



REPRESENTING SPORT & RECREATIONAL AVIATION IN THE SOUTHWEST  
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## DEVON STRUT NEWS, MARCH 2007.

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### CO-ORDINATOR'S COMMENTS

by Pete White

Welcome to the Devon Strut. We've had another wonderfully active month with Strut members all busy creating and organising for the forthcoming year. Our team are very focused and, although operating independently on some projects, are in constant touch with their team members. So who are the team?

**Jim Gale**, the NC chairman, has the BaP2 project under control, (when he is not rebuilding his lounge) and working parties around the region are poised, ready for action. **Steve Robson** is up to his ears in PFA EC business yet at the drop of a hat he is always available to help on the local front. **Mike Mold's** sterling work on the newsletter is a small part of his commitment to Strut duties. **Dave Silsbury**, although labelled as librarian this is but a drop in the Strut ocean of effort by Dave. He is masterminding our SW Regional Aero-rally at Dunkeswell in conjunction with Brendan Procter. **Ian Walsh** our safety officer, **Dave Millin**, fly-in organiser and **Peter Gristwood**, airspace and regulation officer, have joined forces to look after the organising of our fly-in events, including the arduous task of risk assessments for each venue. **Mike King** keeps our membership records straight and **John Kempton** looks after our accounts whilst **Keith Wingate** assists where and when needed. After counting up I noticed one missing, **Pete White** (me) who has been 'Co-ordinating'.

Several other Strut members offer their help with our events and get a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from their involvement but we must make a special mention of our 'Roving Reporter'; yes our Clark Kent of the Devon Strut News, Chris Howell. Chris has relentlessly pursued Orrisk insurance over the past year and from small beginnings we now have a substantial sponsor for our website and the BaP2 project, a Strut insurance policy covering all our events which tops up the small PFA primary contribution, plus 10% off our members' aircraft insurance. Well done, Chris!

Looking ahead to our evening meetings, on Thursday March 8<sup>th</sup> we have Mike Cross explaining AIC's and Notams and then our last meeting, on April 12<sup>th</sup>, before we start the fly-in season will be of a different format. In a change from having a guest speaker, the social evening will be for Strut members to be more involved. If any of you have special snippets of aviation related film on CD, DVD or 'memory stick', either of a personal nature or of general interest to all, please contact me. The intention is to run a program of still or moving images with short chats in between, a very laid back and convivial way to end our programme of winter meetings. Remember this is an experiment and if successful we will adopt it as a regular for one of our winter Strut evenings in the future.

We already have a great programme of speakers prepared for next autumn/winter including Polly Vacher on Thursday October 11<sup>th</sup>, more later.....

Our first fly-in for '07 will at Plymouth Airport and our Strut hosts will be John Kempton and Steve Leach. These guys have worked hard to establish a link with what is historically one of the West Country's prime sites but over recent times Plymouth appeared to have caught the '*big airport bug*' and resisted any close links with general aviation. The management are now very keen to welcome our type of flying back to their field but may lack experience of our style of aviation and so will need help to adjust. Please help John and Steve to turn 'Roborough' back to a place that we can all enjoy visiting and benefiting from. This year the fly-in will be *only* a fly-in and our ground activities will be located on the west side of the airfield with more control by us. Sunday April 29<sup>th</sup> should be in your diary for the Devon Strut's fly-in to Plymouth.

Organisation of the Fly a Teacher and Pupil (FaTaP) day at Bodmin is well under way. So far I have given presentations on our proposed event to a school in St Austell and another in Bodmin with very enthusiastic responses which will result in 12 pupils and 6 teachers from each school attending our event on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> May.

They will all receive a tour of the airfield, relevant aviation related talks by both Strut members and Cornwall FC instructors plus a local flight in a light aircraft. The long-term effects from their day's contact with aviation will hopefully help in their curriculum, their view on aviation and even a career opportunity. On the day we will need pilots and helpers so why not camp over on the Saturday night after our Strut fly-in on the Saturday and join in the fun.

All the best,  
Pete White

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## Last Meeting: Melvyn Hiscock's Rearwin Cloudster restoration

Melvyn Hiscock is well known as an author, journalist, airshow commentator and aircraft restorer. His presentation to our February meeting focussed on his complete restoration of a 1939 Rearwin Cloudster, one of less than a dozen survivors and the only example flying in Europe. What he didn't mention was his involvement in preparing the Vickers Vimy replica recently acquired by Brooklands Museum, his association with La Ferte Alais and his passion for collection and making guitars, about which he has also written books!



