

Shadow Flying Can't whack it!

That's not to say that it's always plain sailing, but it is always exciting!

“Er, Tom, there's a tear in your wing”

Not what I wanted to hear when I was airborne, 60 miles from mainland Britain!

Followers of Fly-UK 2013 (footnote www.fly-uk.org and follow the menu) will know that my aircraft G-MWEZ suffered from an interesting split in the starboard wing top surface while flying over the Outer Hebrides last year. I repaired the fabric, then purchased a piece of 1000 gauge polythene at the Benbecula builders' merchants to wrap the leading edge and top surface of the panel for additional protection. WEZ completed the trip - 700 miles back to Plaistows. However it was clear that with 1200 airframe hours recorded, plus many more hours standing outside as a school aircraft over the years, the wing fabric was probably suffering from UV exposure. It needed complete renewal for Fly-UK 2014.



G-MWEZ at Barra airport 2013

By chance, on the way southwards at Ince Blundell I met Rick Moss, who had just recovered his aircraft and offered me a remainder length of Oratex. So, should I use Oratex (self coloured, lighter and no dope needed) or the original covering of Dupont dress lining fabric (a good deal cheaper). I opted for the Oratex, but the fabric that I hoped for would not 'materialise' in time!

So what to do? Months were passing; 2014 already. Time for another coincidence - Shadow G-MWDB was posted for sale at Plaistows. I bought it.



DB & WEZ
at Plaistows

Now with two Shadows, my first thought was to swap the damaged starboard wing with the good one on 'Delta Bravo', but they were not a good match. Apart from the diagonal brace being individual to each aircraft and the locating pin being aligned differently, it was also a different colour – one black, one white. So even

before finding out whether this would be a major mod, a minor mod or just maintenance, I decided against it.

'DB' looked tidy and in good condition, despite not having flown for a whole ten years. Of course, various rubber parts and fuel lines needed replacing, but it started first time on ten year old fuel. Surely that was a good sign!

More significantly though, 'DB' did not have a 'new' undercarriage. They are out of production and I couldn't get a permit without one. So, with the appropriate form filling and resin mixing, I swapped the undercarriage from 'WEZ'. I also swapped DB's two fibrelam fuel tanks for my aluminium tanks from Jedi. The Force must have been with me as 'DB' sailed through the subsequent inspection, weighing and test flight and the permit arrived with less than 24 hours before my departure for Fly-UK 2014.

However, the engine bearings condition was unknown and they could be rusted. Would they self-destruct within a couple of hours flying? An end float test showed little wear, but whether they would last for 2000 miles of Fly-UK would only become apparent as the trip unfolded.

So on a Friday afternoon in June 2014, I filled DB with my usual stuff, much of which isn't essential or actually needed; 7 litre of 2-T oil, petrol stove, kettle, folding beach chair, more changes of clothes and spare socks than I will use, etc. and set off for Sandy, Bedfordshire. Here we had a really warm welcome. A great location

for the start, not least because it wasn't far from home for me, so I made it there, much to the surprise and cheers from everyone else! Most people had further to fly and yet had arrived before me, including three German Pilots and one Frenchman – I had only travelled 35 miles. The strip is not short, but with trees at the threshold a third of the



Enjoying the sun, beer and company at Sandy

runway is unavailable to most aircraft. And if I had remembered to use my flaps I'm sure that I wouldn't have needed so much brake! The club organised a smashing meal, cool beer and warm sunshine, which was enjoyed well into the evening.

After Saturday breakfast we were making for Boston, Full Sutton then Eshott. Boston has a great cafe - so it was bacon butties and a coffee. I was flying in company with Col Johnson (SkyRanger) and Capt. Cogger (GT450). With unsettled weather we agreed to omit Full Sutton and strike out directly for Eshott. Despite having clearance to overfly Newcastle airport we elected to route around to the west as the cloud base was low and unpredictable.

Fly-UK hit Eshott on the weekend of their annual Great North Fly-In. What a great weekend with vintage cars, classic aircraft and much more. At the rest break for the band during the Saturday evening disco a Fly-UK sticker raised £85; more than any other raffle prize, including a Flight in a Cessna, so everyone was well pleased!

On Sunday local pilot John Hunter (Quik 912) joined us, plus a 'hitch-hiker' who was keen to join Fly-UK. This was the girlfriend of James Sanders whose GT450 pillion seat was full of luggage and who regretted having to find her a place in another aircraft. I was the lucky person who was able to make space for Ellen, by entrusting my luggage to the top of James' and John's already well loaded flexwings. My two fuel cans were taken by two other pilots and I didn't see either of them again until much later in the week! So Ellen and I continued two-up in DB as we set off northwards, passing close to Lindisfarne and Alnwick Castles and with lots of low beach flying along the east coast and into Scotland.



My self-loading luggage!



Chasing Shadows

We crossed the Firth of Forth near Bass Rock and made the first stop at Kingsmuir, Fife, where Keith, the instructor from Balado had relocated for the duration of 'T in the Park'. It is a simple field but the refreshments provided by Keith were well worth the visit. Then overnight at Longside (Peterhead) where the club is always so welcoming that it seems a shame not to go there every year. They let us 'camp' in their club house while our aircraft were well looked after in the hangars. They even have a shower!

