

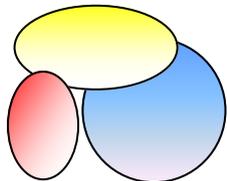


# Brissle Strutter

Newsletter of the LAA Bristol Strut

[bristolstrut.uk](http://bristolstrut.uk)

February 2020



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## Next Meeting — GASCO SAFETY EVENING

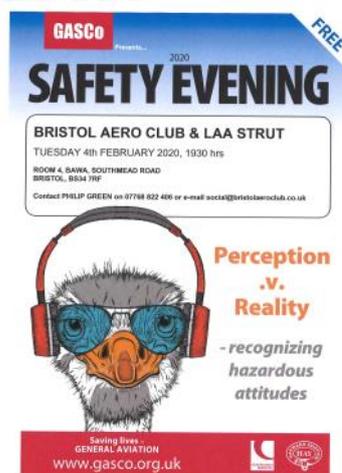
This month our meeting will be the GASCO Safety Evening to be held on **Tuesday 4th February** in our usual Room 4 at BAWA starting at 7.30.

**Don't forget to bring along your Log Book to get it stamped** and that will record your 'attendance at an acceptable safety event' if you are considering going for an LAA Wings Award

This is an opportunity to review your flying habits and maybe learn from the experiences of others.

We all need to brush up on our awareness so do come along to this evening meeting and hear from the experts.

*There is a bar on the premises* and directions to BAWA can be found on our website: [bristolstrut.uk](http://bristolstrut.uk) where you can also find out more about us and read the archive of our newsletters going back many years.



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## Forthcoming Meetings:

**3rd March**—Sharpen up your RT with David Chambers

**7th April**—Aerial sight seeing in OZ with Angus and Fiona Macaskill

## Last Month's Meeting

Members reviewed their activities in 2019 - weather played a significant part! We heard about new airfields visited in the UK, low level overflight of San Francisco and SFO, US boneyards and a vintage aircraft museum in the US, restoration of a classic, first flight of a new build and construction progress of another, where time to completion and calendar time are at last starting to converge!

### Contact Information

**Strut Chairman:**

Trevor Wilcock

01275 858337

E-mail: [chairman@bristolstrut.uk](mailto:chairman@bristolstrut.uk)

**Treasurer/Membership Sec:**

Steve Pemberton

01934 823938

e-mail: [treasurer@bristolstrut.uk](mailto:treasurer@bristolstrut.uk)

**Newsletter Editor/distribution:**

Mary Leader

01275 541572

e-mail: [Secretary@bristolstrut.uk](mailto:Secretary@bristolstrut.uk)

Editorial address:

7 Cantell Grove

Stockwood, BRISTOL

BS14 8TP

**Webmanager**

John Leather

E-mail: [webmanager@bristolstrut.uk](mailto:webmanager@bristolstrut.uk)

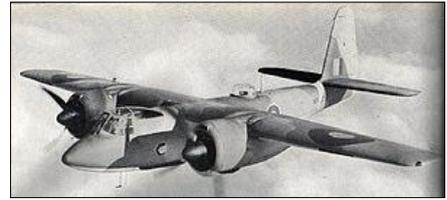
## Picture Quiz

Last month Trevor asked what this aircraft was?

Two correct suggestions have come in this month of Miles Monitor target tug.

Brian Osley was quick off the mark, followed by Alan George who also added: "Getting quite obscure at it never reached production." Congratulations both.

There were also two wrong suggestions of the Blackburn Botha torpedo bomber although it is a very understandable mistake to make.



This Month's picture quiz.

*Here is the latest resident at Garston Farm.*

*Easy? - be careful!*

Suggestions to the editor please—you won't be named and shamed if you get it wrong, only correct answers will be congratulated!

## Museums Old and New

From Graham Clark

Were you like me, the eager youth who watched the Fairey Rotodyne gyrate back and forth above the Farnborough turf many decades ago? Sadly, Fairey Aviation is one of those erstwhile famous names that have receded into near oblivion.