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## Circling the Patch: News from Members and Airfields Around the Strut.

*(with thanks for contributions from Chris Howell)*

### Belle Vue

Steve Wells, having sold his Robin DR400 some time ago, has recently bought Emeraude G-ARDD with Ray Trute at Belle View.

### Bolt Head

It is vitally important during the off season to get PPR from the farmer / strip owner, Malcolm, before you fly in to Bolt Head. All contact details are on the Airfields page of the Strut website. There has been a fence up at the old intersection to graze sheep which has reduced the runway length to 420 meters. Having spoken to Malcolm this week, Chris reports that he expects the fence to be removed and full 620 meters to be available again very soon and the grass will be cut as well. Bolt Head always drains very well and Chris has not experienced water-logging there. Whilst the £10 landing charge is a bit steep, Chris is always happy to negotiate a block booking for anyone that fancies it. There are two pubs in Malborough which is a fairly flat mile and a half walk away and whilst it is possible to walk down into Salcombe, Chris recommends a taxi ride back. There is a stunning spot on the cliffs, which is ideal for a picnic and which again, is about a mile and a half away. There is much to explore in this area so pick a warm day this summer and discover many of the secrets of South Devon. (- Chris H)



## Dunkeswell

The organisation of the **PFA Southwest Regional Rally** to be held at Dunkeswell over the weekend of 30<sup>th</sup> June/1<sup>st</sup> July is progressing well, capably steered by Dave Silsbury and Brendan Procter. All flying arrivals will be by pre-registration, with an application form on the Strut website accessible from links on the Home, Events and Airfield pages. Prospective visitors who submit an application form, an A5 SAE and the pre-registration fee of £5 (to help offset the set-up costs) will then receive joining instructions, airfield and event information from mid-late April onwards. A Saturday evening BBQ is planned and both internal and external catering will be provided by the Dunkeswell Air Centre restaurant. A marquee and bar are also planned. Exhibitors have been invited, including stands for the Devon and Somerset Gliding Club, the resident microlight and parachuting clubs, as well as national magazines and aircraft parts suppliers.

## Build-a-Plane 2

Gordon Salter of the Taunton-based Wessex Light Aeroplane Company flew the first UK example of the X-Air Hawk into Dunkeswell on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February to meet up with our BaP2 benefactor Tim Gilmour-White and Jim Gale, to officially place the order and a deposit for the new kit. Four locations have been identified (Kingsbridge, Sidmouth, Barnstaple and Thorverton, near Exeter), where the main components of the kit will be built & assembled by local groups of Scouts and Air Cadets before final assembly at Tim's workshop in Thorverton. PFA inspectors will oversee the operations with assistance from Strut volunteers.



*Tim Gilmour-White with Gordon Salter of Wessex LAC and the new X-Air Hawk – (photos by Jim Gale)*

## Eggesford

The weekend of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of February saw Jane Roberts, MD of insurance company Onrisk, spend the weekend at The Fox and Hounds and visiting Nigel Skinner's delightful airfield. Many Strut members were also present to discuss their individual aircraft insurance requirements and went away very happy with the quotations they received. Steve Robson and Jim Gale represented the Strut committee and reported favourably on the discussions on the Strut fly-in policy which are now concluded, bar the signing of the documents.

With PFA's public liability cover for struts now a primary policy but for only £1M, our Onrisk cover provides a top-up of a further £2M at a discounted premium. Steve also came away with a cheque from Jane for Onrisk's sponsorship of our website to the tune of £750 and with a commitment to do so for at least the next 3 years. The Eggesford hangars were full including the large Broussard slotted in with the benefit of Nigel's new machine which raises the aircraft on trolleys and slides them into the hangar sideways, thus creating compact parking.

## Exeter Airport

Dermot Richardson reports that, following the take over by the new owners, so far all is well for GA at Exeter. The general plan seems to be to move all light aircraft operations to the north side for which road access is possible through a security gate off the old A30. *(I fondly remember when I used to fly from Exeter, driving to the barrier on the south side and then waiting anything up to half an hour to get the green light to be allowed to race across the airfield to get to our aircraft on the north side - Chris. My experience also, sometimes to the point of waiting for longer at the traffic lights than the duration of the subsequent flight! - Ed)*

## Plymouth

Details of our first fly-in of the season on 29<sup>th</sup> April will be circulated once we have received a guidance document which is being prepared for us by the Plymouth SATCO.

