

End of a memorable trip: Kai (left) and Phil in the Isle of Wight



**Kai Maurer doesn't do things by halves. For his first post PPL(G) flight he decided to go from Kirkbride to Sandown in her MT-03, G-CEHM.**

**Phil Harwood, in a similar machine, went along for the ride.**



Phil preflights at Lydd

# 2's company!

**H**ere I was at last! It was Sunday 29 April and I'd finally received my PPL(G) a couple of days ago. Now I was ready to fly my MT-03 home from Kirkbride to Lydd, followed by an outing to the Isle of Wight. Yesterday evening I'd stuffed some belongings into a big rucksack and taken the midnight bus from London to meet with another MT pilot, Phil, in Sheffield at 4am in the morning.

Having arrived in Sheffield a little later than expected after grabbing just four hours of sleep, we headed to Rufforth airfield, York. The plan was to fly Phil's machine, G-CEHN to Kirkbride in order to pick up my aircraft, G-CEHM. So at 8am Phil preflighted his MT and with a brisk 'see you again in around three hours' to the microlight pilots on the ground, we were on our way.

Take-off was smooth in the MT and she was two-up and almost fully fuelled. We headed west, visibility good and wind

minimal. Along the way I flew the MT from the back seat and it was quite an experience, to say the least, with Phil hanging over the side to allow me to see the instruments.

After an hour or so we started to climb in order to cross the Pennines along the route of the A66. Visibility started to deteriorate, at first gently but then quite rapidly - though we could always see the outlines of the distant mountains and had a tailwind, which meant we were making good time.

The wind then picked up drastically, causing us to be bounced around the sky - thank God we were two-up. We steamed along and finally made Penrith, calling up Kirkbride Radio to announce our arrival. About 20 minutes later we had landed. It had taken us 2h to get there... hmmm, let's have a quick toilet run and get my MT out the hangar. I am eager to fly it now!

We have a quick chat with resident CFI and my instructor

Chris Jones, get HM all fuelled up and checked and then wave our goodbyes. Then the two red MTs take to the sky to commence the long flight to the south coast. The plan was to fly halfway on Sunday and finish off the other leg in good time on Monday, but that was about to change...

Now we are flying into a headwind, very nice. Moreover, no sooner have I settled into my MT than the wind picks up again. We follow the road as it climbs and winds up the mountain, climbing with it, only to find out that the wind is no friend at this point. We try various heights, ranging from 3000ft to 600ft, but cannot find smoother air. We hang on, pressing on as we did coming here and, just as before, the visibility drops again. It's as though we are flying in a bubble, only this time, it's worse. ->



16 GyroFlight, Spring 2008

York, ready for the off



Posing at Connington



...W, time to split



KAI CHECKS HIS MT

→ So we drop down and follow the road across the highest point on the mountain. People stop to wave at us and the buses look quicker than us – and much more stable! So this is what it's like when you first get your licence and go flying! 'My God' I think, 'what did I let myself in for?'

But about 45min later there's light at the end of the tunnel. Visibility improves, the sun comes out to play and irons out the wind, what a lovely sight. Rufforth is reached some 2.5h from takeoff and we touch down around 4pm in the afternoon. It had all taken a lot longer than we'd anticipated, so we opt to get a good night's sleep, arrive at the airfield early in the morning and set off around 7am. Having decided that that was the right idea, we grab a pizza and are asleep by 9pm.

We get up Monday morning at 4am, get ready and head for the airfield. It's only 6am when we arrive and the morning dew is still hanging around. We free the MTs from the hangar and push them on to the apron to check them thoroughly. Then we check the route, fill up with fuel, strap our colossal bags into the back seats and wave a cheerful 'tata' to York as we pre-rotate on runway 06 bound for our next destination, Nottingham.

But about 15min into our route, the clouds close in so badly that we decide to turn back to York and find an alternate route. So just 30min after takeoff we are back on the tarmac consulting the trusted map.

Phil quickly suggests Wickenby, as the weather along the coast is better than the weather inland. Good suggesting Phil – let's go!

Once again we line-up together and get airborne, this time at 8.20am. As we head east the weather is steadily improving and, after an uneventful hour, we hit Wickenby on a Monday morning with its windsock doing the fandango for us. Which way do we land? We contact ground radio three times to no avail and pass overhead to see if we can get a clearer picture. No chance.

