

MEET THE MEMBERS



WOT A LIFE!

We talk to builder, rare breed cattle farmer and former PFA Chairman, David Faulkner-Bryant, whose history in aviation merits a two-parter...

Welcome, David, can you tell us something about your career?

I was born in 1932, making me thirteen years old at the end of WWII, when my Father sent me to a technical college in Brighton for a three-year course on building, which involved all types of trades.

I then did a four-year apprenticeship and in 1952 went straight from that into National Service, joining the Royal Engineers. Initially, I was based in Scotland for training and then went to Germany with the British Army of the Rhine. Good times!

Once out of the Army, I moved back down south and got a job in the building industry. It's hard work and often challenging, but I've enjoyed sixty years of creating all manner of interesting buildings.

Later in life I was on a visit to Scotland, which brought back memories from years before, so I moved to The Isle of Skye. I bought a farm and started building up a herd of White Highland cattle. I also discovered a need for a local wine merchant and filled that requirement too, supplying local restaurants and hotels on the island.

What started your interest in aviation?

As a boy, on the south coast, the Battle of Britain was going on over our heads on a daily basis. With my three brothers and our school friends, we became great spotters, knowing each type of aircraft by sight and sound.

We were often at the scene of a fallen aircraft before the authorities

and saw many things we shouldn't have witnessed. Such were the times...

After the war I made trips to Dunstable Downs on the back of my uncle's motorbike, to see the gliders soaring overhead, which fired my desire to be up there with them. It'd be some years later, as war-torn Britain started to heal itself, that I was able to satisfy my desire.

In what, where and when was your first flight?

My first flight was during 1948, in an Auster that had been released from war service. I was sixteen and a good friend, Ken Browne, who later built a Turbulent, had recommended that I try flying before embarking on motorcycling.

I loved the smell and the noise of it, and all for only thirty bob (£1.50) for thirty minutes. It was loud, exciting and I loved it!

Although I would've loved to have learnt to fly at that time, I knew I couldn't afford it, as I still needed to have some form of transport, so the motorbike won. I knew I'd be back though, when funds permitted.

Where did you eventually learn to fly?

In 1963 I joined the Southdown Gliding Club on the South Downs at Firle, and had my first lesson in a Slingsby T21B. The following year, after seven hours' tuition, I soloed in a Slingsby Tutor. I went on to fly more advanced gliders and gained my 'Silver C' (5hr, 20m duration).

Gliding was a great experience and I learnt an enormous amount from the inspirational bunch of instructors and members at the Southdown Gliding Club – it laid the foundation for my future powered flying.

However, with a growing family and expanding business, spending endless hours on a windy hilltop waiting for the weather had to come to an end, and in 1965 I joined Cecil Pashley's South Coast Flying Club at Shoreham, as it had Tiger Moths. My first powered training flight was in a Chipmunk, and I went solo after three hours. My GFT, with the famous George Lowdell, came after 21 hours. I had my PPL!

(Top) David with the Currie Wot he started, G-BDFB, which was completed by John Jennings.
(Left) A somewhat earlier pic of David with G-BDFB!



How long have you been a member of the PFA/LAA?

Having learned to fly, I decided that I needed my own aeroplane, and not being able to afford to buy one, I realised that I'd have to build it.

I searched through aviation journals and fell in love with the Miles Satyr, a single-seat biplane, and my quest for plans took me to FIV (John) Walker, who worked for Miles Aircraft at Shoreham. John explained that the Satyr plans had been lost in a fire some years previously, and I discovered he worked part-time for an association called the PFA.

"Why not join?" he asked, adding, "and by the way, there's a small biplane not dissimilar to the Satyr called the Currie Wot, for which plans are available."

I joined straightaway and became the PFA's 945th member. At the time, the PFA was still operating from a private house in Woking. I then visited a local Wot builder, Doc Urmston, bought the plans and started on what proved to be a long journey.

Stuart McKay [*Later of DH Moth Club fame. Ed*], who was then the magazine editor and was to a large extent 'Mr PFA', had built a beautiful Jodel D9. We became firm friends, and he invited me to a meeting of the PFA Committee, which I was co-opted on to – they wanted to harness the 'enthusiasm of the new boy' and I became a sort of local ambassador.

I made contact with some local members and formed the first regular members' meetings, which became the Southern Strut. Around the same time, Stuart formed the Berkshire Strut, and the rest, as they say, is history, as the Strut system went from strength to strength.

When and how did you become PFA Chairman?

My work as a Strut organiser meant I was helping to organise local flying events and, ultimately, the PFA Rally. I was elected as Association Chairman in 1972, following the resignation of my most worthy predecessor, Frank Parker, who moved to the US following the sad death of his much-loved wife, Lois, who worked the PFA typewriter and is



(Above) After a seaplane flight in Canada, David went on to get his UK seaplane rating in the Tiger Club's Sea Tiger.

remembered with great affection. Lois's name is perpetuated by one of our prestigious annual awards, for administrative endeavour on behalf of the Association.

I remained as Chairman for sixteen years. It was a lot of fun and hard work, but immensely satisfying to watch the Association grow and prosper through a truly golden era.