## Perranporth

News from Mike Hanley that Mk26 Spitfire ON-B has now had three flights and is going very well. There was a problem with the brakes but that is now sorted and all the P's & T's are good. The most impressive thing is the sound of the engine; it sounds like the real thing! Here are a couple of photos taken on 22<sup>nd</sup> February of Stefan Heale having fun!



## Watchford

**Bye bye, Bebe.** Saturday 3rd February proved to be a brief oasis of stunning weather (in an otherwise torrential start to 2007) as the editorial Jodel D9 departed Watchford for the last time and climbed out northwards towards Exmoor and the channel crossing to Swansea for a rendezvous with the her new owner, Gwynli Jones. Steve Robson accompanied me in his Condor, providing a spare seat for my return trip after the transaction. Our first call to Cardiff Radar on 126.625 brought helpful approval to clear through their new block of Class D controlled airspace, from Minehead to Nash Point at 3,500ft before the cruise along the Welsh coast from Porthcawl to Port Talbot, past Swansea Docks and the descent in to Fairwood Common.



*A recent air-to-air opportunity with Steve in 'FJ.*



*Mike's last flight in the D9, joining d/w RW10 Swansea.*

Dewi Griffiths' Jodel Mascaret was already on the apron as we taxied in and (after being intercepted by a pair of cheery lads taking landing fees and selling Avgas) we found Gwynli and Dewi (who sold Brian Anning his Champion Tri-Traveller many years ago) in the café after their flight down from Llanbedr in North Wales. Mike Wells soon joined us, having left Watchford in his D112 some 30 minutes after us. Concluding the ceremonial discussions and exchanges of paperwork over the obligatory tea and bacon roll, I briefed Gwynli on the handling and performance of the D9 sufficiently for him to kick the tyres, try her on for size and depart back to Snowdonia. It left me with a peculiar combination of sadness and relief;

sadness that a delightful partnership of nearly 14 years had come to an end but relief that I could now think about my next project.

I really enjoyed the trip back to Watchford with Steve in his Condor but I've been surprised by how long it's taken me to come to terms with psychologically "letting go" of the little machine that had been my "Bebe" for so long. I hope Gwynli has as many years of enjoyment with her. – *Mike Mold*

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### Welcome to New Members

Mike Gatcombe of Yeovil. Mike is a friend of Peter Warren and is learning to fly at Dunkeswell.

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### Project News

More evidence of Dave Silsbury's progress with 4 concurrent projects – his exciting "first of type" in the UK, Pietenpol Sky Scout G-SILS and Jodel DR1050M Excellence G-JODL (wing covered and sprayed in silver).



Dave and Brendan Procter's Currie Wot / Se5a G-BFWD has a new engine cowling crafted by Gordon Smith and Brendan's Sipa 903 G-DWEL has reached re-cover stage and is awaiting renovation of its canopy frame.



Peter Warren of Bridgewater has provided some recent photos of his Kolb MK111 Xtra project, showing the wing assembly.



Brian Murray is making good progress with his RV9a in his workshop in Teignmouth.



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### Message from Mike King (Membership Secretary)

Will all members (paying and honorary) who have yet to renew their subscriptions please return their membership application forms with their cheques for £15 and the Data Protection Act clause signed. The information listed in the form needs to be included in the Strut's return to PFA HQ to maintain the Strut's status as affiliated to the PFA and to qualify for PFA primary insurance cover.

For members who have chosen not to renew their subscriptions this will be their last newsletter. There will be no newsletter circulated in April but services will resume in May!

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### AEROLETTERS

Dear Mike,

I am pleased to tell you that I have the Permit for the Eurostar back. I now have to wait until snow has cleared from the Wales field and there is also clear weather to bring it back. I have to get to Hereford if I go by road, unless you have any ideas or know of any pilots looking for a jolly over to Shobdon and could drop me off there, or if they are up for it, the private landing strip in Hardwick about 11 nm SSW of Shobdon.

With weather as it is it, I will not be going for several days. Obviously Branscombe needs to be serviceable as well. Although I could bring it back to Dunkeswell and leave it outside for a few days. I'll obviously share expenses and of course be happy to repay the gesture in the future.  
Thanks for your time  
Nigel Nicholson,  
Sidmouth (01395 577169, nick99@v21.me.uk)

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From Alan Crutcher. (*and in no way intending to be prophetic – Ed*)  
(Slightly modified from the PFA BB)

A group of pilots went flying their old kites to Switzerland for a week. As they were hotelling it, in order to save money they decided each night to sleep two to a room. No one wanted to room with Pete because he snored so badly but they decided it wasn't fair to make one of them stay with him the whole trip so they voted to take turns.

