

“We don’t charge landing fees for diversions” - Ron

It was January 1994 and I had just got back to work after the Christmas break. Colin and I were chatting about the holiday, when I asked him if he was familiar with the Dawn to Dusk Trophy. Colin Dodds was a work colleague and also a well-known pilot and author, with many contacts in the de Havilland Moth Club and the Historic Aircraft Association, where he is the current Deputy Chairman.

“Why do you ask?”

“Well, I’ve had a good idea for a Dawn to Dusk Competition flight”.

“Tell me more – having a good idea is the main problem”.

By way of explanation, the Dawn to Dusk Trophy is a flying competition invented at the Tiger Club when the Duke of Edinburgh was a member; indeed, the Duke donated the main trophy for the event. The aim of the competition is to encourage the inventive and adventurous use of aeroplanes by demonstrating what can be achieved in the course of a single day.

The rules are disarmingly simple. During the hours of daylight on a given day normally between mid-April and mid-August, the entrant(s) set off to fly around a route based upon their chosen theme. They are required to spend at least eight hours of the day in the air and must submit a report of their flight within three weeks of its completion. The report must explain why the chosen theme is worthwhile and present background information, flight logs and evidence of the completion of the flight, including photographs of turning points, receipts for fuel uplift and landing fees, etc.

There are a range of awards, which include: recognition for coming in the first three places, with the overall winner receiving the Duke of Edinburgh Trophy; the best report – Tiger Pooley Sword; best solo entry; best entry by an inexperienced crew; long distance trophy; best all ladies entry, and so on. The Duke of Edinburgh continues to chair the panel of judges.

We had been visiting my in-laws over Christmas and they had been discussing the competition, of which I had been aware from earlier visits to the Tiger Club by push-bike from school in the 1960s. On the drive back home to Somerset, I suddenly had an idea for an entry – it ought to be possible to fly around Britain over locations where aircraft used to be built, by companies that no longer exist. The only problem I could see was that my own aircraft had too short a range, and it would be far better if the competition flight could be made in a British-built aircraft.

I outlined this idea to Colin, whose response was “What a brilliant idea, why don’t you start some planning, whilst I see what I can do about an aeroplane.” A quick look through my own aviation book collection, augmented by three days research in the Royal Aeronautical Society Library in London, generated a list of companies and locations. Much to my surprise there were a lot of firms building aircraft during the First World War that I had never heard of, my favourite being The Vulcan Motor & Engineering Co (1906) Ltd of Southport who built some 725 aircraft during the War.



I decided to position red, green and blue stickers on an aeronautical chart representing ‘major / must have’; ‘significant / should have’ and ‘minor / nice to have’. Having given the chart the appearance of an outbreak of some dreadful disease, I settled down to try to find a route that offered the prospect of good coverage for the task.

We needed to avoid Class A airspace and it was obvious that we were unlikely to have the speed and range to cover Scotland as well as England. There also seemed little prospect of penetrating far into the south

west, so my old employer, Westland, was also excluded from the list.

The final route extended from Yorkshire and Lancashire down to the south coast, before returning to the Midlands and East Anglia. Based on an assumed endurance of around three hours at 90kt, it looked as if there was scope for a route covering around 600 nm with perhaps three refuelling stops (or two at a pinch).

By the time summer approached we had the bones of a route, but no aircraft. Then, Colin had a breakthrough, having put the word out in the de Havilland Moth Club that he was looking to borrow an aircraft for a week or so in the summer. Back came David Wells with the amazing news that, as he was planning to be away for a period, Colin could make use of his 1936 de Havilland Hornet Moth biplane for the week. More than that, there would be no charge other than our own direct costs in terms of fuel and oil, provided that use of the aircraft was kept below 12 hours flying time.

A quick look at the chart revealed that even with the relatively long range of the Hornet Moth, we would not reasonably be able to complete the entire route in a single day. This was significant, as had there been sufficient range, the route could start and finish at the aircraft's home base Little Gransden.