The company was based on Woodley Airfield a little to the North East of Reading, a mile or so off what is now the M4, where a group of enthusiasts runs The Museum of Berkshire Aviation, open to the public on Sundays.

This is a gap in my education which I intend to fill. **Would any other Strut member like to join me on a boys' day outing?** Girls also definitely welcome.

Also, I note that the French Musée de l'Air et Espace at le Bourget has just re-opened their gallery of pre-WW1 aviation: think Magnificent Men!

That's high on my tick-list. **Any other takers for a weekend in Gay Paree?**

**If anyone is interested in joining Graham do please speak to him at the next meeting or contact the editor and your details will be passed on to him.**

## Where to go...

Free Landings February 2020 in:

**Flyer:** Bodmin, Castle Kennedy, Cumbernauld, Fishburn, Holmbeck, Perth

**Light Aviation:** Beccles, Chiltern Park, Blackpool (30% off), Wolverhampton (£5.00)

And for **March:**

**Flyer:** Bagby, Bourn, Brighton, Fenland, Ince, Sackville.

## LAA UPDATES

### Courses

**Electrical Wiring Introduction Course** will be held on *Friday 13th March* and for further information please click [here](#). The essential information is:

Tutor: Nick Long

Time: 9.30 till 5pm (approx)

Cost: £120.00 - please feel free to bring your own food or order on the day.

Venue: LAA HQ, Turweston Aerodrome, NN13 5YD

**Advanced Electrical Wiring Course** will be held on *Friday 20th March* and for further information please click [here](#). Once again important information is:

Dates: 20th March 2020

Cost: £120.00 (includes use of tools but not lunch) - please feel free to bring your own or order on the day.

Times: 9.30am till 5.00pm - one day course

Venue: LAA, Turweston Aerodrome -

Both courses are taking place here at Turweston and to book a place please call the office on 01280 846 786.

## DITCHING AND SEA SURVIVAL SEMINAR

Are you considering doing an over water crossing this year? If so you might possibly be prudent and undertake this course to prepare yourself for that awful possibility of a ditching.....

**GASCO** **DITCHING & SEA SURVIVAL SEMINAR**

WEDNESDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH AND THURSDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2020

AT THE RNLI COLLEGE, POOLE, DORSET & ANDARK DIVING & WATER-SPORTS, LOWER SWANWICK, SOUTHAMPTON

*When alighting on water in an emergency, the aim is to keep the aircraft upright but this is not always possible and so it's important to understand how to get yourself and your passengers out of a submerged aircraft. The underwater escape training provided during the second day of this seminar will provide the skills and experience necessary to cope with this eventuality*



*The RNLI's Sea Survival Training Centre at Poole, Dorset provides an excellent setting for the practical exercise with a degree of realism not available in swimming pools*

This seminar takes place over two days.

Day 1 consists of presentations and advice on how to prepare for flight over water; ditching techniques and sea survival reinforced by practical open water sessions using General Aviation life-saving equipment in the RNLI's world class sea survival pool with environmental effects culminating in a simulated rescue.

On the second day we move to Lower Swanwick, near Southampton to use Andark's Underwater Escape Trainer. In the afternoon on Day 2 we hope to visit the Distress and Diversion Cell at NATS ATCC and the National Maritime Operations Centre (incorporating the UK's Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre). Prices

Day 1 - £275 per person

Day 2 - £190 per person Day 1 (No in-water training) - £20 per person

Bookings close at 1200 hours on Monday 10th February 2020

Book your place today online at:  
<https://gasco.w4x4.com>

*At our last meeting Alan James showed us a picture of the refurbished RF-4 in which he installed an Icom RX/TX.*

*This aircraft has HISTORY! Graham Clark has got it verbatim as written (in French) by its designer René Fournier. He has translated it from the original French in Chapter 11 of Fournier's autobiography. We are lucky to have been given a copy of this chapter and it is reproduced below with kind permission from Graham. It will be spread over a couple of issues of the Strutter.*

## CHAPTER 11 OF ADVENTURES AND MEN PART 1...

Ever since we entered production in Germany, we had major export successes.