The first night Alan slept with Pete and came into breakfast the next morning with his hair a mess and his eyes all bloodshot. They said, "What happened to you?"  
He said, "Pete snored so loudly, I just sat up and watched him all night."

The next night it was a Bob's turn. In the morning, same thing - hair all standing up, eyes all blood-shot. They said, "What happened to you? You look awful!"  
He said, "Wow, that Pete shakes the roof. I just lay awake and watched him all night."

The third night was Reg's turn. Reg was a semi-retired engineer and a man's man. The next morning he came to breakfast bright eyed and bushy tailed. "Good morning."  
They couldn't believe it! They said, "What happened?"

He said, "Well, we got ready for bed. I went and tucked Pete into bed and kissed him good night. He sat up and watched me all night long!"

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*"There is nothing more wonderful or thrilling than going up into the skies in a little aeroplane, free to do what you want and go where you will" - Amy Johnson, 1934*

### **FLY BACK by Rhymair**

Come, fly back, fly back with me  
to when we were on our own and free.

No flight plans, ATC or VFR,  
No radio with orders from afar,  
Just let them be and come,  
fly back, fly back with me.

Lift your head from the cockpit, pilot,  
For you are missing all you came to see.

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### **CAA NPA: Change in frequency of medical examinations**

At the October 2005 meeting of the JAA Licensing Sub-Sectorial Team (Medical) it was agreed that the *period of validity* of certain JAA medical examinations and associated electrocardiograms should be *increased*. These proposals have been subject to a consultation process known as a "Notice of Proposed Amendment", have subsequently been agreed by the Licensing Sectorial Team and are now awaiting adoption by the Regulation Sectorial Team (RST).

Whilst the main change is that the validity of the medical certificate and ECG for *class 1* holders between 40 and 59 years old will be increased from 6 months to 1 year, another part of the proposals concerns the period of validity of *class 2* medical certificates.

Currently class 2 medical certificates are valid for 5 years under age 30, 2 years for pilots aged 30-49 and then 1 year from age 50. *The proposal is that class 2 medical certificates will be valid for 5 years under age 40, then 2 years for pilots aged 40 to 49, then yearly thereafter.* Additionally, there will be the rule that a class 2 medical certificate issued before the age of 40 will not be valid after the holder's 42nd birthday.

Following the latest meeting of the Licensing Sectorial Team it is now estimated that these proposals will be implemented at the end of this year. Once RST adoption has taken place we will be informed of the date of adoption by the UK. <http://www.caa.co.uk/default.aspx?categoryid=49&pagetype=90&pageid=6935>

## FOR SALE

- **Aeronca 11AC Chief G-IVOR.** Fancy some real flying? Genuine and reluctant sale of share in side by side 2-seat, Bodmin-based 1946 vintage taildragger. £29 / hr wet and £35 / month, Share £2,750 to include tailwheel conversion training (worth ca £700). Contact Pete White on 01752 406660 / 07774 017704 or Steve Waddy 07789 712873 for details.



- **Jodel Group at Plymouth.** Shares available in a group forming at Plymouth with a Jodel D120 Paris-Nice. Cruises at 85 knots, 6 hours endurance, 120 litre tank, useful load of 570 lbs, i.e. full fuel and two people with weight for baggage. A joy to fly with superb visibility both on the ground and in the air. Based on four people the group shares @ £3,500, £56 per month & £27/hr wet. Richard Walker 01752 407411 richardwalker123@onetel.com

- I am having a clear out of **instruments** left over from building my Titch and from refitting my Emeraude. Please see attached photo. Email me for individual photos and info. I am also saving to get a Garmin 296 so my faithful **Garmin GPS III Pilot** and my **Acer N35 PDA** which has a built in GPS and road nav software with memory map software and a 1-500 000 CAA chart are both for sale. Open to offers. Regards Keith Wingate 01548 857 513 Keithwinga@aol.com
- Gites in the Dordogne. La Roche Chabrelle website: [www.giteshols.com](http://www.giteshols.com) Contact Charlie Nott, La Roche Chabrelle 24320 St Just, France, Tel: UK 0844 232 6051 France 05 53 90 50 39 Fax: UK 0870 706 3246



**Beware Scams at thehangar.com** John Kempton has received three scam emails originating from Africa enquiring about his Aeronca Chief via thehangar.com and which have been reported this to the police.