With the sock still dancing around we decide to cut across the field and land diagonally on the runway. The wind is quite strong and my landing resembles that of a bouncing tennis ball rather than a smooth round-off, but hey, we are both down and taxi off the runway.

We head off in the direction of the tower to dutifully pay our landing fee, but no-one is there to take our money. As a matter of fact, we learn, it's all shut on a Monday! So where do we go to the loo round here? Aha, there are some people congregating around the hangar, let's aim there, surely they must have a pot of some sort – and so they do.

A map check reveals that we are not too far from Connington (Peterborough), about 1h 15min. So we check our fuel and decide to press on. But we didn't realize that an hour had already passed since our landing and by now the windsock is dancing the YMCA for us. So it seems prudent to use a different runway for take-off. Let's get into the air!

Swiftly pre-rotating then applying full power gets me up quickly, followed by Phil. We head south and pretty soon stumble across a CMATZ. We establish comms and are cleared for entry on level even though we had no transponder and the controller had wanted us to squawk.

We cross the stub of the MATZ at 900ft. Along the way we are overtaken by a Bell twin-engined helicopter. Quite a sight: three in a line, two gyrocopters and a Bell, all at 900ft and all within waving distance. Once we are mistakenly called 'microlights' but that error is soon corrected, as Phil points out our true identity to the controller.

It simply can't get any better. The sun is out and the view around me is magnificent. Having exited the MATZ we cruise along and I am feeling a certain sense of excitement doing all this so soon after receiving my PPL – this is so much fun! This is what it is *all* about, this is the machine capable of long distance travel, this is the pay-out at the end of my training. I feel on top of the world.

We fly on. Connington appears in the distance, a long tarmac runway, and we both land almost at the same time, Phil landing down the runway and me touching down at the beginning. We are the talk of the day. The staff ask if they can take photos of the MTs for their new website, as visitors like us are rare. Everyone is intrigued by the gyros and even the helicopter CFI can't stay away for long, enquiring after its workings.

By the time we've planned our next leg and refuelled, another hour has passed. We get suited up again and warm-up the engine for our trek to Stapleford via the Luton/Stansted CTA. Exciting times ahead, as we climb up to 1000ft and listen in to Luton CTA.

My word, they are truly busy, and half of what was uttered I didn't even understand – but here goes us: 'Luton approach, good morning, this is gyrocopter formation GCEHN' and we wait with baited breath. The radio crackles 'Formation GCEHN – Luton, Pass your message', 'GCEHN is two gyrocopters out of Connington into Stapleford crossing under your zone at 1000ft, request flight information'.

'GCEHN stand-by'. So we hang as we're told and continue to plough along, making good ground.

Finally the response comes. 'GCEHN fine to transit, stay out of controlled airspace, flight information service, QNH 1013.'

'Flight information, 1013, HN'.

Yahoo! We are now transiting underneath Luton and Stansted zones! As we do so, we notice the colossal shadows passing underneath us each time a 737 or indeed a 747 passes overhead. London in the distance is smog engulfed and standing tall, with Stansted runway to our left. Air traffic is directing 'American737...', 'Easy127...' or 'Lufthansa336...' onto final approach.

We skirt along underneath – what a sight! Having nearly flown all the way across we change frequency with 'GCEHN has the airfield in sight request frequency change to...'

'Frequency change approved, bye bye'.

But does Phil have the airfield in sight? We are 5 miles from the airfield and I for one can't see it at all (but that means nothing really, I could be right over it and still not know where it is sometimes – guess we all have had *that* experience!)

As it turns out, Phil can't see the airfield either, and it didn't help that it was a grass strip. 'Connington, confirm 05 is a grass strip?'

'Yep' comes the answer. We perform a couple of orbits to give way to an inbound R22 on final that we can't see, zoom in and land, this being my first grass landing. Perfect! – I am quite chuffed with myself at this stage.

As Phil comes into land the radio controller asks 'Are you here to see anyone special or just a passing visit?', Phil replies 'Actually we are just landing so that I can turn the map – I have run out of leg!'. 'First time I've heard that!' chuckles the radio operator.

