



PRIVATE FLIGHT

Auster appeal

What does the ageing Auster mean to you? The affection for it of one reader has prompted a proposal from him, reproduced here, to renew interest in this fast-fading aircraft before it becomes only a memory.

CONSIDERING ITS MANY MERITS, the Auster is probably the world's most undervalued aircraft. The number of machines on the British Register is now reduced to just over 200 but the number flying may be considerably less than this. It is a near vintage aeroplane now, gentle, elegant and capable of carrying from two to four persons in relative comfort and economy. Many basic machines with good engine hours remaining can still be bought for under £1,000. But it will not always be so.

Despite the aviation world's general neglect of the Auster, to the point where many write-ups of the recent PFA Weekend at Sywell ignored them completely, there is a growing band of connoisseurs who value it as a real



pilot's aircraft. It is not the easiest plane to learn to fly accurately or land well, but persistence is amply rewarded by subsequent hours of flying pleasure in one of the nicest and safest aircraft in the air today.

While the majority remain indifferent to the Auster, the small group of enthusiasts is becoming more keen. For this reason, it seems to me that such pilots might wish to join an Auster pilots' association whose object would be to provide a focus for their enthusiasm. A badge to identify mem-

bers to each other might be a good idea. Such an association could decide on its aims once it was formed but Auster meets, week-end outings and aircraft preservation are possibilities. Membership could be open to any private, commercial or student pilot who has flown solo in an Auster.

Any reader who feels that this is a good idea and wishes me to take it further please contact me at 39 Abbey Park Road, Grimsby, Yorks, and declare his interest and/or desire to help.

J. SIME.



Straight and Level



● What does the ageing Auster mean to you? This question was asked in a recent article on our Private Flight pages.

What does the ageing Auster mean to me, I hear you ask?

A noisy, draughty conveyance with a sticking flap lever, a trim handle working in the wrong sense, coarse brakes with slippery heel pedals, and a sudden shortage of elevator just before touchdown.

But I'll forgive it. The Auster built a generation of skilled arrival artists. If you could land an Auster you could land anything.

Roger Bacon



Chapter 14

INTERNATIONAL AUSTER CLUB IN 2004

by Al Mathie, Colin Ladd, John Powell-Tuck and Mike Preston

AUSTERING TODAY AND THE INTERNATIONAL AUSTER PILOT CLUB by Al Mathie

(From his original article)

The late Sixties were a bit of a gloomy time for the Auster. Flying clubs were importing Cessnas and the appalling Piper Colt in increasing numbers, and anything with a tail wheel was suddenly considered 'difficult to fly'. Many Tiger Moths disappeared overseas whereas Austers were relegated in large numbers to rafters or dusty hangar corners. The image of the tatty Auster being dragged out for an occasional airing was, alas, all too often a reality. It was largely this depressing situation that led Jim Sime and a band of like-minded enthusiasts to establish the International Auster Pilot Club (IAPC) in 1973 and create an enduring resurgence of interest in the type.

During the early Seventies, IAPC membership expanded rapidly, and the relatively small number of Club fly-ins organised were an enormous success. The first IAPC Annual Fly-in, as it was then termed, took place at Grindale Field, near Bridlington, in June 1974 and attracted 27 Austers. Whilst, we can still attract that number regularly nowadays, we are hard pushed, other than at Cranfield, to emulate the staggering success of the '75 Fly-in at Shobdon where over 40 Austers turned up from as far away as

Aberdeen and even Denmark. A notable feature of Shobdon was the extremely high standard of Austers present, which gave the concours judges an enormous problem. Autocrat G-AHAY, in near original factory finish, eventually won the day. Through the late seventies Auster activity continued unabated, although these were thin times and fly-in attendances fell. The gales of January 1976 destroyed a number of Austers picketed outdoors, not least Jim Sime's blue and orange Mk.5 G-ANFU, and in the same year flying accidents claimed the lives of two IAPC members, Anton Chaplin, who hit power cables near Sunderland whilst returning to Norfolk in Autocar G-AJYO, and David Miller, a founder member, who was killed along with his wife and two daughters when his Autocrat G-AJRK crashed on the Isle of Wight.

