

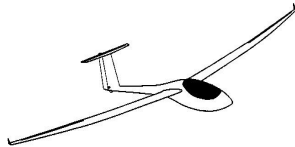
From the home of the *Scottish Gliding Union*

Portmoak Press

Editorial – Ian Easson

Issue 33 brings New Year wishes to one and all and a hope that we can look forward to some good flying opportunities as we get out of winter.

I make no apologies for plugging the book again in this issue and to remind you that every penny goes back into the club funds. Copies available at the club or contact me by e-mail (ian.easson@btinternet.com). If you are still unsure, why don't you read Hugh Woodsend's review on the next page.



In this issue we hear from a well known contributor (Slarty Bartfast) who relays his water-bound experiences down the Clyde. Another regular, Frank Smith recalls a holiday in Europe and his expedition

antics at Shennington last year. And Jim Mattocks tells us about the T53B. As it says below, the Polly Vacher Talk is NOT to be missed! She is giving an illustrated talk about her solo round the world flight in a single engine Piper Dakota...



The event takes place at 7:30 pm on Friday 30th Jan in Room M405, James Weir Building, 75 Montrose Street, Glasgow, G1 1XJ. Tickets are £10 and can be purchased from Irene at the club (01592 840543) or office@scottishglidingcentre.co.uk.

Finally, the usual plea to all members, new or old, experienced or ab initio, regular contributors or not, to consider submitting material for *Portmoak Press*. Details of how to do this can be found below. Cut off dates are as follows: end of December for January, end of March for April, end of June for July and end of September for October. Material can be sent to me either typed or hand-written and dropped in my mailbox beside the payphone, or e-mail me at ian.easson@btinternet.com



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Information Meeting

Almost 100 people squeezed themselves into the club house to attend the Information Meeting on Saturday 13th December. John Williams opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the purpose was to cascade information and proposals, not to make final decisions. Bruce Brebner entertained us all with some excellent graphical representations of what the site might look like in the years to come, and Ian Easson explained the Star-Rating system in use by the Visit Scotland. Some suggestions around the signage on site and the entrance lobby notice boards were discussed with a view to pursuing a four-star rating early in the New Year.

Board Members

Chairman	John Williams
Vice-Chairman & Winch	Douglas Tait
Treasurer	Kevin Hook
Technical & W.O.A.	Joe Fisher
Membership Communications	Alan Boyle
Club Secretary	Alec Stevenson
Buildings & Property	Mike Cartney

Following the above meeting, some sterling work has been carried out by Vic Leitch, Scott Hardie and Gerry Marshall and we shall soon be seeing new signs around the site. Watch this space for an update on our star rating.

Club News

The next two Friday lectures have been published and are as follows:
 6th February – Winch Launching and Cable Breaks (Brian Scougal) and Competition flying for beginners (Alan Boyle)
 20th February – Wave Flying (John Williams) and Gliding in South Africa (John Dunnington).

Details of the five-day holiday courses have been finalized and can be seen on the notice board at the club or on our web page. First one starts on 3rd May.

Just in case you haven't noticed, the club web-site has gone through a major re-design. The web master is Vic Leitch and he is keen to ensure that the pages contain up to date information, so if you spot anything that has gone out of date, drop him an e-mail via the web site. We now have both the “.com” and “.co.uk” domains, so you can use either www.scottishglidingcentre.com

Volunteers Required

As part of our drive to attract new members, we are considering attending various aviation events during the year and we are looking for volunteers to help at these events. Early suggestions include the air show day at East Fortune (25th July), and the open day at Perth (date to be announced). We would normally bring a static two seater to these events and it may be an opportunity for WOA as well as SGU. If you would like to help with any of these events, or if you have suggestions for other events, please let me know.

Ian Easson

Want to see the latest Eurostar 3-axis machine? Keith Miller is hoping to bring the Scottish Aero Club's latest addition at Perth down to Portmoak in the coming weeks. When the date(s) get finalised, we will put something on the notice board at the club house so please keep an eye out.



