

Pilot

February 1973

25p

Flying for Business and Pleasure

Flying a Fournier to Bavaria.

Flying the Bell 212 helicopter on instruments.

Station mail run in the Australian outback.

Capt. de Havilland's Moth—the first practical light aeroplane





FLYING A FOURNIER TO BAVARIA

Cheaper, quicker and less fuss than going by car, was this trip in an RF-4D, "the nicest touring single-seater."

By John Barrett.

The object of the trip was to visit the Third German Motorglider Contest at Burg Feuerstein to see and fly the new two-seater powered gliders. The plane used was the Fournier RF 4D—probably the nicest touring single seater on the market, with its excellent cruise speed of 112 mph and superb visibility for map-reading. Ours carries a 360-channel radio, but otherwise it is 'eyeball' navigation all the way.

Customs were cleared at Ashford, and then on course for Charleroi in Belgium, the first refuelling point. I believe in having plenty in reserve for diversions and besides, after 1½ hours, I am ready for a cup of coffee. Charleroi is a civil aerodrome but also houses a powerful squad of Starfighters. As I cruised in to land, it all looked innocent and deserted with 1½ miles of runway lying idle in the sun; but as I walked over to the control tower, there was a sudden *woosh* as a Starfighter shot along the runway and hurtled into the sky.

Customs officials have their own peculiarities in different countries, and here all they asked for was the journey log book. I opened it at the appropriate page, a large rubber stamp was flourished and then ten seconds later I was being shown the door.

The next leg was to Dahlemer Binz, a nice little field just inside Germany, in the Eiffel mountains, and the home of Sportavia, the firm that builds Fourniers. They have recently laid a tarmac runway, and there is a pleasant restaurant. There was no sign of a customs official although I had requested this in my flight plan. When I queried this with the controller, he said, "I do it." Apparently he phones the local customs lads, and

dictating your particulars is enough!

I wanted new outrigger hoops for the RF 4, and whilst the factory was fitting these I followed my usual method of flight planning—this is to go to the restaurant and seek out a pilot of the country I am flying in and ask his advice on the proposed route. Here I met two helpful Germans who advised me to route over Koblenz and Diez to pass just north of the Frankfurt VFR restricted area. Ninety-nine per cent of Germany is now covered by controlled airspace, but they explained that although the map marked the route as controlled above 1,000 feet AGL, I was free to fly in VMC above this provided I kept to either 3,500 ft or 5,500 ft when on a heading between 0° and 179°. VFR traffic coming the other way flies at 4,500 ft and 6,500 ft, and the IFR traffic is slotted in between.

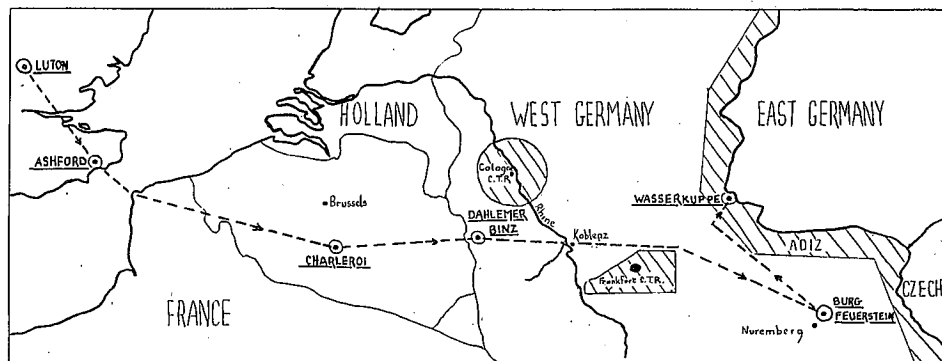
It was a pleasant flight and the Rhine was duly identified dead on time, only to be re-identified a few miles further on and four times as wide! After two hours Burg Feuerstein showed up with a posse of powered gliders overhead as competitors arrived: another pleasant field with a choice of tarmac or grass and an efficient mechanic to provide tie-down stakes. Many of the competitors were camping out in the woods bordering the field, with their machines tied down alongside. One from Switzerland was a Diamant glider with a jet engine fixed above the wing; rather sensibly the rear fuselage was sheeted over with aluminium. The start-up of this machine was watched by a large crowd, and I think we all expected to see it blast off the runway. Instead the engine was remarkably quiet; after a long ground run of

