



Another pie, sir?

Or how Fly-UK turned into Fry-UK for organiser Tom Dawson

CHILLI, curry and rice was the starting point for Fly-UK this year, followed by a full English breakfast, and we were away on another gourmet's delight. Sittles airfield in the Midlands hosted us, with about 35 aircraft flying in on the Friday evening, which must be a record number for the first night of Fly-UK.

Beer and music in the hangar made the evening for some, but I joined others and chilled out in the luxurious clubhouse.

Saturday morning, and after a full English breakfast in a sandwich we were heading towards a bacon roll at Rufforth, where over half of the airfield is a glider site, making this, my first approach, rather cautious.

Fed and watered, we headed off for our last stop of the day at Eshott, timed to coincide with their Great North Fly-In, one of the very best fly-ins of the year. Not only were there burgers on arrival, but later that night there was curry, and no shortage of beer.

They had invited an American car club, a Mini car club, a military vehicle club and a model aircraft club, so there was lots going on, then a cracking band and auction, with the big prize of the evening – a Fly-UK sticker – going for £172. That night I fell asleep to Jean Genie, and woke to bacon butties.

With the weather playing up on the Sunday, we didn't follow the planned route to Strathaven, but followed the east coast over RAF Leuchars with two fast jets in circuits beneath, and on to one of the most welcoming clubs in the UK – Longside airfield and the Buchan Aero Club.

We had arrived two days early, so they hadn't had time to prepare any food for us. Undaunted, we took a taxi to Wetherspoon's in Peterhead for roast lamb dinner followed by a giant sundae. I had planned to walk in, but my right shoe started to fall apart just in time to avoid a 5 mile hike.

Back at the huge clubhouse, we slept on the sofas, the floor, anywhere except outside in a tent. I was in a store room, but at least I got a room to myself.

Monday, and a cereal bar for breakfast made up for over-eating the night before, then on to Easter, where Davy and James had laid on a lunch including a remarkable carrot soup. There must be something special in Scottish carrots.

Whike walking that off with Colin Johnson, to the beach at Balintore, I met a young girl who, despite appearances, turned out to be rather cold. Just my luck: she was cast in bronze.

Tuesday, and delicious hot pies from the local shop set us on our way along the Great Glen, past Oban and into Bute.

With the wind against me, I had to put the Shadow down in a field and refuel from the 10-litre can I carry, then on to Bute and the Kingarth Hotel, which is recognised as providing probably the best ploughman's lunch in the UK. Even better than last year, they now serve it on two plates.

Then onwards to Strathaven (pronounced Stra'ven by the locals and those in the know). Colin MacKinnon helped us all with a fuel run, and then we were off again with Kirkbride in our sights. The White Heather Hotel, usually open only on Wednesdays and Sundays, had been persuaded to open especially for us on this Tuesday evening. They served up a superb meal, and we camped on the airfield.

At St Michael's near Blackpool, the good news was a warm welcome from Dave, and the bad news a fuel leak in the Shadow, which meant a diversion home to Plaistows to fit a slipper tank.

With my wife away on a break to Budapest, it was a takeaway from the local Indian and home alone in my own bed.

Back in the air on Friday, I rejoined the rest of the Fly-UK gang at Westonzoyland and we headed for Compton Abbas, bought an eclectic selection of cans from the local shop, and cooked the contents on stoves, breaking a loaf to mop up the sauce.

It sounds like a religious parable, but although there was no water into wine, a couple of beers flushed it down well. I broke out my whisky and shot glasses, so we went to bed warm.

Sandown, our stop next day, has seen a few changes under the new management team of Danial Subhani and current world microlight champion David Broom.

In particular, there are some really smart showers which most of our team relished, not having bathed for days. I'm told you can even plug your iPhone into them, although why you might want to beats me.

We hung around all afternoon waiting for showers to pass, then David Broom came down from a pleasure flight and reported that it was clear to the coast.

Colin and I cranked up the trusty 912, took a look ourselves, found 20 mile vis in our planned direction, reported back to the boys on the ground, and kept going.

Before long they were all airborne just before the next series of showers hit, and we made the 120 miles to Sandy in glorious weather for a warm welcome from Pete Jarvis, Annabel and other club members.

They have a great clubhouse, and there were about 18 or so for tea that night, with Pete Goff delivering some of his excellent Fly-UK songs.

While everyone else went looking for a bed, a few of us stayed up to hammer out tunes on the piano and drink the whisky. I'm no good as a pianist, but do all right as a drinker.

The next morning, a sausage in a roll finished our gastronomic tour of the UK. Colin dropped me off at Plaistows, I loaded my moped, and arrived home to find my wife in the kitchen.

"What's for tea?" I asked.

"Chilli and rice," she said.

"That'll do nicely!" I said. □

- Next year Fly-UK will start on the evening of Friday 16 June, when we will meet up at an airfield somewhere in the Midlands. Put the date in your diary – you won't go hungry!

Facing page

Map shows the Fly-UK track, omitting Wales and the Southwest

- 1 Sausage barbecue at Easter
- 2 Cooking out at Compton Abbas
- 3 Mermaid at Balintore
- 4 Ploughman's in the Kingarth Hotel
- 5 Tom Dawson with moped