Four Men in a Boat

I should have known better. It was a foolish thing to do. Why did I get drawn into it? Will I never learn? With the characters involved in the proposed adventure and my knowledge of their history I blame myself entirely for not running away to some far-flung corner of the globe. On the face of it, the idea was simplicity itself as the 4 of us are all active or retired glider pilots and all we planned to do was sail around in the quieter waters of the Clyde estuary for about a week, calling at suitable berths (watering holes) throughout. The duly elected captain of the noble vessel was Dave 'Captain' Fraser (ex CFI of Strathaven Gliding Club) who was so elected as it was his boat and he was the only one with any sea going experience and the rest of us were simply sponging a trip. The crew were a motley bunch comprising Fred 'Jonah' Joynes who I blame for the inception of the whole business, John 'Paintpot' Henry and myself Slarty Bartfast. The navigator was to be Paintpot. As those of you who have flown with him no doubt know he is a very capable navigator in the air but it doesn't seem to be so well known that he is a terrible navigator on the ground – or even on the water! Take my word for it, or talk to 'Toad' Fisher on this issue. The odds on Paintpot being a capable navigator on the Clyde were reckoned by the rest of us as being about even, but in any event it was unlikely that we would get 'really' lost although we might be temporarily unsure of our position. To a man, any member of the crew could smell at pub at 5 nautical miles, upwind in a force 8.

Even before the start, plans took a turn for the worse when Slarty received a short notice Hospital Appointment Card specifying the Tuesday afternoon following to the agreed Monday start date. To compound the problems, the weather remained obdurately wet over the weekend prior to the planned departure with a forecast of continued rain on the Monday and Tuesday. So the five day sail was rescheduled as a three day sail with departure now set for the Wednesday at 10:00 hours although there was some debate as to whether or not it was to be Zulu time. The intention to

return to Ayr Harbour on the Friday around midday remained inviolate.

Wednesday dawned brightly, as forecast, and Slarty and Jonah set off from Houston to pick up Paintpot at Kilmarnock, which they duly did after joining him in a mug of tea. In the interest of environmental correctness the crew arrived in one car at Ayr Harbour at the designated hour. The Captain was already on board Cloud Nine stowing away essential supplies, which seemed to the casual observer to be mainly liquid. Cheery greetings were exchanged between the boat and the harbour wall and the invitation to come on down the gangway and board the vessel were readily accepted. Paintpot led the way and quickly made a passable attempt at a loop on the somewhat slippier than expected gangway. Everyone laughed but he wasn't the last or the most spectacular.

The boat was examined and baggage and supplies brought down from the quayside and stored away on board. Before leaving port it was decided by the crew that a visit should be made to a charming little bistro on the quayside for the purposes of immediate victualling and relief. The food was ordered and consumed but sadly the only toilet was out of commission with no alternative seen or known of. At last the captain and crew were on board and at their stations, the motor started and the boat cast off. We made our way out of Ayr harbour and out into the flat calm waters of the Clyde. There was no wind blowing so we couldn't use the sail and therefore powered our way at a leisurely 3 ½ knots up the coast past Troon, Ardrossan and Portencross point as we made our way to the west of Little Cumbrae. As we neared Hunterston power station we recalled that a fellow aviator was currently working in the confines of the site and that he still sailed whenever a convenient opportunity came along. In the secure knowledge that he couldn't join us and that we would only be taunting him we each opened a tin of beer and gave him a cheery phone call to appraise him of our situation and how pleasantly the voyage was going. He wished us well!

As we sailed steadily past Little Cumbrae I



saw that there was a disused lighthouse and associated buildings on the island's west side that I had never known of and began to wonder if Little Cumbrae was inhabited, and if so by how many and how did they earn a living, or did they commute to work and if so how. On the other hand they could just be rich, retired or plain unemployed with no prospect of employment and all day to do as they pleased in which case shopping might be a bit of a problem especially in the winter months. By this time the east coast of Bute was in view and I started to look out for Mount Stuart house, as it has been my promise, for some time, to visit it with Mrs Bartfast. Eventually the house hove into view or rather the top of the house as it was well screened by trees. Progress so far had been a bit slower than planned and it looked as if we might be a bit late for the dinner that he had booked at what he promised to be a charming little waterfront restaurant so phoned ahead to appraise them of the situation. The rain came on just before we turned towards Rothesay harbour and we phoned Roy Surtees, a Regius CFI of the SGU who now resides on the island, to update him on our progress and to garner advice on where to park the boat. By the time we got into harbour and tied up at the pontoon at the rear of the main pier we had realised that when we were in the vicinity of the Caledonian McBrayne ferry's wash Cloud Nine was rolling noticeably and that when the ferry entered or left the pier it was especially noticeable. Well, the ferry stopped running shortly and didn't start again until 08:00 the next morning by which time we should be thinking about getting up. Roy joined us shortly; I pulled out an unopened bottle of Jura, plonked it on the table and went off to avail myself of the Victorian award winning pierhead facilities. On my return to the boat I was offered a wee dram out of my own bottle by my now not so drouthy cronies. On examining the bottle I was somewhat taken aback at the absence of liquid in it. The others had already benefited from a pierhead call from a waitress enticing them towards the culinary delights awaiting, so we gathered ourselves together, jumped ship and went off to the restaurant, which turned out to be