## **Graham Jarvis – RIP**

I first met Graham 12 years ago when he was doing his PPL training at Bodmin and between Cessna sessions I introduced him to the joys of tail-wheel flying in 'Ivor the wings'. Once his wings were won he took his daughter Suzanne and her husband Pete flying in a Cessna 172; neither of them knew he had a licence and they thought he was playing about when taxiing but matters became more serious when Graham lifted off the Bodmin turf. They forgave him for the shock and both promptly became addicted and now have a PPL each and are building their own aircraft.

Graham progressed from a Jodel 112 to the aircraft he is best remembered for, G-AJES Piper L4 Cub in USAAF colours. Graham had left the West Country to live with his brother Donald in the West Midlands and the 'three' of them were to be seen all over the UK, France and Ireland during the next few years. The Aeronca Club had adopted JES and crew early on at a fly-in to Caernarfon when Graham was delighted to be not charged a landing fee after I suggested he booked in as a Piper Aeronca. When accompanying the Aeronca Club on an Irish tour, JES set off first followed by 5 Aeroncas and a little later, behind came the Stinson yet we always arrived at our destinations together.

Despite being a relative new comer to flying, his extensive travels had earned him much respect from his fellow pilots. Graham later had heart surgery which he overcame and returned to flying and even a bout of cancer did not keep him away from his love of the air. Graham supported the PFA and VAC with great enthusiasm and many of us will miss seeing his flying suited frame climbing out of JES, his face always sporting a wide friendly smile. See you later Graham .....

Pete White

*Graham died in hospital last Friday the 16<sup>th</sup> February after a short, chest related illness. The funeral will be on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> March at 15.15 at Bushberry Crematorium on the outskirts of Wolverhampton.*

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## **March Free Landings**

Pilot: Cromer, Eshott, Newtownards, Sandtoft, Seething, Tatenhill.

Flyer: Eaglescott, Panshanger, Redhill and Wycombe.

Today's Pilot: Popham, Old Buckenham, Old Sarum and White Waltham.

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Let's support the Wessex Strut at their traditional start of season Henstridge event on Easter Sunday, but be sure to check the Henstridge website <http://www.henstridgeairfield.com> for PPR and noise abatement arrival & departure routes.

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## **Next Devon Strut Evening Meeting**

**Stowey Arms, Exminster, Thurs. 8<sup>th</sup> March, 7.30 for 8.00 pm. Mike Cross, NOTAMS.**

Mike's talk will cover getting NOTAM briefings from the AIS website and how to get the most out of it. He'll also cover background information on the ICAO NOTAM system and the additional resources on the AIS site including Aeronautical Information Circulars (AIC) and the Aeronautical Information Package (AIP).

Mike learnt to fly on gliders at Lasham and did his PPL at Shoreham in 1974. He has shared a 1948 Luscombe 8E for a number of years, based at Popham. When the AIS site went live in 2002 he was one of 7 pilots who filed MORs regarding it. He represents AOPA in regular meetings with AIS on NOTAM issues and has worked closely with AIS in resolving issues.

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## **Tailpiece:**

**Sled Drivers – Fastest Guys in the Sky**

**by Brian Schul ( former SR-71driver)**

There were a lot of things we couldn't do in an SR-71, but we were the fastest guys on the block and loved reminding our fellow aviators of this fact. People often asked us if, because of this fact, it was fun to fly the jet. Fun would not be the first word I would use to describe flying this plane - intense, maybe, even cerebral. But there was one day in our Sled experience when we would have to say that it was pure fun to be the fastest guys out there, at least for a moment.

It happened when Walt and I were flying our final training sortie. We needed 100 hours in the jet to complete our training and attain Mission Ready status. Somewhere over Colorado we had passed the century mark. We had made the turn in Arizona to return to Beale AFB. The plane was performing flawlessly.

My gauges were wired in the front seat and we were starting to feel pretty good about ourselves, not only because we would soon be flying real missions but because we had gained a great deal of confidence in the plane in the past ten months. Ripping across the barren deserts 80,000 feet below us, I could already see the coast of California from the Arizona border. I was, finally, after many humbling months of simulators and study, ahead of the jet.