We park up outside the restaurant area in full view of everyone – it was a very busy Monday here. We go along to pay our landing fee of £6 and the female clerk gets rather confused with our call signs, one being HN the other being HM. Yes we know, thank you!

Stapleford is a great place, with a huge restaurant and veranda. We couldn't help but take a few minutes to enjoy the view and marvel at our achievement so far, flying

together is certainly more fun. The local flying instructors come over and enquire about the beasts, it certainly seems that few people have seen 'proper' gyros, they all seem to think a gyro is glued together in your shed and falls to bits when you taxi or kills you when you get airborne – ah no, not this one here.

We talk about the MTs so enthusiastically we could have been sales personnel engaged by Rotorsport UK. I'm sure we could have sold some along the way!

A little while later we consult map and GPS one last time to plot our course to Lydd. Before we get airborne I ring Lydd to announce our arrival. They want to know what make and model we are and seem none the wiser after I tell them. We then get airborne, with the shortest take-off run ever, at 2.40pm.

As we fly along the M25 I smile to myself at the cars stuck in traffic beneath me and London to my right. Engine power 4600rpm and making good groundspeed of 70mph, we finally reach Gravesend, calling up Rochester for a flight information service. We then cross the Thames estuary and with some trepidation I watch the shadow of my MT glide effortlessly across the water.

With Maidstone dead on the nose we deviate to the west slightly to by-pass the city. Rochester to our left, we carry on south with a westerly wind. Rochester sits sheltered by ridge and for a second time we get to feel the foen effect coming off the hills. On our last leg – again! For a gruelling 30min we are strongly bounced around the sky as we follow the Eurostar rail track towards Ashford.

At Ashford we contact Lydd, announcing 10 miles to run with great relief, but the bouncing still has not stopped



Main photo: Fuel stop at Connington near Peterborough

Left: Not far to go now – landed at Lydd

Above: Ready for departure at York



and we slow our speed right down to minimize the effect. It works. By the time we call four miles to run, the hills are behind us and we have entered smoother air.

We're told to join overhead at 1500ft for 03 RH. Glorious day, here we were, and what a super long runway it is. We join overhead and come around onto our downwind leg. 'Report final number 1 and exit taxiway charlie.'

'Charlie – is that the second exit or the first?'

'The second,' was the answer, 'we can do the first' 'ok, delta if you wish.'

'Final HN, cleared to land, surface wind 040/18kt.'

'Final, one on HM'

'Cleared to land'. We had made it!

As we taxi off onto the parking lot, the time is 4.15pm and we feel as proud as a couple of kids who've just won the local swimming competition. We jump out of the aircraft to shake hands before the MTs are safely tucked away into the hangar. What a trip!

But it isn't quite over yet, we still have the Isle of Wight to do. So Thursday comes and we prepare for our first water crossing, getting the MT out of its pyjamas for a thorough check, rolling it out of the hangar and preparing it for the flight. After a warm-up we taxi out, having established radio contact with the tower. 03 is the runway to use.

We taxi out, ready for departure, and once more take to the sky. Soon I contact Shoreham to explain who we are and where we were heading, by points of VFR. It is bumpy but there's not a lot of traffic about today. Mind you, it is only 10am.

We hit Littlehampton and change frequency again to Chichester/Goodwood Information for a FIS before we hit Hayling Island. There I change to Sandown Radio to announce our 'coasting out'. What a sight, crystal blue water, yachts in the sea and us 1000ft in the air, heading 190 at 75mph. I think to myself 'if I have an engine failure now I need to put it right near a yacht' in the vain hope they might see me go down. Thank God we had put on our newly purchased lifejackets. But it was a smooth crossing on a clear, blue sunny day, amazing weather. So 6.75 miles of water later we are back on land, 'coasting in'.

Another 10min and there is Sandown, the grass strip in the distance. I'm all ready to line us up for our RH downwind leg for 05, only to be prompted that it was actually LH. 'Oops, in that case HM is downwind left for 05'. I went along the far end of the runway to let Phil land behind me.

We have made it, we have arrived, Kirkbride to Sandown. This goes to prove that the new generation gyroplane is indeed quite some tourer. With the combination of a map and GPS, the sky really is the limit now and if you have a mate that flies with you, this can turn into a great adventure and a fantastic time. As for me, it has only been the start, but what a start this has been... GF