David Miller was the first pilot to land at Popham when the field was established after being reclaimed from scrubland, and an annual Auster fly-in is held there, with a trophy bearing his name for the best Auster to attend. It was in the late seventies that Old Warden, thanks to the Old Warden Group of the IAPC, became a magnet for Austers, successive fly-ins there attracting large numbers of visitors both by Auster and by road, and successful events were repeatedly held at Marsh Farm, home of Colin Mason's Terrier G-ASDL, and Leicester where Ron Neal still oversees a few Austers, though not so many as in earlier days, when even the hangar walls were festooned with Auster fuselage frames and mainplanes. The renewed interest in fly-ins heralded a change in emphasis within the IAPC with a change from an annual event plus Club participation in a few others to the now familiar intensive



A typical Auster Fly-in scene at Paddocks Farm, Kibworth, in June 1988. 19 Austers (representing 12 variants) plus three other types attended. (Maurice Marsh)



International Auster Club 2006

flying programme shoe horned into the current frantic aviation year. Yearly events at established venues tend to form the basis of the Club programme, with the PFA Rally being the traditional place for pilots to bring their aircraft and also by showing the flag with the IAPC stand in the PFA marquee. The stand has been a notable success in recent years, attracting enormous interest and helping to swell the Club coffers both with sales and subscriptions, this being the perfect opportunity to coax members into paying overdue subs!

Of the IAPC events, the longest established are Michael Stops' Farm fly-in at Kibworth and the August gathering at Neville Rogers' strip at Castle Mill, near Bedford. Kibworth is only a five-minute hop from Leicester, so even the stay-at-homes can be relied on to make the trip! In fact the local numbers are always swelled by a stream of Auster arrivals from all over the country and a field full of cars too, so that the fly-in is now also the venue for the Club AGM. At Castle Mill, attendance is frequently so good that we have to open the farm gates and pull Austers into the adjoining fields. A regular feature of this fly-in is that the Red Cross is in attendance. The profits from the splendid lunch provided by Neville and his helpers go to the Red Cross, and the ladies usually manage a short Auster trip to see the local area, their medical skills having hopefully not been tested.

A number of other airfields have hosted notable events over the years, these varying from Biggin Hill and Bemburgh to George Strathdee's strip near Aberdeen. The grass strip is obviously very much in character with the Auster, so it has been nice to see the re-opened airfield

at Burnaston, itself a former bastion of Austering, as a regular venue for an IAPC event.

Despite Auster pilots being seemingly a rather retiring lot, competitions at our fly-ins have been a feature throughout the life of the Club, even if the odd trophy has wandered a bit or not been competed for on the odd occasion. The first major trophy was the Peter Mead Rose Bowl, presented in the early days of the IAPC by Brigadier Peter Mead of AOP renown, which is awarded for spot landing. A trophy presented by F&H Aircraft is for the best military restoration, whilst the latest addition is a splendid cut glass vase presented by Val and Tony Johnson.

This is awarded for navigation and reconnaissance in recognition of the Auster's AOP role and is usually competed for at the Kibworth fly-in. At the PFA Rally at Cranfield, most prizes are for concours or deserving aircraft, and the one for Austers is no exception. Presented to the PFA by the IAPC, it is the Auster Altimeter Trophy produced by member Robin Helliars-Symons. His splendid trophy, based on a wooden propeller hub, has a vintage altimeter, typical of countless Austers, mounted at its centre.

The Club news magazine has always been one of the mainstays of the IAPC. From the earliest days when it consisted of a comprehensive broadsheet produced by Jim Sime on foolscap sheets to the glossy product Roy Hough has conjured up over the last three years, International Auster Pilot Club News has featured all aspects of the Auster scene, maintaining in particular the international flavour of the Club by regular inclusion of items from all over the world.

