



Isle of Wight 2003

Report from Kevin Robinson who's looking forward to this year's fly-in and also supplied the article and front cover photographs.

When I invested in a gyro 3 years ago I always had this image of spending the weekends in the company of fellow gyro-naughts, freed from the bonds of married life and flying around the country on Sunday mornings eating fat boy breakfasts and discussing the enjoyment of flight.

The reality I found was an isolated (but excellent) farm strip in the middle of Oxfordshire with no other gyro within a hundred miles. Determined to travel and not use my machine as a low level barnstorming toy, I was determined to travel around and visit other airfields within my local area.

I got off to a slightly shaky start when I flew into Kemble a number of years ago and was accused of being the world's worst aviator. Undaunted I continued to travel to every airfield within a hundred mile area of my airstrip. My travels have been varied and the interest always high. I have now compiled my own BRA information board and I have attended a number of local air shows flying the flag for our organisation. I have a number of friends within the aviation world and it was them that told me about the Isle of Wight fly-in. They described it as the best fly-in of the year, with a large beer tent, lots of friendly folk and a wonderful location. I checked the internet and found their web site. This event, like many other microlight fly-ins, was advertised on the kiss 400.com web site. This is an essential web site for all who enjoy fly-ins. You register to get on their list and all fly-ins are notified to you automatically. If I may suggest, something so radical a site we should make use of for all our own fly-ins.

Having heard about the event and being slightly reserved about admitting I was a gyro pilot I registered for the fly-in. I contacted my friends and on Fri 20th June set off to Popham to meet my friends. Friday was a gorgeous day, but as this was my first ever night trip away from home I had all the logistical problems of the Wright Brothers.

I fly an early model of the Benson Montgomerie gyro - G-BUJK. It's a super aircraft but its luggage carrying capacity amounts to a tooth brush. Despite this I had a number of ideas to allow me to carry all I needed for a weekend away from home.

My first item was a tent which I bought it from Popham show at the May fly-in. That was also a good weekend, with the Global Eagle guys present but that's another story. It cost less than £10 and only weighs 1.5 kilos. I have a place at the bottom of my frame where it can be securely and safely stowed. It won't have changed the centre of gravity and should not be subject to the dreaded 'Section-T'. The next

problem was clothing. The forecast was hot so I dressed from the inside out - underwear, shorts, trousers, t-shirt, shirt, jumper and then flying suit. O. K. in the air, but a little hot on an 80 degree day! I arrived at Popham at lunch time, expecting my friends to join me. They were leaving from RAF Holton and unbeknown to me the base was subject to one of those military inspections that prevented them taking-off. Three hours later they arrived. It was a windy day and I passed the time watching microlights getting buffeted in the gusty cross-winds.

After a brief meeting we decide to fly across to Sandown. We discussed the route and opted for avoiding controlled airspace and flying across Hayling Island. We would clip the military dock yards and fly over the Victorian Forts. The next discussion was how high. My friends in their microlights wanted to fly at 4000 feet, so that in the event of engine failure they could glide onto the adjoining shore. I explained the gliding ability of a gyro and explained that I get vertigo and a nose bleed if I go higher than 1000 feet! The other pilot flying a weight-shift with a Rotax 914 (he could out fly us all), seemed to hold an opinion somewhere between the two of us. We set off flying and as we approached the Solent all attained our varying heights.

The trip across the sea was impressive, with numerous small boats all enjoying the waters of the Isle of Wight. We joined a relatively quiet circuit and landed at Sandown. Sandown is a grass strip fairly smooth with plenty of length. Marshals were on hand and we were directed to our parking bays for the next two days. The interest as ever was great for the gyro and I spent much time explaining how it all worked and how safe they were, before being kidnapped by some lads from Manchester who marched me to the bar! I spent the evening at a local restaurant, having a meal before retiring to bed after a few more beers in the beer tent. I have to admit it wasn't the best nights sleep in my life, despite donning my flying suit and all layers of clothing I was freezing, and had a fitful night sleep as the late night parties went on.

Saturday dawned sunny and clear, the aircraft streamed in all day and I was amazed at the distance people had travelled. We made a decision that we would make use of the day to venture out and visit some local airfields. I dressed in shorts and t-shirt and set off for the day. I have a friend who is based at Thorney Island, which is an old airfield now used as an Army camp, with three perfect runways all miles long. A phone call gave us permission to land there and once more we were off across the Solent. This was a busy sailing weekend in the Isle of Wight and there

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Low pass over Bracklesham Bay airfield in G-BLUK. Kevin Robinson

was over a thousand yachts sailing around the Island. I had managed to convince my friends that it may be O.K. to fly lower than 4000 feet and we all crossed at 1000 feet. There was three of us and it was the first time I had the opportunity to fly in the company of other aircraft. It was fantastic and chatting on the microlight frequency made it more fun. It also made me realise that after three years of flying my ASI was reading 20 mph slow! We landed without incident and after a few photos took off again.

I was given the opportunity to be flown in a weight shift microlight with a Rotax 914 engine. The pilot took the opportunity to throw me around and demonstrate his flying ability. Its rate of climb was impressive, as was the handling, but the cold wind on one of the hottest days of the year took me by surprise. Any body who flies one of these in the winter has my utmost respect - I never realised just how warm it is in my pod! The g-forces are much more than in a gyro and I never once felt the urge to ask for a go. The landing speed caught me out - being used to bringing the gyro to zero speed before touching down. Still good fun!