I was beginning to feel a bit sorry for Walter in the back seat. There he was, with no really good view of the incredible sights before us, tasked with monitoring four different radios. This was good practice for him for when we began flying real missions, when a priority transmission from headquarters could be vital. It had been difficult, too, for me to relinquish control of the radios, as during my entire flying career I had controlled my own transmissions. But it was part of the division of duties in this plane and I had adjusted to it. I still insisted on talking on the radio while we were on the ground, however. Walt was so good at many things, but he couldn't match my expertise at sounding smooth on the radios, a skill I had honed sharply with years in fighter squadrons where the slightest radio miscue was grounds for beheading. He understood that and allowed me that luxury.

Just to get a sense of what Walt had to contend with, I pulled the radio toggle switches and monitored the frequencies along with him. The predominant radio chatter was from Los Angeles Center, far below us, controlling daily traffic in their sector. While they had us on their scope (albeit briefly), we were in uncontrolled airspace and normally would not talk to them unless we needed to descend into their airspace.

We listened as the shaky voice of a lone Cessna pilot who asked Center for a read-out of his ground speed. Center replied: "November 1753C, I'm showing you at ninety knots over the ground." Now the thing to understand about Center controllers, was that whether they were talking to a rookie pilot in a Cessna, or to Air Force One, they always spoke in the exact same, calm, deep, professional tone that made one feel important. I referred to it as the "Houston Center voice."

I have always felt that after years of seeing documentaries on this country's space program and listening to the calm and distinct voice of the Houston controllers, that all other controllers since then wanted to sound like that and that they basically did. And it didn't matter what sector of the country we would be flying in, it always seemed like the same guy was talking. Over the years that tone of voice had become somewhat of a comforting sound to pilots everywhere. Conversely, over the years, pilots always wanted to ensure that, when transmitting, they sounded like Chuck Yeager, or at least like John Wayne. Better to die than sound bad on the radios!

Just moments after the Cessna's inquiry, a Twin Beech piped up on frequency, in a rather superior tone, asking for his ground speed. "I have you at one hundred and twenty-five knots of ground speed."

Boy, I thought, the Beechcraft really must think he is dazzling his Cessna brethren.

Then out of the blue, a navy F-18 pilot out of NAS Lemoore came up on frequency. You knew right away it was a Navy jock because he sounded very cool on the radios. "Center, Dusty 52, ground speed check."

Before Center could reply, I'm thinking to myself, hey, Dusty 52 has a ground speed indicator in that million-dollar cockpit, so why is he asking Center for a read-out? Then I got it. Ol' Dusty here is making sure that every bug smasher from Mount Whitney to the Mojave knows what true speed is. He's the fastest

dude in the valley today, and he just wants everyone to know how much fun he is having in his new Hornet.

And the reply, always with that same, calm, voice, with more distinct alliteration than emotion: "Dusty 52, Center, we have you at 620 over the ground." And I thought to myself, is this a ripe situation, or what? As my hand instinctively reached for the mic button, I had to remind myself that Walt was in control of the radios. Still, I thought, it must be done - in mere seconds we'll be out of the sector and the opportunity will be lost. That Hornet must die, and die now. I thought about all of our simulator training and how important it was that we developed well as a crew and knew that to jump in on the radios now would destroy the integrity of all that we had worked toward becoming. I was torn. Somewhere, 13 miles above Arizona, there was a pilot screaming inside his space helmet.

Then, I heard it - the click of the mic button from the back seat. That was the very moment that I knew Walter and I had become a crew. Very professionally, and with no emotion, Walter spoke: "Los Angeles Center, Aspen 20, can you give us a ground speed check?"

There was no hesitation, and the replay came as if was an everyday request. "Aspen 20, I show you at one thousand eight hundred and forty-two knots, across the ground." I think it was the forty-two knots that I liked the best, so accurate and proud was Center to deliver that information without hesitation, and you just knew he was smiling.

But the precise point at which I knew that Walt and I were going to be really good friends for a long time was when he keyed the mic once again to say, in his most fighter-pilot-like voice: "Ah, Center, much thanks, we're showing closer to nineteen hundred on our equipment."

For a moment Walter was a god. And we finally heard a little crack in the armour of the Houston Center voice, when L.A. came back with, "Roger that Aspen. Your equipment is probably more accurate than ours. You boys have a good one."

It all had lasted for just moments, but in that short, memorable sprint across the southwest, the Navy had been flamed, all mortal airplanes on freq were forced to bow before the King of Speed, and more importantly, Walter and I had crossed the threshold of being a crew. A fine day's work. We never heard another transmission on that frequency all the way to the coast.

For just one day, it truly was fun being the fastest guys out there.

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