The biggest market to open was the United States, to which we quickly sold about 20 RF-4s. Over there, the RF-4 was provisionally classified as an 'Experimental' while the application for full certification went through, and aircraft left our factory at the rate of about ten a month.

At three-day intervals a new RF-4 made its first flight from Dahlem to its new home in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Finland or England.

Some others were despatched in containers, by ship or Boeing freighter to countries such as Japan, South Africa, Australia, Canada, Mexico and various other countries in South America. Islands such as Guadeloupe, New Caledonia, Tahiti and even Hawaii each had their RF-4.

In France, in spite of the market distortion due to the subsidies, Alpvavia imported about 40 aircraft. Most of the aircraft were delivered by Bernard, who had no time for holidays. He delivered RF-4s – and continued to do so – to Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Spain. Given the experience of his visit to Chad, he did not hesitate to deliver an aeroplane to Congo. This extraordinary 10,080 km flight from Paris to Brazzaville was in April and May 1967, crossing the Sahara desert and virgin forest. He described this with emotion and in great detail in subsequent presentations and in his book.\* In spite of the lack of radio-navigation aides, which were still in their infancy, he proved once again that a big adventure, coupled with its agonies and ecstasies, was still possible.

In addition to delivering aircraft, over the years he gave about 2,000 briefings to customers prior to their first flights in the RF-3 and RF-4. These first flights were not without a degree of apprehension, always because there was no radio and always the possibility the customer would forget to lower the landing gear. Bernard Chauvreau awaited the customer's first landing, standing by the approach with a red flag!

His demonstrations in France and elsewhere continued to be greeted with the same success, each time crowned by television coverage or articles in local newspapers and the specialist press. These reports were also printed in international publications in the four corners of the world, after which came the competitors.

It was fascinating to meet customer pilots. We had a very wide range of people, some of quite modest means and others very rich, from the funniest to the serious, from the reserved to the exuberant, from the reflective to the irresponsible. But all were united by the same passion: enthusiasm for this economic aeroplane with long wings, which enabled them to get away from it all at an affordable price per hour. I came to understand the real meaning of the marvellous idea advanced by Saint-Exupéry: "The greatness of a profession is, perhaps beyond all else, to unite people: it is nothing more than a veritable luxury, and it is that of human contact."

Every day we received news from our customers and one April morning an American turned up at the Sportavia factory from Los Angeles. Mira Slovak was a Boeing 707 captain with Continental Airlines. Fifteen years earlier he had fled from communist Czechoslovakia as the captain of a scheduled airliner and landed in Germany, following which he obtained political asylum in the United States. He arrived there with two shirts and three dollars in his pocket and, overcoming bureaucratic obstacles, resumed his career as an airline pilot. He also became the National Air Race Champion, took part in and won numerous hydroplane boat races including the Gold Cup, the British Columbia Cup, the President's Cup and much else besides. He was obviously an accomplished pilot, but what was he doing here at Sportavia?

Alfons was quickly put in the picture when Mira Slovak unrolled an aeronautical chart. Mira explained he had come here to order an RF-4 on the spot, to have it equipped according to his personal requirements, and then to fly it in stages to the United States.

That represented a 13,000 km trip, much of it across the North Atlantic, Greenland, Labrador and Canada: then an east to west crossing of all North America, right to his home base at Santa Paula, California.

For these long over-water flights he needed to extend the range of the RF-4 from 650 km to 2,000 km by incorporating additional fuel tanks in the wings. Also he needed to install radio navigation aids, and to find sufficient space for survival equipment in case of a forced landing in an inhospitable region. All this would require a 30 percent increase in empty weight, which given its structure the little RF-4 could manage without any risk.

Mira Slovak's project looked to be mad, but appeared to be technically possible.

When Alfons told me about it, I was equally perplexed. But given the fact of Bernard's trans-African flights, did that not prove it was possible, thanks to the robust construction of the RF-4 and its engine?

