

Frustration, the ticket and the

When you buy an aircraft kit in 1994, build it by mid '95, have some lessons, get mad at it, sell it, buy another, build it, take some more lessons and nearly 10 years down the line you still haven't got a licence, it has to be said, you can become a little frustrated.

Part of the problem is distance. Gyro flying instructors are few and far between, very few and far between, so few in fact that in the north of England there are but two. One is Roger Savage; he operates in the Carlisle area. I have to say I don't know Roger very well, but I know enough to know that the RAF 2000 isn't his favourite thing. The other is David Beevers (based at Melbourne near York) who is also a fan of the other two-seater, the VPM M16, but more of him later.

The instructors who favour the RAF 2000 are in the South. There are three, and I have flown with two of them. Mike Goldring is a good friend and nice guy. He's not available very often, but when I go down he always makes the effort.

Tony Melody is a quiet-spoken total gyro enthusiast and one of the nicest people that I have ever met. He has a problem though, in that everybody wants his time. He always has a queue of people following him around waiting for instruction and, though he does his best, there are only so many flyable hours in a weekend. A weekend goes something like this...

Friday night: put trailer on back of car, put gyro on back

of trailer, put rotor blades in blade box, put blade box on trailer and secure it.

Saturday morning, 4am: hit the road, quick coffee at Frankley services on the M5, hopefully arrive at Henstridge at about 10, into clubhouse, have breakfast, someone else arrives, have a natter, go over to hangar unload gyro, bolt rotor blades onto hub bar, and with help put blades and hub bar onto gyro, give gyro a good preflight check, go and have a cup of tea with some more of the lads. It's really nice to see them, as they haven't been here for my last couple of visits.

Grab Tony as he walks past and tell him how far I've come to see him, get an hour's instruction. This involves taking off at one end of the runway, flying down the runway and landing at the other (sounds boring but it's not), quick debrief, somebody else grabs him and I go off with a couple of the lads and have a cup of tea.

Saturday night: out for a meal at the local pub, nice crowd, good fun.

Sunday morning: same again, then on Sunday afternoon it's time to load up and drag that trailer 285 miles home again, with perhaps another 3h in my logbook.

Brilliant weekend, but absolutely knackered, and very frustrating.

I'm sure that some readers will have been to Netherthorpe. If you haven't, it's a grass airfield with two runways, some nice interesting aeroplanes and a good

*Karen's first flight
in a gyro with me in
March '05*



devil machine

Ray Firth and me
flying at Melbourne



Ronnie Legge wrote this for the PFA's North Lancs & Fylde Strut newsletter back in 2005. We felt it deserved a wider audience.

clubhouse. There's something magical about sunny days, old aeroplanes, grass airfields and ham and cheese toasties, call me strange if you like, but it does it for me, and my old Jodel lives there.

Over the years I have met some of the nicest people through gyros. One of them is Ray Firth, he has his RAF 2000 based at Netherthorpe, and I have an open invite to fly with him, Ray is a chap in his 70s with a mental age, like me, in his late 20s. His machine is immaculate and it's always great spending time with him.

The only difficulty is that he's a Yorkshireman, though I don't hold that against him because he can't help it. But he isn't an instructor, so I can't book the time, which is frustrating. So it's time to get my backside into gear and go to see David Beevers.

Ray has been telling me to do this for some considerable time. David uses the VPM M16, which he tells me is very stable and easy to fly. The RAF 2000, on the other hand, is not very stable and isn't easy to fly. But, you pay your money and you take your choice.

In summer we fly around with no doors on, while David flies around in his semi-open-cockpit machine. In winter we put the doors on, switch on the heater and can still fly round in T-shirts. For some reason, David finds the RAF 2000 more interesting then.

As I said earlier, David instructs at Melbourne near York which is also York dragstrip. He only does it part-time, on Saturday and Wednesday afternoons. The good thing about Melbourne is that it's 'only' 98 miles away, so I can nip over Saturday morning, unload, set up, have a couple of hours, dismantle, load up, drive 98 miles back and still be home in time for tea. (Well, not really, but you begin to see what I mean.)

The numbers go like this: 98 miles at 20mpg (towing a trailer remember) then 2h instruction at £50/h, then 22 l/h for the gyro, then 98 miles home at 20mpg. As

you can see, money is being eaten up at a serious rate here. It's not going to be long before Karen susses it out, and at that point bottoms will be smacked (aren't I the lucky one!).