Graham Kilsby initiated the magazine style of publication with 'Vol.1 No.1' in January '78. This format was consolidated by Bill Fisher until mid '81, with Ian O'Neill continuing the good work in a most creditable fashion for the next 4 1/2 years. Roy Hough made the jump to start the current series A4 sized magazines in '86 and has excelled himself with a full colour-covered publication of great merit in the Auster's 50th Anniversary year. There is no doubt that these successive magazine editors have been the linchpins of the IAPC, particularly during thin times, and we owe them our thanks not just for their great attention to detail but also for dedication to an awesome task.

In the very earliest days of the IAPC, Peter Stoddart established Leicester Museum of Technology as a repository for Auster history, this from a local and industrial standpoint as distinct from a military angle, which is admirably preserved by the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop. Peter has answered enthusiasts' and re-builders' queries for years with un-flagging thoroughness, as well as supplying technical drawings copied from the factory originals in response to cries for help worldwide. The Museum's aircraft G-AGOH is virtually the flagship of the IAPC, and in the hands of Philip Goodwin, Eddie Stevens or Steve Thursfield it has attended more Auster fly-ins over the years than any other aircraft. Moreover, G-AGOH keeps alive the original factory scheme of cream with green trim. Peter has now passed the drawings to Cliff Baker, whose spares service at Carr Farm, near Newark, fuelled from the residue of the factory stocks, is fast becoming a most comprehensive and vital back-up for all Auster variants. Batches of expendables and no longer



available critical parts such as brake back-plates and canopy transparencies have been manufactured, and Austerers can even fly into Carr Farm, which has a splendid airstrip running right up to the buildings.

No rambling through the recent Auster scene would really be complete without a further mention of Ron Neal, formerly employed in Auster's experimental department and latterly in charge of the Husky production line. Ron knows most of the extant Austers by name, and his hangar at Leicester still oozes with Auster expertise, despite extensive intrusion of present-day men and machines. Ron is the oracle on Auster airworthiness matters as far as the CAA is concerned, and rightly so. His perfectionist approach is an example to all who seek to maintain or rebuild Auster variants, particularly where authenticity of equipment or colour schemes is involved. Ron would certainly disown some of the things that are done to Austers these days - a couple of aircraft with instrument panels like Concorde come readily to mind, as do two or three with boudoir interiors of thick, bright carpet and flashy trim. Not everyone is necessarily out to impress him, but Ron's influence is undoubtedly reflected in the generally high standard of Austers that we see on our flying fields. The dusty old Auster in the back of the hangar is now well and truly a thing of the past and that's where I started!

The Auster is well established as a classic British light aircraft, a thing of character and value to be preserved and enjoyed. A whole generation of pilots grew up to love or hate Austers, those who disparage them being primarily the ones who never managed to fly them properly, particularly

when returning to earth, which the Auster only likes to do at the speed where all three wheels are parallel to the ground! I don't know precisely when the Auster's heyday was supposed to be; I remember some years ago seeing an article in the aviation press which grudgingly recognised the aircraft's returning popularity in its title 'An Indian Summer for the Auster'. Well, that was some time back. It's still summer for the Auster and set fair for the future.

Fifty or more years ago who would have thought that these aircraft would still be in regular use in the 21st century. Whilst few Austers are now employed for commercial purposes they continue to provide pleasure and adventure to those fortunate enough to fly them.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to all those involved in the production of what has proven to be a rugged and long-lived aeroplane.

The Auster has been one of the best kept secrets over recent years as they represent excellent value in comparison to more common types. However they have finally come of age and are now considered to be desirable vintage aircraft still practical for touring and pleasure flying.

The International Auster Club by Colin Ladd and John Powell Tuck

The International Auster Club as it is now called caters for all enthusiasts of the marque whether they are interested in maintaining aircraft or the history behind them. Membership is truly international and in

2002 there are about 90 members scattered around the world outside the UK and a total of 450. The club's success has gone from strength to strength over the years thanks to the enthusiastic and adventurous nature of its members and a full calendar of events is held every Year. The quarterly magazine is a mainstay of the club providing information and interesting features to the members. The quality of this publication has steadily improved over the years and is now quite exceptional for the size of organisation.