I'm proud to have been part of it, and with those who shared the journey and experienced the true spirit of Flying for Fun, or as my good friend, 'Benjy' [*Lewis Benjamin of Tiger Club fame. Ed*] put it, 'Flying for a song'!

With family, business and PFA commitments, did you still manage to fly?

Yes, time was precious but well-spent. I was still a member of the South Coast Flying Club and able to fly their Tiger Moths, plus a member of the Brighton Flying Group, which operated Bolkows, Beagles and Pipers, etc.

I'd also joined the Tiger Club, so was able to fly a host of wonderful aeroplanes.

I continued with the construction of my Currie Wot and was later able to buy the example that Doc Urmston had built. At last I had fewer restrictions to flying, save weather and time, so I made the most of it, with promoting the PFA at the heart of my campaign.

The attendance of foreign aircraft and pilots at our annual Rally required reciprocation by PFA members attending events in mainland Europe, and I was happy to oblige. A good time was had by one and all!

Have you flown many types?

I've been fortunate to fly quite a few. We often swapped aeroplanes at rallies, and that's been a main reason why I have managed 44 different types. They're mainly homebuilts, vintage and classic types, all of which have been memorable. If you're going to ask me for a >



(Above) David in Currie Wot G-ARTZ, in which he flew to rallies and fly-ins around the UK and mainland Europe.

MEET THE MEMBERS

favourite, I have to say that I enjoyed them all. But if pushed, the two which will always be my favourites are the Tiger Moth and, of course, the Currie Wot.

I flew the Wot, 'RZW', to rallies and fly-ins in France, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland and halfway to Sweden, plus of course many events in the UK.

I also sampled two other Wots, Ted Gould's 'YMP', which was built from my jigs, and 'XOL', both beautiful examples.

For passenger flying I flew the Tiger Moths and Pup at Shoreham, and the Tiger Club's fleet at Redhill. I also flew the Comper Swift, a true sporting machine – the Pobjoy-engined G-ACTF was an endless joy. The most enchanting was G-ABNX, John Pothercary's Robinson Redwing, a side-by-side, Genet radial-engined biplane.

What's your favourite type of flying?

All flying is fun, but most of all I enjoyed cross-country – going places with a rally, air race or fly-in as the destination. Navigation was with map and compass, and of course by Bradshaw and the 'three Rs' – roads, rivers and railways. I didn't carry a radio, or any of the other more sophisticated nav aids, and enjoyed many challenging weather situations, all VFR, of course. We always got through – an open cockpit is the answer!

I wasn't drawn to aerobatics but I did experiment within the limits of the Currie Wot. The pundits at the Tiger Club were in a different league, but I stuck to LAROSA, which stands for 'a loop and a roll on a Sunday afternoon', for which the Wot was more suitable.

Seaplanes were another fascination. After a short introduction by Blaine Bowyers, on the Canadian lakes in his Cessna Skywagon amphibian, I vowed to get a seaplane licence, and finally obtained one on the Tiger Club's Sea Tiger at Scotney Court, with Tom Freer and Keith Sissons.

Another interesting experience was when another former editor of the magazine and a keen balloonist, Mike Grigson, woke me up at the PFA Cranfield Rally, and we had a marvellous early-morning balloon flight across the Bedfordshire countryside.

Finally, there's air racing – a most unlikely pursuit in a Currie Wot. When it was announced that an air race to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Bleriot's crossing of the English Channel was to be held, I felt the PFA should be represented and entered 'RZW' – it was the slowest aircraft in the handicap race.

With the encouragement of the organising race secretary, the ever-persuasive and charming Carolyn Evans of AOPA, I stumped up the £25 entry fee and was the second aircraft away from Biggin Hill to Ghent in Belgium, via Dover and Calais.

I bent the throttle all the way and ran out of fuel over the runway at Ghent, the finishing line. I dead-sticked onto the grass and had to wait until the rest of the field had landed – 49 other aircraft – before I could recover my Wot and trundle off to the hangar.

By that time, the photographer from the *Brighton Evening Argos* had taken a rather undignified picture for the next edition. The headline was, "Local Pilot's Flip-Flop Finish to Stella Artois Air Race." I finished 44th out of 50, still smiling. It was, however, my first and last attempt at air racing. ■

Read part two of our interview with David in the January 2018 issue of LA.



(Above) David recovers his Wot and heads for the hangar at Ghent, after a dead-stick landing at the end of the race which commemorated the 70th anniversary of Bleriot's Channel-crossing.

**STELLA ARTOIS
AIR RACE**

25 JULY 1979
Entries close 11 July 1979

FROM BIGGIN HILL TO GHENT
(Courtesy Bromley Corporation)

Organised by
AOPA
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

British Light Aviation Centre, 50a Cambridge Street, London, SW1V 4QQ
Telephone: 01-834 5631 Telegrams: Aviacentre London SW1 Telex: 262284 Ref. 2290

(Above) A promotional brochure for the Bleriot commemorative event, which proved to be David's "first and last" experience of air racing!