After further investigation, we decided that the aircraft could be moved on the Saturday to the gliding site at Pocklington, a wartime Halifax station, where the Wolds Gliding Club offered overnight accommodation and promised to make hangar space available for the aircraft.

Logistics were a bit of a problem, as even if the flight were successful, we would end up 125 miles from our take off point, where there would be at least one car to collect. After a bit of thought, we decided to drive (two cars) to Little

Gransden, where we would meet Mark Miller, who looked after David's aeroplane. My car would stay at Gransden, and I would drive Colin's car to Pocklington.

We got the aircraft out of the hangar and then there was the usual faffing about with refuelling, maps, oil and aircraft documents.

"Colin, is it OK if I head off now?" – I was conscious of the fact that I was driving and Colin would be flying and probably averaging nearly twice my speed. Colin said OK and tossed me his car keys. This was a mistake, and it was compounded by a separate mistake that I had made earlier.

As I drove north, it slowly dawned on me that we had not removed Colin's headsets from his car. The upshot was that when I arrived at Pocklington, there was no sign of the aircraft, which I had thought would arrive ahead of me. Colin had had to borrow headsets from Mark, who needed to return home to get them.

Eventually, Colin arrived and I made a grovelling apology. Colin was a little concerned at the apparently high oil consumption on the flight up from Gransden. We put the aircraft to bed and were then shown a pretty basic bunk room in the gliding clubhouse. The second problem then hit home. I had not asked what facilities were provided and had blithely assumed we would be staying in a local bed and breakfast. As it turned out, the room was just a room with two single beds and no bedding. I had no sleeping bag and no option but to bed down fully clothed, using my leather jacket to try, rather unsuccessfully, to stay warm.

We studied the weather forecast, which indicated that the weather would be perfect, following the clearance of early fog in the Vale of York. This was a potential issue, as we had to be airborne by 0730 if we were to complete our planned route, including fuelling stops, in the hours of daylight.

True to the forecast, it was foggy at 0600, and the fog cleared to a gin-clear summer's day at about 0930. Monday – the same; Tuesday – the same; Wednesday – the same; Thursday – the same. At

least we had the opportunity for some tourism, including visits to the aircraft museum at Elvington and a look at the interesting machines at The Real Aeroplane Company, Brighton. We also had a tourist visit to York, where the draw of an excellent aviation bookshop in The Shambles proved hard to resist; there was also a visit to Beverley for lunch.

It looked as if Friday would finally offer acceptable weather and we were airborne by 0730 heading for Holme upon Spalding Moor and Sherburn in Elmet, en route to crossing north of Leeds Bradford to Samlesbury, Blackpool and Warton. To my surprise, air traffic seemed to accept our unusual routing without the slightest comment. Colin would call "Golf Lima Oscar 2000 ft on QNH 1020 from Pocklington to Leicester – Navigation competition" and there would be a simple "Roger" and not the slightest question of why an aircraft that was in a navigation competition was headed from Pocklington to Leicester was flying due west, when the direct track would have been almost due south.



The airfields all came up according to plan and were duly photographed as we started to get into the serious business of a route extending over 600 nm with more than 40 turning points. I should say that our navigation aids comprised a map, a directional gyro, a P-type spirit compass on the floor between the seats and a single VHF radio.



It was still early as we approached Liverpool flying at low level down the Mersey estuary to photograph Speke and Hooton Park before heading across to the Airbus factory at Broughton. As we approached the controlled airspace and asked for permission to transit, the friendly controller said "No problem, not above 1500 ft maintaining VFR. I'm expecting an RAF Hawk coming the other way, but you asked first, call westbound for Neston".

After Broughton, the route took us across Staffordshire over the Boulton Paul test airfield at Seighford, now well-camouflaged by agriculture, continuing from there towards our planned landing at Leicester.

"What do you think of the weather, Colin?" I was looking at a dark grey wall of cloud ahead to the east.