Our next location was a small microlight strip along the coast at Bracklshore Bay. You could see it from where we took off and after flying along the coast we landed at the strip. This is small grass strip located near a holiday camp. There was no one to meet us and we went off to explore the nearby holiday camp. The weather was very hot and after a quick sandwich we found ourselves by the swimming pool. Nobody seemed to take any notice of these aviation trespassers and we managed to make use of their excellent out door swimming pool. After a cooling refreshing dip we headed back to the airstrip to find a polite notice had been placed, suggesting we pay a

landing fee! Landing fee paid and with a few more aircraft present I took the opportunity to show why everybody should own a gyro. I proceeded to demonstrate the tight handling ability, the ability to hover and, after a few tight turns, came into land and managed a perfect zero landing roll. I know there was a hint of envy in their eyes as they walked back to their microlights!

Another briefing and we decided to fly back to the Isle of Wight. The gyro pilot's aversion to height was paying off and I negotiated a flight at 500 feet (clear of persons, vessels, etc.) back along the coast. We flew back over Thorney island and then Hayling Island, before turning back across the open sea. The trip was again excellent and, after flying abeam Cowes, we landed safely back at Sandown. The afternoon had been excellent and the weather was still very hot.

We decided that as it was the longest day of the year it would be remiss of us not to continue flying. A trip to the local petrol station and we were fuelled up and ready to go. We decided to do an aerial tour around the entire Island and little was I to know how spectacular it would be. The time was about 2100 and as the sun was slowly descending we headed North and then East along the coast. Still dressed in my shorts and t-shirt and in unison with the microlights we drifted along the many miles of sea cliffs and slowly out into the open sea. As we approached the end of the Island any thought of not being over terra firma disappeared and I had the most magnificent view of the Needles. I am sure the photographs will not do justice to the actual view but in my own mind I had arrived in terms of what I wanted to achieve with my gyro. I was experiencing a fantastic view, in fantastic weather, in my own Flying machine. I doubt

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there can be a better feeling than that of flying around the Isle of Wight on that day. We continued around the Island and drifted back in towards the land before cutting back across the Island, landing with the sun setting and an orange tinge descending over the airfield. Straight in on finals and the gyro was soon rested up for the night.

Another social night took place in the beer tent, with many prizes being presented to the many microlights that had attended. As I mentioned earlier I was amazed just how far these guys had flown. The commentator and main organiser is 'Big' John - I had spoken to him before the event and confirmed he was happy that I was coming. He was delighted that I had attended and took it in his stride when I voiced my dismay at not receiving any prizes for best gyro, longest distance flown, best looking gyro pilot, etc. He did however say that if we attend in numbers next year he would lay on the appropriate prizes. My only chance of winning a prize will have by then passed as them Northern Gyro lot will no doubt sweep the board!

The beers and hospitality went on into the night and despite retiring to bed the partying went on long into the night. This night was warmer and having borrowed another flying suit I had a warm nights sleep. A briefing had been given that nobody should take off before 0600 and those experienced visitors said the place would be alive with hundreds of microlights flying off home. The reality was somewhat different and in the early hours massive thunder storms broke. My tent which stayed completely dry was battered by rain and wind, and illuminated with lightening during the impressive storm. Apparently two microlights did attempt to take off but, having got air born in the middle of a bad storm, decided discretion was the better part of valour and landed back at the field.

Sunday morning was a stark contrast to previous day with heavy cloud, rain and wind. There was constant opinion as to what the weather was doing and numerous phone calls to Popham who confirmed low cloud and rain. There were a lot of worried pilots who had clearly not anticipated another day on Sandown.

The weather did improve (not up to my flying standards), although aircraft were seen departing North. One of my enduring memories of the day was seeing numerous microlights heading into the rain and disappearing from view. The microlight frequency was an education - 'Steve where are you, I'm in heavy rain'... 'I was with Bill but I lost him and he's got the GPS'... 'I don't now where I am but I'm pushing on'... 'I am going to land in a field and I'll see you later'. I felt I was listening to intrepid explorers setting off on some expedition. I admired their spirit but was happy to have both feet on the ground!

After lunch the weather did break and, with my travelling companions, we decided to head home. We planned to fly up the Solent and head back directly to Popham. We flew over various dry docks, at a slightly

more appropriate height, before heading out over the Hampshire country side. I had encountered my first mechanical hitch by discovering my ASI had been 20 mph slow. I was now flying 20 miles an hour faster and the resulting air flow was causing my starter rope to chaff badly. Having got started at Sandown I wasn't convinced that if I landed and stopped the engine that the rope would take another engine start. I therefore decided I would push on and head back to my airfield. So I bid my flying friends farewell and headed for home. I picked up Brize Zone (I always use radio) as I crossed over that huge scar that used to be Greenham Common and flew back to my airfield with out incident. I touched down as I had started, alone on my farm strip in the Oxfordshire countryside. I climbed out, stored my aircraft away and reflected on a weekend of flying.

The weekend was without doubt the best flying I have ever had. It was social and flying with others is fun! The gyro slotted in well with the microlight flyers and is comparable in terms of speed and endurance. The reception from the organisers was excellent and I would recommend that all gyro pilots book the weekend in their diaries for next year now. I know the North West Gyro Club likes to travel distances and I would actively encourage them to attend next year? I think I have found a like minded bunch of pilots to spend time flying with and would again recommend the kiss400.com website. Register and say you're a gyro. I flew for about seven hours that weekend (not bad for a southerner) in almost perfect conditions.

If fellow pilots are interested then register on the web site but also let me know now so I can give the organiser an idea of numbers. The event is planned for 25th to 27th June 2004.

Contact me on K.j.robinson@ntlworld.com.

Happy flying

Kevin Robinson.

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