The modifications were effected by Sportavia and took one month, following which the fully equipped aeroplane was painted white and blue; bearing the name Spirit of Santa Paula given by Mira Slovak, it was ready for the grand departure.

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\*Il était une fois : mes ailes: Editions France - Empire 1981.

On the morning of 7 May 1968 it was loaded up like a little bomber, and commenced the long take-off run from the grass runway at Dahlem, departing to the West at the hands of its audacious pilot. As we watched it disappear over the horizon, we asked ourselves whether it had been wise to support this project; one which as far as we knew no other aircraft of such low power had succeeded, or even ever attempted.

A little while later he flew over Brussels, the Dunkirk beaches and then suddenly the English Channel was beneath his wings – a canal in comparison with the North Atlantic Ocean, which awaited. Prior to reaching the White Cliffs of Dover he was faced by a horizon of large black clouds, preceded by heavy rain beating down on his frail little skiff, grey skies blending with the grey sea. Heading for Luton in England, he was given radar guidance through awful weather but finished this leg of the journey, landing without incident. After a brief stop, and still in rain, he departed for Glasgow, where he arrived five and a half hours later. Here, Mira Slovak had to ask himself if the Weather Gods had decided he should not continue, because the heavy rain continued unabated for five days and nights, transforming the poor little Spirit – which was parked outside – into a fountain. Eventually, on the sixth day, an anticyclone formed over Greenland, gradually forcing the bad weather further east. Then came take-off for Stornway in Northern Scotland, where once again the poor little RF-4 was lashed by strong winds and rain. At Stornway a group of 60 people had assembled to witness the arrival of this new Lindbergh. One of them shouted out: "What madman would want to cross the Atlantic in this Micky Mouse aeroplane?" To which Mira simply responded: "Me."

After having submitted the flight plan, checked the oil and done a thorough pre-flight check, he took off and headed for the North Atlantic. A little while later he was alone, truly alone, over this immense expanse of blue and sombre water, headed towards a piece of land still invisible over the horizon, the Faroe Islands.

It called for real courage to face such loneliness, to take such risks. But Mira did not ask the question; he stuck to his heading and reached the Faroe Islands without difficulty.

The next morning and encouraged by clear skies, he set course for Reykjavik in Iceland. The forecast predicted only a few snow and rain showers at the coast. For more than three long hours there was nothing other than sea and clouds. Then suddenly in the distance there appeared the first snow-covered mountains and the coast of Iceland. From nowhere he was surrounded by a black cloud resembling volcano emissions, but without totally blocking his view, then followed by a snow cloud that he crossed, a few hours later by rain, and then at Reykjavik by a perfectly blue sky. Annoyed at having lost five days in Scotland due to the rain, Mira only took an afternoon to unwind. He went to bed early and was off again the next day at 4 am on the next stage of his flight to Kulusuk in Greenland. This was the longest of his overwater flights, 6 hr 15 min. Heavily laden with full fuel tanks and survival gear, he flew relatively low over the sea. At this height, it looked at first to be fairly calm, until he saw an enormous cargo ship being shaken about 'like a toy in a bathtub'. He concluded that the wind was very strong and he would not be able to reach Kulusuk in the estimated time. He asked himself how long he could survive if he had to splash down in this raging and icy sea. He was overcome by a strange feeling; was his life not suspended by this little motor that he could hear humming away, just like the beat of his heart? He reasoned that although he had all the necessary survival equipment, which rescuers would need to find him, he thought that even so their chances were not great. He flew on for three hours through this loneliness, storm clouds, snow and sudden rain. He avoided them with frequent diversions from his course, losing precious time. After four hours, he tried but failed to get an ADF radio-compass bearing from the powerful transmitter at Gun. "With this strong headwind", he thought, "I will be very late." After another hour had passed Mira could still not get a signal from Gun. The situation was becoming agonising, but suddenly right before him were the mountains of Greenland and the Kulusuk radar station aerials. Once again he tried to get Gun, but got no signal. Finally, he made contact with a USAF ground station, where the anxious voice said: "But where have you been? You are two hours late on your estimate. Everyone reckons you are down in the water and we were about to start the search."