devoid of customers other than ourselves. Fortunately strong drink was readily available as it was Roy's birthday and the assembly was able to wish him many happy returns in a traditional manner. After dinner Paintpot phoned his niece who happened to be on the island, who then joined us with her husband, and we set off to another establishment for further refreshment. On approaching the point of saturation Paintpot and Jonah set off to spend the night with Paintpot's niece. The Captain and myself went back to the boat for a well earned nights repose, after a wee top up. Day one had finished without incident. Day two (Thursday) started with Cloud Nine being rocked by the departing 08:00 ferry. On rising and going up on deck it became apparent that the day had dawned in a grey and overcast manner. So, off to the Victorian munificence to carry out the early day ablutions, a wee walk into town to garner rolls and replenish liquids, make and consume breakfast and then a further walk round town while awaiting the return of the crew. Jonah and Paintpot duly arrived and we quickly set off for Millport although by this time we had quite a strong southerly breeze and the Captain had doubts about this destination due to it being renowned as an uncomfortable berth in this wind direction. Once we cleared the harbour area the Captain hoisted the foresail and off we went at a spanking 4 knots heading across the northern end of Cumbrae. As we turned to head south towards Millport it was obvious that we were going to have to tack, despite the use of the mighty engine, between the Eastern Shore of Great Cumbrae and the western coast of the Clyde. After some time we got down as far as Largs and then beyond Millport where we decided not to stop due to the wind having freshened. Slowly we progressed onwards towards our new destination of Ardrossan and it seemed to take forever to reach and pass Hunterston Ore Terminal and then to get down to the Power Station. This time there was no talk of taunting our fellow aviator then currently working within the confines of the power station. By the time we had passed beyond the power station at about 15:00



we began to realise that we were making slow progress indeed and that the wind was now showing 20 to 22 knots. The Captain had gone below for a rest and the crew were taking turns at the helm, manning the ropes and courying into the wheelhouse for shelter from the wind whilst hoping that better progress could be made once Portencross Point had been rounded. Slarty's beat went well as did Paintpot's. Jonah's went well until about his second turn back towards Little Cumbrae when there was a sudden noticeable flapping of the foresail due to the foremast having become detached from the deck. Things got interesting and the captain appeared on deck. After some time, profanity and difficulties the foresail was dropped, bundled up and stowed below decks where it couldn't cause further annoyance and the foremast was lashed to the rail at the front of Cloud Nine although it now had an obvious bow in it that hadn't been there before. The wind was too strong to raise the mainsail and all now depended on 'Thumper' the single cylinder marine diesel engine. Thumper soon demonstrated that it was no match for wind and tide and the decision was made to turn for Troon Marina and berth the night there. With the wind and tide now with us we quickly made up on Hunterston Ore Terminal and hence to the Marina entrance and holding berth. After a quick call to the marina control centre we were allocated a berth, made our way to it and tied up. Once the boat was tied up and secured the damage was examined. It was quickly ascertained that nothing had in fact broken but that two lock nuts had failed to prevent the rotation of a straining tube that was threaded one end left hand and the other end right hand. The foremast however was even more bent than we had believed. At that point we went off to the Restaurant where the first round of drinks went down like a rocket! We ate, had another round or two of drinks and went back to the boat.

Day 2 had not ended without incident and we had failed to get to Ardrossan.

