

### The Story Behind the Photograph -3



*Graham Singleton's LongEze G-RAEM waiting to get airborne from Gamston*

In 1986, we owned Jodel D120A G-BIEN, based at Dunkeswell. Each year, we tried to fly to areas of the country with which we were unfamiliar, to practice our navigation skills. The aircraft was fitted with a VOR, but we depended largely on dead reckoning navigation supported by pre-flight planning and careful in-flight map reading.

In July that year, we headed off from Dunkeswell to an Auster Club Fly-In and camping weekend at Temple Bruer, a 550m grass strip located a few miles NNW of Cranwell in Lincolnshire. En route, we suffered a radio failure but carried on to reach our destination without further problems.

At Temple Bruer, we met up with a couple from Netherthorpe, Phil and Theresa, who suggested that we call in there on the way home, as they had a resident avionics man. We were pleased to do so, albeit without resolving the problem, returning safely non-radio on the Sunday.

Having made friends with the locals, we were invited back to stay with Phil and Theresa later in the year. During this second visit, it was suggested that I might like a flight in Graham Singleton's recently constructed LongEze G-RAEM. I was delighted to accept!

Graham explained that, in the calm evening conditions, he would not fly two up out of Netherthorpe, where the published take off run available on the 'long' runway 24 is only 490m. Instead, he would fly solo to nearby Gamston and fly me back from there. Phil duly drove me over to Gamston and the photo reproduced above was taken as we walked across the tarmac in the misty evening light to climb aboard.

With a 160hp Lycoming IO-320, G-RAEM had sparkling performance compared with my normal Jodel. I wrote a piece for the Wessex Strut newsletter at the time describing the type's handling and flight characteristics. I sat in the rear cockpit, which doubles as a baggage compartment when the aircraft is flown solo. To facilitate this, there is a side-stick controller on the starboard side and the rear cockpit is not provided with rudder pedals, leaving an unobstructed cockpit floor.

The main points of my write up, from memory, being as follows:

- Brisk take off and climb performance
- Excellent cruise performance
- Poor view forward and downward from the rear cockpit
- Light and responsive controls

I flew a steepish turn reversal and was quite happy with the roll rate; as I passed through wings level, Graham fed in rudder which resulted in a marked increase in the already acceptable roll rate.

We investigated the stall both in level and turning flight, which proved to be very benign. The design ensures that the foreplane stalls before the main wing. At the stall, the nose bobs down, keeping the main wing below its stall incidence. Stalling in the turn merely results in periodic nodding in pitch with no suggestion of any tendency to departure. At any point the aircraft could be flown away from the stall by simply opening the throttle.

Graham explained that these characteristics were very helpful when flying from the short grass runways at Netherthorpe, as he could comfortably approach just above the stall speed (which my recollection tells me was around 48kt).

This was demonstrated as we returned to Netherthorpe to land, into the sun, on runway 24. The ground air radio passed the information that there was a very thin layer of fog at about 50ft and suggested that Graham switch on his landing light so that they could warn of any gross heading errors late in the approach.

From overhead, the field was clearly visible. We set up a slow approach and, as we had been warned, there was a brief interval when the mist layer and sun's glare intruded and the runway disappeared from sight. Reassuring advice to 'keep straight as you are' resulted in the runway reappearing within a few seconds, followed by a completely uneventful landing.

The Rutan series seems now to be somewhat in decline in an era now dominated by the more conventional-looking Vans designs and a rash of new LSA developments. At the time, however, the VariEze and LongEze were cutting edge designs, both for their all-round performance and relative ease of construction. With their futuristic appearance they were a real statement that homebuilt aircraft could be much more exciting than the mass-produced designs emanating from the likes of Cessna and Piper.