

Letters to the Editor

Cranfield A1

Sir,

I read with interest David Ogilvy's article in the December 2010 edition of *General Aviation* about the Cranfield A1 and the ensuing letter from Alan Cassidy in the February 2011 edition. I must take issue with Alan's assertion that his was "a record of the only time the Cranfield A1 was flown in earnest in competition".

With over 150 hours of A1 time in my logbook I beg to differ.

I first flew the A1 in April 1979 at the request of Angus McVitie who was then the chief Test Pilot at Cranfield. The aircraft had been displayed by Phillip Meeson at Farnborough in 1978 but as Phillip was embarking on a sponsorship programme with Marlborough for his Pitts S1 he declined to be involved further with the A1. (He was probably already well aware of the aircraft's limitations).

After my first flight at Cranfield the proposal put to me was that I could take the aircraft away to the Central Flying School (CFS) until the following October, provided I flew in competitions up to and including the Unlimited UK National Championships. Why me? At that time I was the co-opted RAF representative on the committee of the British Aerobatic Association (BAeA) and also the current holder of the Brabyn Trophy for aerobatics awarded to a staff instructor at CFS.

To satisfy the BAeA committee and judges I had to fly in competition at Intermediate and Advanced Levels before they would entertain the idea of my entry at Unlimited Level which was to coincide with the Manx government's millennium celebrations at Jurby on the Isle of Man in September 1979. All hurdles were successfully completed including a 3rd place at the Air Squadron Trophy at Old Warden in June. During that summer, by the kind permission of the Station Commander at RAF Leeming, many weekends and evenings were spent practising the Unlimited Level Known Compulsory sequence, developing the 750K Sequence and four-minute Freestyle that would be required in the Nationals. To begin with I was having to learn new techniques as well as coping with the main drawbacks of the Cranfield A1, namely: it was too heavy and too stable.

To keep a long story reasonably short, I flew all the sequences at Jurby, only picking up a couple of zero scores and, despite coming last overall, doing well enough to be invited to compete in a Manx styled 'European Masters' event with the late Eric Muller amongst others – and I wasn't last! The secret of some success with the aircraft was to make use of its stability by including tail slides as my choice in all Unknown Compulsory sequences, a manoeuvre disliked by all Pitts pilots and frequently zeroed by many. As well as continuing to enter

competitions, winning the Esso Tiger Trophy in 1980, I displayed in more than 100 air shows from Compton Abbas in the south to Strathallan in the north up to the end of 1982, with my final display flown in 1984.

Despite various attempts by Cranfield to modify and destabilise the A1, it was obvious from the very beginning that the aircraft had very little potential as a competitive aerobatic type but could have been very useful in the early eighties as an aerobatic trainer had it been modified with a second seat. The space had been built into the early design and in 1983 I had the sponsorship and the engineer in Geoff



Masterton to modify the airframe but the College at Cranfield would not release it for modification and their own engineers wanted to charge four times as much for the work as the sponsors were prepared to pay.

Despite the generosity of Alan Curtis, the late Neil Williams' early desire for an aerobatic monoplane to replace his Zlin in competition came at the wrong time in the wrong place. Walter Extra took the idea forward and with the benefit of his specialist knowledge and modern materials has provided the aerobatic fraternity with a lasting success. I may have not been the best person at the time to take on the development of an aerobatic prototype but I certainly had a fantastic experience trying.

Eric Steenson (Sqn Ldr Retired)

Holding EASA to account

Sir,

I read the recent article on this issue in the *General Aviation* magazine.

EASA is quite clearly overwhelmed by its many responsibilities. And yet it wants to take on more!

Unfortunately all bureaucracies that are not adequately held to account have a natural tendency to want to grow without limit.

To illustrate EASA's overstretch, you may want to investigate the confusions and backlogs that have enveloped the approval of Supplementary Type Certificates (STCs).

To take one specific example. Traffic Advisory Systems have recently greatly come down in price, are now a practical proposition for many existing general aviation aircraft and are a very good safety feature. Any regulatory authority should want to encourage the fitting of such devices to enhance safety.

If you want to add such a system to your aircraft it is likely that you will need to install one (or two) aerials, and, in the case of TAS

systems, the aerials have to be positioned to maximise the effectiveness of the signal reception. If you have a pressurised aircraft, this will often require one or two openings through the aircraft pressure hull. While putting an aerial lead through a pressure hull is a well understood standard engineering procedure, it does require a proper engineering submission by an authorised (Part 21) organisation to EASA to obtain an approval for the applicable STC approval.

So far so good.

However, EASA, unfortunately does not seem to have the resources to evaluate the submitted STC in a timely manner. At the moment such submissions are taking anything from three months to a year to be approved! The reason for the delay is not the difficulty of the engineering submission – most such submissions are almost pro forma. The reason is that EASA do not have the management, systems, or staff to handle the volume of submissions.

Avionics engineers find it very difficult to discover where their pending STC application is in the queue or when it is likely to be reviewed, and they are in fear of pursuing the matter with overstretched EASA staff as the avionics engineers think they might find their application 'lost' or put to the back of the queue! I have been told, in conversations with European engineering organisations, that STC submissions have, in fact, been lost (with a consequent need for re-submission) and delayed by up to a year.

In comparison with the service that used to be provided by the CAA (which was not perfect) the current EASA system is a disgrace.

It seems to me that EASA's management neither fully understands general aviation nor is sufficiently interested in its needs. The lack of adequate management and resources for the general aviation Supplementary Type Certificate approval system is systematic of the overall EASA problem of overstretch and lack of accountability to its users.

In comparison, the FAA have always fully supported the STC system because the FAA understands that if the aviation business – and especially the general aviation business – is to flourish it must have a responsive and timely STC approval system. In addition, the FAA is also accountable to the US government and ultimately its users in a way that EASA is not directly accountable to anyone! An identical Traffic Advisory System STC submission with respect to a US registered aircraft would not be subject to any significant regulatory delay.

I cannot understand is how can it be sensible for EASA to think of taking on more responsibilities with respect to general aviation – in particular US registered aircraft in Europe – when it cannot even deal with the reasonable regulatory requirements of the aircraft that it is currently responsible for.

But I come back to my original comment that, in my view, all bureaucracies that are not adequately held to account have a natural tendency to want to grow without limit.

Name and address supplied ■