Day 3 (Friday) dawned for Cloud Nine at the back of 08:00. We had all slept well due to adrenaline release and the physical efforts of yesterday. The challenge of

getting to Ayr by lunchtime loomed large in everyone's mind so we carried out our ablutions, had breakfast and set off smartly. On leaving harbour it was immediately apparent that last night's weather forecast had been accurate and that the wind and tide were against us again. Thumper appeared to be running well but doubts awakened yesterday about its ability to drive us forwards were quickly reawakened. Back to the business of tacking to and fro between Little Cumbrae and the mainland, and very slowly getting towards Portencross. As the day passed and lunch came and went we were getting a bit down in mouth but still hoping against hope to reach Ardrossan although progress down river seemed to be getting slower with the passing of time.

By mid afternoon, with Jonah back on the helm we realised that relative to one of the buoys we seemed to be going backwards and so we adjusted our heading. On nearing the east bank of the Clyde we ran along parallel to the coast in the hope that the current would not impeded our progress to the same extent but quite close to Portencross we observed a gentleman leisurely strolling along the waters edge who was certainly making noticeably better progress than we were. The consensus of opinion was that there was something wrong with the engine, transmission or the propeller especially as Cloud Nine seemed to go backwards more quickly than it went forwards. Time to throw the towel in again. So it was about turn and back to Largs again! We arrived back at Largs Marina, were allocated our old berth, returned to it and tied up. Paintpot leapt off the boat and went running off along the pontoons and up the gangway towards the security gate leaving the rest of the crew wondering what had brought this about. The despondent crew started to tie up the boat and to this end the Captain threw a rope on to the pontoon. He obviously doesn't know his own strength as the rope skidded to the far edge of platform and then dribbled over despite best efforts to stop it. It quickly sank out of sight and was lost. The Captain was noticeably not at peace with himself. Paintpot rejoined us and we removed all of our gear



from the boat, closed it up and went off to report to the control centre and order a taxi to take us to Ayr. It was now 18:58 and Slarty was supposed to be at a New Hangar Group meeting at Portmoak at 20:00 and failed to make it. So there was the poor boat, foremast bent, motor/drive/propeller not operating to its best. Further, the bit of string and wire rope that should have been attached to the foresail at one end and tied round a wee hook at the bottom of the main mast, was dangling from the top of the main mast with the other end tied round the rail at the front of the boat. There was no obvious way of getting it back down apart from climbing the mast or lowering it. The Captain offered his opinion that lowering the mast was b****y expensive! We were all past caring.

Day 3 had not ended without incident.

On the Monday Paintpot made up a recovery device of a pole with fishing hooks attached and tried to recover the rope from its watery repose. He succeeded in catching onto the coil of rope and got it to just below the surface but it slipped and sank again. He also managed to connect with the piece of string at the mast but then found that the other end had been tied to the front rail and so had to let it go. As soon as the other end was released he didn't manage to hook the required end.

On the Tuesday both the Captain and Paintpot arrived and managed to recover the coil of rope and the wee bit of string on the mast with the Mark 2 grappler. Life had started to improve.

On the Friday the Captain, Paintpot, Jonah and his brother successfully brought Cloud Nine from Largs to Troon thus bringing to a close the 3 day voyage on day 10 and placing the boat in the hands of the repair men.

What have I learned from the venture? Well looking back on it, it wasn't dull or boring but I really should have known better. If you wish to know the origins of Fred's nickname for this article than ask him about some of his earlier experiences when out fishing on the briny. No wonder he kept quiet about them until we were well under way. My other thought was 'why would anyone who is supposed to have

studied meteorology call a boat Cloud Nine when they should have known what Cloud Nine meant in the old cloud classification system'?

Slarty Bartfast

Gliding in Italy

With the British weather becoming more inclement with each passing year, the only place to be assured of sunshine for your holidays is to take that holiday abroad. Which is why, once again, in early May we were aboard the Superfast ferry with our motorhome, sailing from Rosyth to Zeebrugge on our journey to Greece. The next part was to take a ferry from Ancona in Italy across the Adriatic to Igourmenitsa on the Greek mainland. Having bathed in the blue Mediterranean, soaked up masses of glorious sunshine, eaten at exquisite tavernas and drank the local wines it was time to start the serious business of the holiday.