"Doesn't look great, let's listen out on the Leicester frequency to see if they are flying".

This was an astute move, as the next thing we heard was Leicester giving their current weather as 300 foot cloudbase and one mile visibility in rain.

"OK, time for Plan B, Ron. I'd like to get on the ground anyway to check the oil consumption, so let's divert to Coventry".



We shut down on a damp, grey, greasy tarmac apron at Coventry next to a DHL Convair 580. I hopped out with the well-named oily rag and wiped off the oil that was trickling down the inside of the undercarriage legs, before it could get as far as the brakes. A check on the oil contents showed very modest consumption and we came to the conclusion that if you topped it right up, it simply threw out the first half litre, before settling down to a very acceptable burn rate.



After refuelling, we set off on the next leg of the route, to Shoreham on the south coast. Suffice to say, the flight thereafter was routine, except for greyer weather with thick haze in the east, instead of the clear blue skies in the west.

The full route flown, with take-off / landing points in italics, was *Pocklington*, Holme on Spalding Moor, Sherburn in Elmet, Leeds Bradford, Samlesbury, Blackpool, Warton, Southport, Speke, Hooton Park, Broughton, Seighford, *Coventry (diversion)*, Staverton, Hucclecote, Moreton Valence, Filton, South Marston, Chilbolton, Eastleigh, Sandown,

Bembridge, Portsmouth, Middleton on Sea, *Shoreham (lunch)*, Rochester, Wisley, Brooklands, Farnborough, Blackbushe, Woodley, *White Waltham*, Booker, Leavesden, Radlett, Hatfield, Luton, Barton-le-Clay, Cranfield, Peterborough, *Little Gransden*.

On arrival at White Waltham, we went to the West London Aero Club to book in and pay for fuel, oil and the landing fee. When it came to the latter, the duty manager looked up and said "We don't charge landing fees for diversions", Colin said "But, it wasn't ..." only to be cut off by the manager "I'll say it again, we don't charge landing fees for diversions!" When it came down to it, they liked the aircraft and they liked what we were doing with it.



At about 8 pm, we stiffly dismounted from the Hornet Moth and, after a couple of photographs as the sun set, restored her to her hangar after covering some 625 nm in 8.5 hours flying time on a route with some 40 turning points that ranged over much of the length and breadth of England.

With a sigh, we turned to my car and headed back to Pocklington, arriving quite late and finding the clubhouse locked. After a night in the car, we went our separate ways in the morning.



Later in the year, we went to London for the announcement of results and awards. One thing that, in retrospect, we had got right, related to the submission of the report. We had noted that it had to be submitted within three weeks of the flight. We had also noted that there was nothing to stop you writing the report before you flew, so that's what we did. We also, although we were using 2¼ inch floppy disks, managed to embed a series of black and white photos of relevant aircraft in the text. It's hard to believe how difficult and unusual this was in 1994, compared with today's media and memory-rich world.



We added the colour photos taken en route on separate sheets and presented our report in a binder with an evocative photograph of a Miles Falcon on the cover. We also edited our pre-drafted text to reflect the actual route flown including the Coventry diversion.

At the awards ceremony, we received some good-tempered 'joshing' from John Farley, the famous Hawker Siddeley and British Aerospace Harrier test pilot, who had been on

the judging panel and said to Colin "Of course, you guys got marked down because you were the most experienced crew". Colin had 6,000 hours total time 5,000 as pilot in command and was qualified in multi-jet, multi-piston, twin engine and single engine aircraft and helicopters.

Once the reverse order list reached the last three, we realised that we were going to win something. In fact, we were the overall winners and received the Duke of Edinburgh Trophy; a plaque each to keep; and a certificate signed by Prince Philip in his role as Chairman of the judging panel.

I subsequently expanded and wrote up the research conducted for the competition into a manuscript, which was published as the five volume series *British Built Aircraft*.