Monday was supposed to take us to Kirkwall, but the weather beat us all. Instead, after a late start we made our way to Easter then took our favourite route to the west coast, through the valley via Achnasheen. The military Notamed us through the Danger Zone with one hour to make the transit. What a great low level flight! Arriving at Plockton we had a choice

of several pubs but we decided on the chippy by the beach for our evening meal. I can't resist battered haggis.

Tuesday morning saw us marking time at Plockton while the weather gods played games in the heavens! We got away at noon. Beneath low cloud we followed the coast, crossing the Ardnamurchan hills before finding our way up the Sound of Mull into Glenforsa. Then more coastal flying, passing the steam train at Mallaig, a touch and go on Bute for Ellen's benefit, and onwards to Strathaven. Here Col and I were given a lift into town and placed our pizzas order for delivery to the airfield. Laden with drinks from the supermarket we cadged a lift back with the pizza delivery. Excellent! The evening was spent in the Strathaven club house.

Wednesday we got away early. DB was reloaded with my kit plus much of Colin's while he took Ellen to Carlisle airport so that she could return to Derbyshire for a family engagement. I even got one of my 10 litre petrol cans back; the other had gone down in a Scottish loch. (footnote www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkqZGaJasDc) Taking a direct route, almost along the motorway and flying low past the wind farms we arrived at Glassonby. Owner, Robin provided a fuel run and hot coffee in the clubhouse. Onwards to Ince for another fuel run and another coffee! After handing back Colin's stuff I forgot to check my rear hatches and took off with one unsecured. "Oh dear!", said I, as it flew open, damaging part of its frame. I vociferously blamed my passenger, but as Ellen was on the train at the time no-one took me seriously. Colin provided gaffer tape to seal it, then off again for Llanbedr.



Fully loaded

This airfield re-opened only two weeks earlier after passing from RAF to commercial use. The flying club turned out to help tie down our aircraft at the edge of the apron or secure them in hangars. Camping wasn't permitted so we took a short hike to Shell Island camp site (the largest in Europe) where we enjoyed a swim in Cardigan Bay before making full use of their restaurant and bar.



Jerome: "oo-el-em pilote" at Shell Island

I was up early on Thursday morning, watching the porpoises moving down the coast. By 8.30 we had de-camped and walked to the airfield just before high tide. A few minutes later we would have had wet feet on the causeway. Next stop Shobdon for a refuel and snack lunch.

Rick Bremner (with Marian in a Kitfox) and I had relied upon them having 2-stroke oil, but unfortunately none was available, so we made a short hop to Broadmeadow Farm where Fly-UK pilot, Paddy O'Rourke is based and he kindly ran me to the local garage. After refuelling it was full speed with GPS crosshairs on Sandown and an eye to the forecast weather.

A front was approaching from the southwest which became all too apparent as I squeezed through the gap between the heavy showers and danger zone D123. I knew that Rick was unlikely to follow as he had a charging problem; unable to start his aircraft when I left. I arrived at Sandown in the rain and was glad to be down. But the part of the journey that I struggled with most was putting on my waterproofs whilst still in the cockpit!

Friday's weather was excellent at Sandown, while the weather further north was unflyable. Taking advantage of the sunshine we spent the morning on the beach! By the mid-afternoon it was clearing and we departed for Redlands. Club members took us to the pub and after a good meal we were properly entertained by Peter Goff (Foxbat) with his Ukelele.



Pete Goff and his Ukelele

Saturday morning, after the weather had cleared sufficiently, we left Redlands to regroup at Oakley, then on towards our destination at Headon. We were expected at Wolvey, but the rain squalls kept me away, despite trying. Protracted circling while looking for an opportunity to approach left me marginal on fuel for Headon so I put down on Nottinghamshire Showground, carrying my only can to the garage for 10 litres. Then just a short run into Headon for Martin's Hangar Bash. I arrived in plenty of time for a burger before the band started its warm up. By the

time it was well underway I was sitting with a small group in the caravan where it was quieter and we could talk!

For most accurately predicting his destination each day, Ian Donnellan (Gyro G-IGLL) won the coveted Fly-UK 'cup'. On Sunday Steve Ivell, last year's winner, presented it to him.



Steve Graham Pete Mark Tom Col John & Ian. He's not really that small!

Sunday's weather was good enough for everyone to get home after another great adventure. By now you'll have guessed that my engine bearings were OK. We had travelled about 1500 miles with much of it over mountain, moorland and sea, where a landing would be difficult. So with some relief I arrived at 1800 feet over my home field at Plaistows. I throttled back and the engine seized. The fan belt had worn down quickly due to rusty pulleys and finally snapped. Fortunately I was able to glide down to my chosen runway where I was grateful for help with a push to my hangar! Home at last! But not quite with the panache that I had intended.

Fortunately I got away without a permanently seized engine. It is now being stripped by my engineer (Colin) and rebuilt with new and reconditioned parts. Hoping Fly-UK 2015 will be without incident.

Why not join us to see what all the fun is about? It starts on Friday evening, 19th June at an airfield 'Somewhere in the Midlands'. First stop will be Spamfield for the Saturday fly-in.

Just register at www.fly-uk.org by 7th June 2015

ENDS

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