No gliding enthusiast should ever venture abroad without establishing the whereabouts of several gliding clubs near to his routing. I realise that if your beloved finds this information before you set off, you could be in serious trouble or worse. However my beloved, mellowed and nicely browned by weeks of exposure, actually encourages me. To glide that is.

So, on our return journey up through Italy we stopped at a campsite near the small town of Borgo San Lorenzo, some 12 miles from Florence and also from information on the 'Internet', near to a gliding club. Having arrived on a Friday, we then spent Saturday looking for the airfield. The girl at the campsite's reception desk gave us directions to the airfield. Unfortunately when we arrived 'The Airfield' turned out to be a power only operation. Never mind, back to the receptionist and this time we set off armed with an aerial map down loaded from her computer and the co-ordinates of the gliding club. It still wasn't easy to find, but eventually we came across a sign that looked promising and having threaded the motorhome down a narrow rutted track with overhanging

vegetation, there it was - an airfield.



Why do gliding sites live in the back of beyond or even further?

Parked 'Molly' Motorhome, left Margaret guzzling coffee and set off in search of some friendly glider pilots. But by half an hour later I'd found nobody. I'd gone through hangars, workshops, offices and even tried the toilets - nobody. Everything was unlocked, doors open, equipment laying about, but no people - strange.

Back to report to Margaret, who suggested perhaps they were all airborne. Pretty clever cookie my wife. But no, there must be someone left on the ground. Anyway, we had lunch sat outside under the welcome shade of a Field Maple Tree (I used to work for the Forestry Commission and know about these things), hoping that a person or persons would turn up and he did.

An elderly Italian drove through the gates and before he could disappear (remember the others) I engaged him in conversation, which was rather difficult as he didn't speak English and my Italian is limited to a few very basic words. However, somehow, he managed to impart the fact that there would be no flying today and to come back tomorrow.

So that's exactly what we did. This time it was all very different, there were people present for a start and the first guy I spoke to had a very good command of English. Turned out he was the club's president and also a commercial pilot. What followed was a very pleasant day spent in the company of the club's members, including a flight in a K21 with one Carlo Bartolini, an ex-president of the club. We had a delightful hours soaring in the skies over the Tuscany countryside. Carlo allowed me to do all the flying. We'd been towed up behind a Rallye. During the flight we chatted away and I learnt that he was a Professor and taught Geology at the University of Florence. Bathed in sunshine we toured the local area with Carlo pointing out places of interest, particularly the old and the new architecture as seen from the air.

The tow to 2000 feet and one hours soaring cost 50 euros. The club's site was about 12 - 15 miles from the

city of Florence and well worth a visit if anyone was in that vicinity.

The full title of the club is 'Aeroclub Volovelistico del Mugello'. It's worth logging on to their web site, which is www.mugellogliding.aero as there are some very nice aerial photos.

And now for something different
Shenington 08

Returning from the continent in July it was now time to look forward to the Clubs visit to Shenington in August. Perhaps this year would produce some good soaring weather. Ever the optimist, I trailed the Vega down South for the clubs two week expedition at Edgehill. In a year of very indifferent conditions it was expecting a lot to encounter any sort of a good day.

The first week started with sunny periods interrupted by some prolonged heavy showers. It was a case of grab some local soaring while you could.

Then came the Friday and for once a forecast that didn't threaten rain of any description. The only downside from our enlightened task setter was that there might be some creeping overcast drifting in from the West later in the day. At briefing, all this materialised into us being handed 300 km or 500 km task sheets.

It was good to see folk galvanised into action with the prospect of being able to leave the site.

I'd personally taken one of the 500 km sheets, not out of any bravado, just that they had run out of the 300km ones. With the Vega ready to go and trailed down to the launch point, it was just a case of watching the sky and deciding when to go. With cu building and the sky looking promising it was time to launch. Kathy, Shenington's intrepid winch driver gave me a nice smooth launch to 1200 feet and I was soon climbing under a well developed cloud. With the drift being to the east (the direction I wanted to go) in the westerly wind I just circled up to nearly cloud base before making for Banbury.

For a while I was flying in company with Alastir in his Astir. Having topped up for height over the town

it was a case of put the nose down, crank up the



speed and get going along track.