Mira explained about the headwinds and asked why there was no signal from the Kulusuk ADF. "We shut it down two days ago for maintenance", came the reply.

After landing at Kulusuk, filling the tanks and an excellent breakfast, Mira was soon airborne again, in spite of the fatigue of this long and demanding flight. This time, before crossing Greenland from East to West, he once again made contact with the USAF to give them his track. Given the mountainous terrain he was to cross, he asked for permission to climb to 10,500 ft; the highest ground there is 10,000 ft. "Okay," said the voice. "But be careful. We have lost three pilots in the last few months."

Mira doesn't understand why, because the sky before him was one of biblical calm. But a little while later he realised the dangers of flying in this region. Studying the horizon, he found it increasingly imprecise and blunted by snow. Having no artificial horizon and only a turn and slip indicator, the only way to keep straight and level was to keep an eye on the sun and its reflection from the ice. "With this reference", he said, "it was like flying through a tunnel of ice." Four hours later and half blinded by this vision, he landed without further problems at Sandestrom on the west coast of Greenland.

After having paid "the most expensive landing fee in my life", he said the next day, he took off for the North-West Territory of Canada, destination Frobisher via Cape Dyer.

The weather was superb, the sea studded with 'ice cubes' and the wind seemed calm for the crossing of this sound, located along the Arctic Circle; a flight of 500 nautical miles, to which Mira was now becoming accustomed.

Having reached Cape Dyer and setting course for Frobisher a little time later, he noted the engine temperature had gone up 20°C and the oil pressure dropped to 5 bar. He was a bit worried, and asked if he should return to Cape Dyer or continue en route. Not having an outside air temperature gauge, he decided to put his hand out into the slipstream via the clear view panel, and found that the air outside seemed to be warmer. At once, his concern vanished and he continued on track. The countryside unfolded before him with one hill after another, endless stretches of water with no visual references and where, in spite of himself, he could not resist asking whether anyone could possibly find him in this savage country, forgotten by man. Finally, he man-

aged to tune in to the Frobisher beacon, where he arrived some time later. To his great surprise, he was welcomed by some 100 Eskimo schoolchildren, who had been given a half-day holiday for the occasion!

The next stage was the flight to Fort Chino, but after five hours aloft he still could not get radio contact. He was extremely worried because it was 01:30 at Fort Chino and there was more than 1,000 ft of fog between him and the ground. According to his flight plan, he should have already crossed the Bay of Ungava and should be about a mile from the coast, so to make sure he decided to fly under the layer of cloud. He lowered the gear and deployed the airbrakes to descend through a hole. When under the cloud he found to his great satisfaction that he was exactly on track. It was impossible to follow the coast in conditions of such poor visibility and a cloud base of 500 ft, so he decided to climb back above the cloud and gave it full throttle. Fine droplets were accumulating on the windscreen with the risk of icing. He could feel the aircraft getting progressively heavier and after about 20 minutes the windscreen was covered in ice, so much so that he could no longer make out the engine cowling. Also, the HF radio aerial attached to the right wingtip had accumulated ice and was vibrating so badly that Mira wondered if it would not break the fin. Then he popped out of the cloud into sun and blue sky, to a magnificent spectacle. Slowly, the ice began to melt and after 6hr 30 minutes he finally arrived at Fort Chimo, where he landed without further ado.

Once again, the tanks were filled and Mira left almost straight away off to the south for Knob Lake, flying across a region of elongated small lakes. However, 60 miles from his destination he got lost. He was simply unable to recognise any features in the region and was battling snow showers that added to his confusion. He then entered another region of low-altitude weather, forcing him to fly low down. His hopes of finding a landing site were fast diminishing. Just when the situation was becoming critical with large snowflakes, he spotted a pylon straight ahead. Later he said: "At that moment, if someone had offered me a million dollars or the pylon, I would have chosen the pylon." All he then had to do was follow the telephone line to Shepardville, where he landed at last.

