

**Linda Abrams her "Flying in England" report, from her visit to Southern England & flights with Mike Willis, August 30, 2008**

BTW - Some really beautiful related photos were taken, and can be viewed on Mike Willis's web site by looking under 'Flying adventures' at <http://www.ercoupe.co.uk/> or more directly @ <http://www.asmn85.dsl.pipex.com/ShobdonAug08/index.html> and [http://www.asmn85.dsl.pipex.com/EMU2\\_NW\\_Aug\\_08/index.html](http://www.asmn85.dsl.pipex.com/EMU2_NW_Aug_08/index.html)

Last year, when an Ercouper from England, Mike Willis, was in L.A., he offered to get me airborne in England the next time I got over there; that isn't the kind of invitation I let go by! So this summer, I was in England for 2 weeks, and -- despite often- unfavorable weather conditions, managed to fly on 4 occasions, including an Ercoupe meet Up!

I arrived on Saturday, 16th Aug., and by Monday the 18th, had made my way up to the Cambridge area where Mike and his gracious wife, Lorraine, live. It had been an unusually cloudy-rainy summer, and weather was pretty marginal, but Mike had taken a couple days off work, so we gave it a try at his local flying club at Bourn airport, and managed about 1/2 hr. in the air before the clouds closing in looked too ominous.

That provided a fun intro to Mike's Alon, G-HARY (Aircraft reg. numbers in Europe are all letters.), and to the friendly folks at his flying club, located in a picturesque & flimsy old WWII Nissen Hut <http://www.nissens.co.uk/>. Mike explained that during WWII, over 600 airports were carved out of this tiny island's countryside! It seemed he pointed out airports every couple miles, both active ones and ones now "disused!"

But this short flight introduced me to the difficulties of picking airports out of the endless patchwork fields, when they don't all have black or white runways (many are just mowed grass strips that blend into the terrain, and even hard-surfaced runways might also be brown or tan). I also found it surprisingly hard to navigate at first, in England's homogenous landscape of irregular patchwork fields, without mountains or large cities as reference points. And UK charts look totally different than U.S. Sectionals!

By the following Friday, Mike was able to take off again. I was staying in Oxford by then, about an hour's flight away from Bourn, and Mike flew over to pick me up at Kidlington Airport. It has a passenger terminal, about the size of a California FBO, but very new, sleekly modern, and staffed by 2 extremely friendly & helpful people.

We took off and flew about an hour west, to a surprisingly busy tiny airport named Shobden, way out in the beautiful countryside of the Welsh Borders. What a thrill it was to see from the air some of the features en route that I knew from the ground! Blenheim Palace, the Cotswolds, the Malvern Hills -- England is such a visually beautiful place, and even more beautiful from the air!

There was considerable cloud cover, but Mike explained that most G.A. flying in the UK, takes place at about 2000'-2500' to avoid the many air space restrictions at higher altitudes, so it wasn't any problem to stay under the clouds. Mike's Alon flew well and felt comfortably familiar...but I confess I was too distracted by the view to take the yoke much!

Shobden had a busy pattern ("circuit" the Brits say), including glider traffic and helicopters as well as fixed-wing, and Mike demonstrated their protocols for an overhead entry. Continuing an electronics jinx that had plagued me since arriving, my camera battery quit on the base leg of our approach, but fortunately batteries were available where we checked in from the flight, so I got a couple pictures of Shobden at departure. There was both a great cafe and -- surprise to American G.A. eyes! -- a bar, both again in an old WWII [is quonset the right word?] structure.

The second surprise was their cost of fuel: it is measured in liters, and filling up the Alon after Mike had flown it just ~2 hrs. cost the equivalent of about \$120 ! There were also landing fees at Shobden of GBP 12 (10 during the week) (= \$20-24), and on our return to Oxford, landing fees of GBP 10 (12 during the week). Bourn, his home airport, has landing fees of "only" GBP 5 (= \$10). And landing fees apply for each and every touch-n-go, too!

Mike had to leave after dropping me back at Oxford, but I had such a great time that upon landing I sought out a CFI there, and arranged a flight for the next day! Mark Hayter was a real find: the owner of "Fly CB," he has 2 Eurostars, a very cool 2-seater low wing, which is considered a "micro-light" in the UK (probably closest category to U.S. LSAs).

He said it has a 6-hr range on the same fuel capacity as our 'Coupes, and a fast Rotax engine so quiet and smooth I almost had to touch the panel to feel that the engine was still operating! On the next day, Saturday, we flew west again into Wales, but on a more southerly route than Mike had taken the day before, and crossed over the Severn River near the northern part of the estuary. Again the cloud cover became almost solid, but at altitudes that permitted us to press on, and with good visibility below the ceiling.