But it's never as simple as that, is it. Pushing out beyond Banbury and to the East nothing worked, the clouds were there and they looked just the same but they weren't keeping me up. Decision time, carry on hoping they will or backtrack? My axiom is to stay with the lift. So, back over Banbury and we're going up again, which is rather nice. With cloud base lifting slightly I decided to try heading to the east again, now conditions were improving giving 2 - 3 knots to 3500 feet.

It's probably worth mentioning here, just as an aside, that Hinton in the Hedges airfield lies not too far from Banbury in a South-easterly direction. Quickly picked out on your half mill map. They glide and also have a parachuting centre there, but more importantly to me anyway, was the parachute packing facilities offered by Point Zero who are housed there. I dropped our chute in for repack and pick up next day for a very reasonable price. Perhaps I should also mention that the outward destination for this flight was the turn point at Newmarket set just a little to the north of the town. Talking of Newmarket takes me back to my National Service days, when I would often find myself thumbing a lift on the A11 which runs close to the town on my way north to Coltishall the RAF station in Norfolk. There I spent two illustrious years as an Instrument Mechanic pre -flighting a whole host of visiting aircraft when attached to Station Flight. These included Venom's, Vampire's, Meteor's, Javelin's and even a Mosquito. We're talking serious vintage stuff here.

Anyway back to reality and the flight in hand.

Pressing on from the Banbury area I'd chosen to run out on a line towards Towcester which would nicely take me between the towns of Northampton and Milton Keynes, crossing the M1 in the process. Any task flown to the east of Shenington gives relatively easy navigation and no restrictive airspace considerations, however Notams for the day had specified that there was activity in the Southwest area of Northampton which should be avoided.

Running out on track I noticed a glider way down below -

couldn't be Alastir could it? So, over the M1 and now where? Well I'd always wanted to have a look at Sackville airfield from the air and as Sally in her Pegase was trying for her silver distance to there, it seemed like a good idea. Passing overhead at 4000 feet I was now to the north of Bedford.

For some while now a large lump of water had been looming up in the distance off to the left of track, which was encouraging as it could only be Grafham Water. I find lakes and reservoirs a very useful aid to navigation, rivers can be misleading and mistaken as they snake their way across the countryside. Grafham Water is quite a large expanse of water situated some 5 - 6 miles north of St. Neots. Leaving this feature on my left I was now entering the difficult part of the flight - nothing to do with navigation or staying aloft - something more basic, I desperately needed a pee.

I still haven't really, in all honesty, mastered this operation, it remains a serious flaw. I've chatted to all the knowledgeable folk about their approach, but for me it's a performance. You could add the word dramatic as well. It all starts with the Vega in a shallow dive.

Pushing on the countryside now looked to be rather familiar and I realised that I'd flown over some of this area before when on an expedition to Gransden Lodge home of the Cambridge Club in 2004. It was very tempting to divert to the South and pay an aerial visit. But time was getting on and there was still the return leg to be flown, with that possibility of an overcast to worry about. Cambridge came up to starboard and seemed to stay there for ever as the sprawling city unfolded. Last time I flew by Cambridge it was to the South with a view of the airport and on my way to turn the dis -used airfield at Stradishall, today I was passing to the North. Throughout this outward run cloud base had steadily risen and was now at 5000 feet, which I always feel is a nice comfortable height to work from. The very wet weather during harvest time, meant even now in the middle of August there were numerous fields of standing oats, barley and wheat

to be cut, which concentrated the mind somewhat.



Newmarket is only a short distance from Cambridge - some 80 furlongs in racing terms and I was soon rounding the turn point and heading for home. This turn point actually sits quite close to a combined MATZ encompassing three strategic airfields - Mildenhall, Lakenheath and Honnington. The history of these three war time airfields, which were used primarily for bomber operations, is set out on their web sites and well worth a visit. If only to realise the sacrifices made by those crews. A combined total of 260 Wellingtons, Stirlings and Lancasters were lost on operations from Mildenhall alone.

The homeward leg produced no nasty surprises. At one point a Libelle joined my thermal lower down and we both threw lazy circles in the sky, as we topped up our height. Then he or she departed, slipping away with sunlight dancing on the wings. It looked so magical I followed for a while delighting in the spectacle of watching another glider in flight. With cumulus scattered all over the sky and the firm bases giving strong lift it was a joy to be in the air. I did need to backtrack just the once when getting slightly low and in doing so, once again realised how much easier it is to view and assess the clouds when approaching them from the sunward side.

