

The Story Behind the Photograph -2



Rapides in a summer sky – G-AKIF from G-AEML

In view of these duties and my Assistant Judge role, I received a free entry ticket and vouchers for free food and accommodation and an 'Active – All Areas' airside pass.

For the first event, I drove to Rendcomb airfield and Colin and I manhandled G-AEML out of the hangar (a task which was only just a two-man job and would have been much easier with a team of four). My reward was then to be chauffeured into Wroughton as the only passenger in this splendid aircraft.

For the second show, I met up with Colin and the aircraft, already at Wroughton, as I had only just returned from the USA on business the previous day. The aircraft was parked on the far side of the field and needed to be moved across onto the flight line. As we were taxiing, we heard a radio call from G-AKIF – one of the other Rapides due to take part in the formation display: "Wroughton Kilo India Foxtrot inbound approaching Junction 15 M4".

Once air traffic had passed the airfield information, Colin called up "India Foxtrot, this is Mike Lima taxiing on the field. Suggest you hold vicinity of Junction 15 and we'll join you for formation practice". I was therefore in the right place at the right time for photographing one beautiful aircraft from another against a gorgeous summer sky during a twenty minute formation practice.

In 1994, I teamed up with my work colleague Colin Dodds to make an entry in that year's Dawn to Dusk Trophy competition. I had the idea of flying around Britain in a suitable aircraft over locations where aircraft used to be built. Colin borrowed David Wells' De Havilland DH87B Hornet Moth G-AELO as our mount and flew the route based on my research, flight planning and navigation.

Colin subsequently asked me if I would like to help him as Assistant Judge at two 'Great Warbirds Spectacular' airshows that were held at Wroughton, Wilts. Colin is a member of the Historic Aircraft Association and is a CAA Display Authorisation examiner. For these shows, he was both Chief Judge and Safety Officer.

At the first show, Colin flew the newly-restored DH89 Rapide G-AEML, belonging to Proteus Petroleum. For the second of the two, he was also taking part in a formation display of three DH89 Rapides during the event. For both shows, I acted as Rapide ground crew, responsible for using the accumulator trolley – plugging it in to the under-fuselage socket before start-up; monitoring engine start in case of an incident such as an exhaust fire; and crawling beneath the aircraft once started to unplug the trolley and signal when it was safe for Colin to taxi away.

Both displays were blessed with excellent weather. At the first event, we awarded the Best Display trophy to a spectacular RAF C-130 display. On the second occasion, Colin asked my opinion and I suggested that the award should go to Barry Tempest, who had flown a smooth, advanced and compact display in the relatively low-powered Stampe SV4C biplane.

Colin, aware of all the other exotic aircraft on display, asked me why I had proposed Barry's display. I said "Of all the displays flown, it was the only one that the other display pilots applauded!" That was good enough, as far as Colin was concerned.

The three ship Rapide display provided a relatively gentler spectacle of three elegant aircraft showing off their fine lines. The final manoeuvre was a surprise, however. The formation ran in directly toward the crowd in 'vic' formation and then flew a 'bomb-burst'. The lead aircraft pulled straight up; that to the port rear rolled right and pulled to starboard; that to the starboard rear rolled left and pulled to port, so that the two rear aircraft crossed each other's path as the formation split.

John Blake, who was commentating, was equally impressed by this unexpected manoeuvre, which evoked his congratulatory response "Oh, my word!"

Altogether a fantastic experience which I could not have enjoyed more.



Formation practice: Rapide G-AKIF seen from Rapide G-AEML