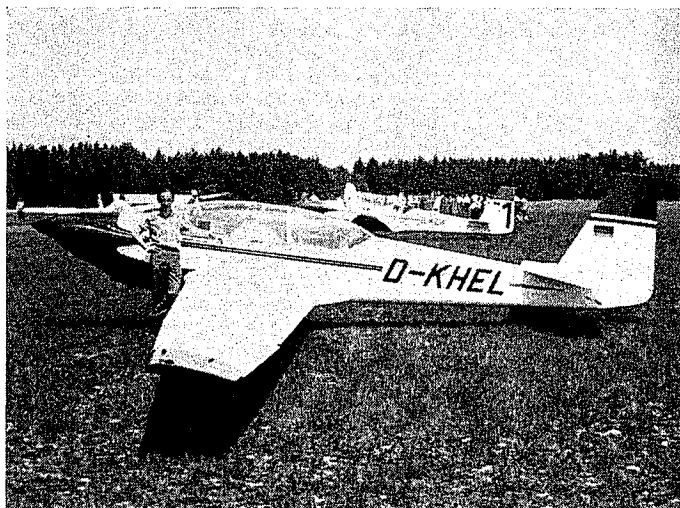
1,000 ft it gently unstuck. I asked the pilot how he had fared after the first contest day in weak thermals, and he said he had been forced to land once. This meant asking a passing motorist for the temporary loan of his car battery to refire the turbine!

Briefly, the competition was to fly a task as quickly as possible. After crossing the start line at 2,000 ft, every minute of engine time lost 15 points. I flew in the rear seat of a Sperber (an RF 5 with a 17-metre wing), on the first contest day when a 187 km triangle was set. With weak thermals we took four hours to creep round the course with a lot of scratching around at 400–600 ft above the ground. If sinking below 400 ft, then a quick reach for the electric starter and full bore until the next thermal! A new type of barograph measured the amount of engine time by the vibration, and the clever boys had prop brakes fitted to eliminate that useless 15 seconds of shuddering that occurs after switching off the magneto and before the prop stops. We needed some twenty minutes of engine time, and finished well down the field.

In the evening there was time for sampling other people's machines, and I had a pleasant half hour in the Tandem Falke. This also has a 17-metre wing and the added refinement of a feathering propeller. It flies slower than the Sperber and is therefore able to use smaller thermals. One had flown the day's task without using the engine at all!

The ASK 16 prototype was not coming to the competition, and so I had arranged to go to the Schleicher works. These are in a small village at the foot of the Wasserkuppe, a range of hills 3,000 feet in elevation where





gliding originated in the 1920s. There is still a gliding school on the summit, and the prototype is flown from this site. As it is only three miles from the East German border, it lies in the ADIZ, an air defence corridor 20 miles wide between the West and the Communist bloc. To fly here required special permission and adherence to a strict flight plan, and dire warnings not to stray into East Germany. Fortunately the gliding site is 'easy to find because of an adjacent radar station where the scanners are covered in white nylon, and show up as four large golf balls.

The ASK 16 was standing outside the hangar, and looked an impressive machine with its retractable twin wheels and fifty-foot wing span. Its side-by-side seating made it a more companionable craft than the tandem arrangement on the other two. The 1,700 cc Limbach engine easily pulled us off the short grass strip, and after a climb of 1,000 feet the variable pitch propeller was put into the cruise configuration, which reduced propeller tip noise. We then bowled along pleasantly at 100 mph. Finding a thermal, it was a simple matter to stop the engine and feather the propeller. Circling at 50–55 mph, we climbed several times to cloudbase at 7,000 feet during an hour's gliding. Then back to a rather heavy landing on the undulating downs, with which the undercarriage seemed to cope without protest.

Then it was time to head for home. On the way back I again put down at Charleroi. In particular I wanted a weather forecast, as it has a well-equipped met office. The duty forecaster pointed out a cold front over Paris, and said that it would be along my track to Ashford in about three hours. Barely ten minutes after take off, I ran into torrential rain and decided to turn back. Back in the met office some thirty minutes after the first briefing, I rather pointedly asked the forecaster where his cold front was now. "Ici, monsieur" he smiled and to my snort of disgust muttered, "C'est la vie!"

But the clear visibility that followed the cold front made up for the delay, and the white cliffs of Dover were visible whilst still ten miles inside France.

For those who want an alternative to the Le Touquet run, I can recommend a visit to Germany. Take an RF4 and touring is cheap. For the 1,200 miles we required just 36 gallons of petrol, and landing fees amounted to only £4.20. Cheaper, quicker and less fuss than going by car! □

Left: the ASK16, "an impressive machine with its retractable twin wheels and fifty-feet span".

Right and below: the long-winged RF-5B Sperber has a glide ratio of 1 in 26.