Back overhead Shenington and decision time, to extend this leg or land? Out to the West there were certainly the first signs of the forecast high cover moving in, but it wasn't that, that made up my mind. No! It was the fact I needed another pee, and badly. So, an excellent day and a most enjoyable flight. Sally achieved her Silver distance to Sackville, being retrieved by John and Nick and then a phone message had me hitching up Alastir's trailer and picking him up from a huge rape field near the village of Litchborough which is close to Towcester. They were still in the process of harvesting the crop and the very friendly farmer came over in his battered old landrover and offered to tow us out if we got stuck. Luckily we didn't need his services.

There we are then, tired but content, late back to the airfield, missed dinner. Snacked on chocolate and an apple in my farm digs and then slept like a baby.

Why don't you come on a club expedition one of these years,



you might just enjoy yourself or you could nip across the channel and try something a little more exotic.

Frank Smith

Phoenix Arisen

The Restoration of Slingsby T53B/C Phoenix - (G-DDHE)

Many of you will have noticed that the Slingsby T53 (known in the past as the "Bank Tank"), has been flying at Portmoak for some time now after a gap of six years. This is because a group of SGU members who also are involved with the Aviation Preservation Society of Scotland (APSS) at the Museum of Flight, became interested in the T53 as an aircraft of historical importance in the British aviation preservation world, since it is the only example of a British all metal glider. The aircraft had been bought by the RAF Kirknewton Gliding Group in 1975 and was flown at Kirknewton by RAF gliding personnel there, as well at Leuchars for a period in 1986, before moving to Portmoak, where it came to our attention.

So, in November 2001, we "acquired" the airframe with a view to restoring it to flying condition, from the then syndicate which included Eoin MacDonald, and Ken Moffat who is now in the new syndicate. APSS normally work on the preservation of the national collection of aircraft at the Museum of Flight at East Fortune Airfield in Lothian. However, as Museum work was temporarily suspended in 2002, we seized the opportunity of switching to the restoration a flying airframe, as a change from museum artefacts, however interesting they might be. Following three years of careful work, the Slingsby T53B/C, airframe number 1718, and trigraph DHG, as it then was, had its post-restoration test-flight on Tuesday 8th December 2004, in the capable and experienced hands of our retired APSS Chief Engineer, Jim O'Donnell, who admits to at least 8000 hours in gliders.

Jim told me that the flight went without any hitches.

"The T53 was aero-towed by John Riley flying the Pawnee tug. I released at 3500 ft and

took the aircraft through the usual test regime, which includes stability and trim checks, control effectiveness, turns followed by stalls with a close check on instrument readings during this phase. This was followed by a dive to something approaching Vne, and I rounded off with some tight turns, pulling up to 3.5g. Approach speed was 50 knots and I was very impressed with the absorption and resilience of the new undercarriage we fitted. Overall, the performance is close to the K13 and it will give a good account of itself in thermalling”.

The restoration work was carried out at East Fortune mainly by joint APSS/SGU members working under Jim’s direction. It included the re-fitting of both instrument panels, the re-setting, re-riveting and strengthening of the central wing fixture, the replacement of wires and pulleys operating the control surfaces, the replacement and re-setting of the aileron hinges and pins and the replacement of a new undercarriage spring damping system as well as a complete paint strip and re-spray of the wings.

This latter proved to be quite a task in view of the huge surface area involved and Frank Fiddes did a splendid job here.

Prior to the disastrous fire in the Slingsby works in 1968, the RAF had decided to order a modified version of the T53A for the Air Cadets as the basic two seat tandem trainer. Trials were carried out at Boscombe Down on a T53B and subsequently, the RAF modifications with the exception of reduced forward sweep, were incorporated into two surviving airframes one of which was 1718. Later airframes and modifications were given the name Phoenix in recognition of the company’s recovery from the fire. Because our airframe was modified closely to the RAF specification, presumably C, we decided to use the then current RAF paint scheme, minus the roundels, based on a photograph from that period.

This has been a great success. It looks smart and the colour scheme has a good air to air visibility impact, something I first noticed during the test flight when I followed it in the Falke and took pictures, at an appropriate distance, of course.