One major development over the last couple of years has been the web site put together by Mike Preston and Ian Pawson. This has been very successful for flow of information, history and 'Sales and Wants'.

The military history of Austers has generated a great deal of interest in recent times with several aircraft painstakingly restored to their military schemes. Owners are regularly invited to attend air shows with these machines.

The number of Austers now returning to the air is encouraging and it would appear that



Ian Pawson the Clubs web master



International Auster Club 2006



Club meeting at Eggesford Devon summer 2000



A gaggle of Austers at the Club AGM held at Leicester Airfield 2003



Mike Preston, John Golding, Mick Ames and Charles Kirk and the Auster Mk 11 at the AGM weekend at Leicester Airfield

they will continue to be used for decades to come providing friendship and fun to all involved.

Colin Ladd

The aviation world has recently celebrated the Centenary of Flight, and all of us with an interest in Austers will wish that some forty years from now, a long line of Austers will start to achieve their own centennial goal. It is also more than forty years that the Auster Aircraft Company was absorbed into the Beagle venture and some thirty since that enterprise folded. Globalisation was not a familiar byword in those days, and one can only surmise at the distress these events caused amongst that close knit work force. One might have been justified at that time, in thinking that few Austers would have survived the twentieth century.

Thankfully that has not been the case, and as Al Mathie has previously pointed out, the unloved Auster is a thing of the past. The reasons of course are numerous, but amongst the most important must be "commonsense"! There are quite a few British aeroplanes that will make you go weak at the knee, but few that possess both the nostalgia and the capability of the Auster. It is not surprising to find them wandering continents, far from home, nor is it uncommon to witness open mouthed disbelief, at the large volumes of equipment unveiled from some Austers on their travels!

My secretarial predecessors have rightly lavished praise on some of the individuals, instrumental in the Auster's resurrection, and the success of what we now call the International Auster Club. Heroic amongst these must be our magazine editors, because human nature being what it is,



expectations continually grow, and each new editor faces fresh demands.

As we look forward to the reprint of Ambrose Hitchman's wonderful book, Peter Wood is the current beneficiary of this dubious privilege, and once more we are fortunate to have someone who has yet again raised the bar. Ironically, as Austers grow older, technology, through the development of the magazine and the use of the Internet is playing an increasingly important part in the future of the Club. The soul of the Club may reside in the UK, but its spirit is undoubtedly international, and it is through these channels that it breathes.

It is pleasurable to reflect and reminisce, but what of the future? Just when the wheel seems to have turned full circle, one might conclude that all is well, and with so much achievement one could be forgiven for thinking that the dragon has been slain, and that little stood in the way of "the Auster" achieving its own centennial milestone.

Sadly bureaucracy and ignorance within the CAA and the recently established European Aviation Safety Agency, pose as great a threat as any in the past. The inability of these authorities to put light aviation into a sensible context, has produced a raft of legislation that is slowly achieving the double affront of not only eroding the pleasure of flying, but at the same time of coming dangerously close to making the cost of doing so prohibitive.

The IAC has excelled at "informality" but these are issues on a scale and of a nature that we have not had to face in the past, and we are not able to face alone. The ability to adapt is the essence of survival, and inevitably we are



The first meeting of the extended international Auster Club committee at a local hostelry in Widmerpool



Annual general meeting at Leicester July 2005, John Powell-Tuck officiating with Ambrose much in evidence



Auster Line up at the AGM Leicester Airport July 2005



International Auster Club 2006



The first meeting of the International Auster Club Heritage Group at Snibson Discovery Park on 28th October 2000.

going to have to look beyond the Club and give our support to stronger alliances such as AOPA and Europe Air Sports. As the song goes, *"the times they are a changing"*, and as a famous international rugby player once said, *"to be as good as you were, you have to be twice as good as you were"*! Complacency is the enemy.

The future of the Auster depends in part on the success of the Club, and that in turn on the support of all who share an interest in these aeroplanes. Opinions will differ, but if we focus on our commitment to the aeroplane, the majority of those that fly in 2005 will achieve that centennial milestone.

John Powell-Tuck