Once into Wales, we turned south along the exceptionally pretty Wye River Valley, buzzed Tintern Abbey ruins, and got as far as Pontypool, at the base of the Black Mtns., before we turned around. On the way back, we diverted a couple of times for aerial views of Raglan Castle and Chepstow Castle, then flew back across the Severn near the 2 major bridges that cross it, and then east-northeast back to Oxford's Kidlington, again passing over some very beautiful scenery, dotted with lakes and some startlingly deep quarries.

Somewhere along the flight back, I realized that I had begun to understand at least a little of what was being said on the radio! (Between the different terminology and Brit accents, that took a while!) Upon our return to Kidlington, Mark humored me by requesting the one grass runway they have, since I'd never landed on grass; it was a new fun experience! This 2:20 hrs. with Mark was the big splurge of the trip, but very worthwhile.

Since I enjoyed flying in his plane, Mark also offered to put me in touch with CFIs who have the Eurostar in other parts of the country, so that when I'm over there again I can arrange to go flying in whatever region I'm visiting! Some other differences I noticed: there is no general air-to-air frequency comparable to 122.75 in the U.S.. At all but the smallest, most casual air fields, everyone out on the field is required to wear bright yellow nylon vests for safety -- for that purpose, Mike carries 2 of them in his 'Coupe.

UK charts come in "half-mil" and "quarter-mil" versions (250,000:1 and 500,000:1. U.S. sectionals are half-mil) and arrive in one giant laminated roll that you have to contrive to somehow fold to fit in the cockpit! The UK transponder squawk for G.A. is 7000; because it is so close to various "trouble" squawks, they typically turn it to standby while changing to assigned squawk codes. UK altimeter settings are given in millibars (US uses inches of mercury, the rest of the world millibars.)

The following weekend, I drove back to the Cambridge area, to be nearby for flying out of Bourn with Mike in G-HARY to a scheduled EMU (Ercoupe Meet-Up), for lunch at North Weald. I arrived at Bourn for our planned 10 a.m. take-off, but found the weather looked uncannily like SoCal's marine stratus, with a couple of low overcast cloud layers plus heavy haze down to the ground giving poor horizontal visibility as well.

We hung out at the flying club all morning with others who were also waiting hopefully, giving time for lots of hangar-flying with local characters, and to read some of the WWII memorabilia on the walls. About 1 p.m. it had thinned enough that Mike said, "Let's go up in the circuit and take a look." Once there, it looked just about like L.A. basin air on a 3-mile day, maybe slightly better

from side to side, but with the sun now warming everything, and a few blue patches, we decided to set out.

By the time we reached North Weald, about a half-hour's flight to the SE, we landed with sunshine burning through the haze. As it happened, the North Weald airport was also the venue for a massive RV fly-in that day, and about 50 of them had already arrived, making it a very colorful field! (And also a very crowded cafe & bar.) Mike said the RV homebuilts are extremely popular there. I took photos of a few of the most interesting RV paint jobs and amusing call signs (e.g. G-DUDE).

When Mike & I landed in G-HARY, Robert Rombouts, who had flown in from Ostend, Belgium, in Ercoupe OO-PUS, was already there, and so was Keith Peacock. Robert brought gifts he'd had made for all of us: a white neck lanyard with "ERCOUPE LOVERS" in blue lettering! Before long, we met up with David Hulks, a former Ercouper for 10 years, who flew in from near Dover with his son, Steve, a commercial pilot, in their Robin. Unfortunately, another 'Couper who had been expected, Andrew Gardner, was grounded with mechanical difficulties (misfiring on right magneto, now suspected as plug fouling).

It was great to meet everyone and we all chatted away the afternoon. In addition, Mike knew of some Provost jets, small jets based there, so we walked over to that hangar to look them over. (See photos on Mike's website, <http://www.ercoupe.co.uk/> and click on Flying Adventures, then North Weald Aug. 30, 2008.)

We departed North Weald followed closely by Robert Rombouts in OO-PUS, who planned to overnight at Mike's field and attend a small local air show with us the next day. The Little Gransden air show on Sunday was delightful, despite foggy weather giving a slow start. There were a familiar-looking array of merchant booths (aviation, models, books, crafts, food), and a very up-close-&-personal flying display. One of the unusual food booths was a "hog roast," featuring a whole hog on a spit, which resulted in very yummy sandwiches layered of pork, stuffing & applesauce.

Flying displays included some low-level fly-bys of interesting aircraft I'd not seen fly before, such as a Russian Yak, and a chopper painted to resemble MASH's. I had to leave just about the time that two vintage biplanes were chasing each other around at very low altitudes. You should be able to find Mike's photos of the airshow online at <http://www.ercoupe.co.uk/> (click on Flying Adventures), also of the Ercoupe Meet Up at North Weald and our excursion to Shobdon.

My very great thanks to Mike Willis for all his help! He not only helped me live a long-time dream of getting airborne in the UK again, and helped me get oriented to flying there, and supplied a number of very helpful website links; but he was also an excellent host, and a huge help in solving an endless variety of difficulties that arose with logistics of my trip and various electronics I had along. Bravo to Mike and the wonderful worldwide network of Ercoupers!