On my first flight in the T53 - immediately after a

PIK 20D, by way of comparison – it struck me as a pleasant, roomy and very stable airframe, with excellent all round visibility. In light ridge soaring conditions, we had no difficulty in holding our own with the glass fibre jobs and it is notable that over the years there have been some many high level flights, including Eoin MacDonald’s Gold Height in October 1993. Tight manoeuvring failed to produce the much talked about “clanking” in the fuselage, a tribute perhaps to the quality of the restoration and strengthening work. Positive use of rudder is needed, not surprising in view of the long wings, as well as stick movement to maintain attitude and speed when the large paddle like airbrakes are extended. Because we had a very good log book record and all mandatory modifications had been recorded, we had little difficulty in re-registering it under the EASA system, as G-DDHE, thanks to the splendid work of Craig Chatburn.

The Slingsby T53B/C is flown at Portmoak by a syndicate who are members, separately, of both APSS and the SGU. APSS have for a long time had an unofficial “flying sub-group” of members. Currently this numbers some 15 flying members, either glider or power pilots, or both. So ownership of the a flying airframe fits in well with our other activities such as the Museum airframes, the Radio and Radar exhibition which we operate on behalf of the Museum, and, of course our own special project, the building of a full scale flying replica, of the Sopwith 1 ½ Strutter, from the original plans. This 1915 design was selected for its historical importance, being the first British military aircraft to have a forward firing machine gun. The airframe should be finished about four years from now. Needless to say, anyone who is interested in flying the T53 or in the other APSS activities should contact us.

Our intention is to keep the T53 flying, as a tribute to Slingsby’s contribution to British gliding, and for the benefit of APSS members. We are also delighted that the Vintage Glider Club has accepted our airframe and we now operate as part of the

Vintage Glider Movement.

James Mattocks



Some Characteristics

<i>Glider Type</i>	<i>T.53B/C Phoenix</i>
<i>Works Construction no</i>	<i>1718</i>
<i>Cert of Airworthiness</i>	<i>G1</i>
<i>Issued</i>	<i>21st July 1972</i>
<i>Manufacturers name</i>	<i>Slingsby Aircraft Co</i>
<i>Ltd</i>	
<i>B of T</i>	<i>11082</i>
<i>BGA Reg Letters</i>	<i>DHG</i>
<i>BGA Reg Compet no</i>	<i>661</i>

Specifications

<i>Span</i>	<i>17.0m/55.5ft</i>
<i>Empty weight</i>	<i>780lbs/354kg</i>
<i>Payload</i>	<i>499lbs/226kg</i>
<i>L/D</i>	<i>29 at 48Kts</i>
<i>Min sink</i>	<i>2.5 at 48Kts</i>
<i>Designer</i>	<i>John Sellers</i>

Record

<i>Weight - 795lbs</i>	<i>13th Aug 1969</i>
<i>Test Flight - Geof Bailey – Woods</i>	<i>14th Aug 1969</i>
<i>ARB Approval Ref - A1/2243/46</i>	<i>14th Aug 1969</i>
<i>Mods for C of A – 19-,23,and 25</i>	<i>19th July 1972.</i>
<i>Re-weighing - 823lbs</i>	<i>19th July 1972</i>
<i>Test Flight - Geof Bailey – Woods</i>	<i>20th July 1972</i>
<i>C of A - Slingsby T.53 no 1718</i>	<i>21st July 1972</i>
<i>BGA no - 2132 as of</i>	<i>29th June 1976</i>
<i>BGA Reg - DHG as in BGA Cert of</i>	<i>15th July 1976</i>

History

Kirknewton 1975. RAF Kirknewton Gliding Group. Regularly serviced by Robert Williamson, logging 138 hrs and 293 launches. His only complaint was that the glider was 'underutilised'.

Portmoak 1986. It was also at Leuchars for a period.

East Fortune APSS, November 2001.

Portmoak December 2004.

Gold Height - Eoin MacDonald, 21st Oct 1993

Total Hours *906 hrs as of 13th Aug 1998*

Duty Pilot and Duty Instructor rotas

These rotas are now interactive and are available from the club website. The following link takes you straight to the rotas page. It's easy to follow...

<http://www.dutyman.biz/dmmain.aspx?id=S0001434>