Clearly, whichever way I choose to train, it's going to be expensive and time-consuming.

Moreover, the trailer I'm using isn't really mine. I built it but sold it with my first machine, so now it belongs to Mike Goldring. It's on indefinite loan, but I'm building another to replace it.

Trailers and gyros seem to go together. It has been said in the past that it's impossible to trailer a gyro with its rotor on, without damage to rotor and/or machine. So I got to thinking and over time I hatched a cunning plan. Over the next (what turns into two years), I build a trailer that will not only carry my gyro with the rotors on and not damage it, but is also fully enclosed. Am I a clever Dickey or what? (answers on a postcard please). The only down side is, it's bloody huge. And my beloved wife can't see it for the beautiful thing that it is, parked outside the house. Ah well, women.

The upside is, rigging and derigging time is much reduced. David then finds me a parking place at Melbourne and frustration and travelling time are reduced further.

The ticket, however, seems as elusive as ever. Most Saturday mornings see me on the M62, hoping that today will be the day for the first solo.

There are two of us under instruction. The other chap, Charles Watkinson, is a very experienced pilot who flies singles and twins and has an instrument rating. He also flies R22s and Jet Rangers - and do you know the best bit? He can't get to grips with gyros either, he's struggling just as much as me. Perhaps I'm not so thick, I was really getting worried.

Over the past weeks and months we have been doing circuits, landing down the runway, across the runway...→

→ doing circuits at tree-top height, inside the field boundary. We were both doing okay but sometimes we would make mistakes. I know we all make mistakes and that's fine, but in the landing phase when you are slowing down and stopping, a mistake can lead to a rollover and, as that thing above your head has a tip speed of 400mph, you need to avoid this at all costs. But we're improving.

On Saturday 14 August 2004, the wind was 5kt straight down the runway. Charles and I had both had a 1h lesson and we were sat in the caravan having a well earned brew and chocky bicky. At this point it was announced that today was going to be the day that solo flight was to take place (much arse clenching was felt, I can tell you).

When this happens in the RAF 2000 world, one fills up a five gallon drum with water and straps it on the passenger's seat. Gyros act very differently with only one person aboard, so we need to fool it into thinking that there are two.

First, Charles does it, with no problem,

Then Ronnie does it, no problem either. I land, calm myself and then I am so amazed that I carry on and do another three circuits. Frustration, what's frustration? Progress, wonderful.

Over the following weeks solo time builds and it's time to do some short cross-countries, triangles drawn on the map, you know the sort of thing.

We now are ready for the qualifying cross-country. It's an epic trip to a private strip called Eddsfield, only a short trip in a fixed-wing aircraft but in a gyro, it's a trip for a man! In fact it's so near that it's a bit embarrassing really.

The rules are these, that any student or pilot with less than 40h post-licence P1 time, may not fly in winds exceeding 15kt. The wind at Melbourne is 8kt and a quick phone call to Eddsfield tells us that their wind is steady at 11kt. The forecast says little will change, so away goes

Charles, followed 20min later by yours truly. I take off and climb to 1500ft. After a while I notice that my progress is slow and ask myself why I am going sideways. Anyway Eddsfield is found and a very short landing made. I taxi in, and am given a cup of coffee.

There is a Jodel on finals. He has two attempts at landing and gives up as the wind is now 12kt gusting 17 straight across the strip. What are we going to do?

We wait for it to drop a bit, then do the return trip. On my return I do a cracking landing on the grass, right in front of the caravan. What a great day!

All I need now is a GFT, and then the ticket is mine.

On 20 November G-BYIN and I did the GFT. We filled in the forms, then received the congratulations and the coffee and biscuit. I loaded the gyro into the trailer and all but floated the 98 miles back to home.

That night I wrote the cheque to our beloved CAA and waited...

Two weeks later a package arrives... and yes, it from them. In it is my logbook and all my other bits, also a letter saying that because my fixed-wing licence is not current I have to resit Air Law, Navigation and Meteorology exams again. The B*****.

The ticket, the frustration.

I do the study, get the exams, and send the papers. This time the ticket, my long-awaited PPL (G), arrives. So now we have...

Frustration – over.

Ticket – in hand.

And *Devil machine* – nah, pussycat.

GF

PS: Since that time, a mate and I have embarked on a project to build a horizontal tail for the RAF 2000. During this project we have had to deal with the CAA. When I wrote this article, I didn't know what frustration really was!