting to creep up again. Combined with all our other rising costs this will inevitably require increased charges in the not-too-distant future. Please help to defer that longer by continuing to operate the aircraft as economically as safely practicable! Meanwhile, our landings will rise from £8.40 to £8.90 each with effect from 1st June.

SUNDAY FLY-OUTS

Our ad hoc Sunday Fly-outs have continued to be highly enjoyable and it has been a pleasure to have new members participating and to witness how much they enjoy the experience. Subject to weather etc, we normally congregate at the hangar at 0900 or 1130 on Sunday morning and decide then where to go for breakfast or lunch. These modest expeditions provide an excellent opportunity for the less experienced to expand their horizons in a supportive and friendly environment and an enjoyable time out for all. They represent an ideal starting point for those who would like to venture further afield on their own or to participate in one of our foreign fly-outs.

FRENCH FLY-OUT

A modest French fly-out is planned for Saturday 23rd/Sunday 24th May. Plan A is to depart Exeter in good time on the Saturday to Lannion for Customs. Then along the north coast of Brittany to the delightful island of Ouessant (Ushant) for lunch, followed by Quimper and Quiberon before over-nighting on Belle-Ile. Sunday morning to La Baule, Dinan for lunch, Dinard for Customs and home. This is a route we have flown many times but it has never failed to delight. Participating in a short fly-out like this is a vital pre-requisite for those wishing to participate in the longer foreign fly-outs.

OTHER FLY-OUTS

There will probably be more short one-night-away fly-outs during the year (tba) and Tom Bills is rumoured to be planning a Swiss fly-out (perhaps August or September?)....

PILOTS' DAY

Traditionally we have had a Pilots' Day at Easter, including a spot-the-defect pre-flight check challenge. This year's event was displaced by the Malta fly-out, exonerating those who fail every year to notice the Easter egg in the air intake! So we are planning something slightly different this year themed on "*To fly or not to fly – a question of judgement*" with brief presentations, discussion and a little flying. Provisional date Saturday 30th May, light lunch provided.

FARM STRIP DAY

A tour of some local farm strips of varying degrees of challenge, prefaced by a thorough briefing and some precision landing practice. Dependent on conditions, likely candidates include Eggesford, Bellevue, Watchford Farm and Farway Common. The last event was greatly enjoyed despite fairly exacting hot and calm weather. Date tba when we have an idea of how many would like to participate.

CROSSWIND CLINIC

We have held several of these events to help members gain confidence in their abilities to take off and land in strong crosswinds. Their very nature requires highly specific weather, so they will only be notified at short notice.

GROUP BARBECUE

Our Annual get-together for members and partners provides an excellent opportunity to meet everyone. Provisional date Saturday 4th July - invitations will be sent out nearer the time.

If you would like to participate in any of the above activities please let us know!

*Wishing you all enjoyable flying,
Dermot and Debbie*