The next stage was no easier. From Shepardville he rejoined the Sept-Iles near Port Cartier on the north bank of the Saint Laurent estuary. This is desolate countryside with very few landmarks or made-up roads. Mira swore that he had never been so scared in his life as he had been over this bare country, over which he navigated in abominable weather.

After arriving at Sept-Iles, he set course for Quebec and then Montreal. At last, he was back over 'Good Old America' and shouted "I'm back home!"

The rest of the flight continued with all the usual safety services and assistance that a VFR pilot could enjoy when flying over North America in 1968.

It was thus with the idea that he had won his dare that Mira Slovak continued en route. After crossing the border of the United States at Ogdensburg in New York State, he arrived in the Tri Cities (?) where he had to spend the night because of a violent thunderstorm. The next day he set off for Youngstown in Pennsylvania and made a detour to Woodster, Ohio, home to the Sportavia US agent. Afterwards it was Indiana, Illinois and he crossed the Missouri en route to Wichita in Kansas for a stopover. Then it was off to Las Vegas via Reno where he was awaited by the press and television. From there, the next destination was Watsonville on the Pacific coast south of San Francisco, where there was a big meeting for historic aircraft, with many of his friends taking part.

Finally, he flew in formation with his friends to his home base of Santa Paula north of Los Angeles, and the ultimate destination of this fabulous and difficult flight.

In flight, in spite of all the honours showered upon him, he thought with great modesty: "No, I am not Lindbergh. I don't expect any trophies, no great celebrations or receptions. I was simply in pursuit of a dream, and now it has finally arrived." Suddenly, such thoughts were interrupted by serious turbulence on penetrating a violent front. Following the Pacific coast and passing Ventura, Santa Paula Airport came into view and he could see how once again a huge crowd had assembled to witness the arrival of the Spirit of Santa Paula and its brave pilot.

Suddenly, just when he had lowered the gear and was about to land, the aircraft was hit by violent gust, but he was still too far from the runway. Why did he not give full power and go around? Later, he was unable to explain. Suddenly, at a height of 50 ft, the aircraft stalled and 'fell like a duck shot from the sky.' He was taken unconscious to hospital where he remained seven days before recovering his spirits. Surrounded by bandages and drip-feeds, he stared at the ceiling trying to understand what had happened: "What did I do? How could a man like me with 22 years flying experience make such a stupid mistake?"

One could well understand how this happened given the type and duration of the flight, the test of nerves and fatigue, all of which caused him to lose a kilo for each day of flying, especially given that he was not exactly overweight to start with! One could understand also that, distracted and exhausted and full of emotion in the triumphant arrival, overloaded, and in this wind shear that he simply stalled, in spite of his fantastic experience. Was this destiny? Undoubtedly it was his friend Ernie K. Gann who had the answer. When asked "Do you believe in destiny?" he answered "Yes, I believe in it. Look at Mira Slovak, who crossed the Atlantic covering 13,000 km and huge areas of hostile terrain. He encountered bad weather, over places where he could not possibly land, where nobody would have found him. He did all that in a little airplane with a little 39 hp engine and got home. He successfully completed this difficult flight and was 50 ft from landing at his final destination, when he ran out of height, speed and luck, all at the same time. Yes, I believe in destiny!"

Mira Slovak recovered from his accident without serious consequences. He didn't wait to be discharged from hospital before telephoning Sportavia in Germany to order replacement parts for those damaged in the crash. He was going to have it repaired, because he already had another idea. As the days progressed, they took shape in his mind. He meditated, studied and brooded upon it. One thing was sure, his extraordinary exploit could not end this way. It had been but one step on the voyage he had yet to repeat; yes, with the same emotions, with the same problems, the same test of his anguish and the same fatigue. Yes! He decided that he would once again cross the North Atlantic, but this time in the opposite direction! *To be continued...*