

AOPA Mentoring Scheme

We await the utterances of sages in the insurance and legal fields before finally and officially launching the AOPA Mentoring Scheme, but the beast is straining at the chocks and project manager **Mick Elborn** has held the inaugural Induction Workshop at White Waltham. Here he reports on progress, while **Pat Malone** and **Timothy Nathan** road-test the concept and iron out some kinks.

In the beginning...



A momentous occasion! Perhaps in years to come, worthy of a blue Heritage Plaque on the West London Aero Club building at White Waltham for Service to General Aviation. Years of design work and removal of obstacles by Timothy Nathan and Steve Copeland (yes, he was there!) finally culminated in the first Induction Workshop for AOPA Mentors.

It was a packed house as you can see from the photos. All those Magnificent Men... but where are our Lady Pilots? The scheme is open to all pilots who are AOPA members and who meet the requirements set out in the AOPA Mentor Guide available via www.aopa.co.uk (under Training and Development).

Did we make them work for it? Of course we did.

Did they enjoy it? Well, no-one went to sleep and no-one left before the end. All 10 attendees were signed up to be the founding AOPA Mentors. (The sharp-eyed ones will actually count 12; we were joined by Chris Royle, our Members Working Group Chairman, and next to Chris was a potential Mentee observer, Harvey Blunt, to give some balance.

We now have mentors covering the following airfields (and a radius of up to 50

nm around them); EGBG, EGBJ, EGBN, EGBP, EGBS, EG CJ, EGFF, EG FH, EGHP, EGHR, EGKB, EGLG, EGLM, EGLS, EGNE, EGNF, EGN G, EGNV, EGNX, EGSP, EG TB, EGTC, EGTF, EGTR, Spanhoe.

Now they need someone to mentor. Is that YOU? Take a look at the AOPA website, read the information about the Scheme, and if you can see yourself benefiting, apply to be registered as a Mentee. You will then be put in touch with the closest and most appropriate Mentor.

We are also looking for more Mentors to cover a wider area of the UK. As expected, the South East is already well supported. To try and get more Northern and Middle England support it is planned to hold the next Induction Workshop at Sherburn-in-Elmet. Timing will depend on getting a suitable number of applicants and also clearing legal and indemnity issues with AOPA's legal advisors and insurers, to minimise any potential litigation against AOPA or Mentors and Mentees. We hope to have these issues cleared by the end of July and can then plan the second induction workshop for August.

Subsequent workshops will be held in other Regions.

There was a good show of interest for the scheme at AeroExpo Europe, held recently at



Top: potential AOPA Mentors at the inaugural meeting at West London Aero Club
Above: Steve Copeland was there – for MWG members, he's the chap in the black tee shirt

Wycombe Air Park, both at my presentation and general enquires at the AOPA stand. So clearly there is demand for a well organised and managed Mentoring scheme amongst pilots.

One point that came from my presentation is that we may also want to look at extending it to helicopters, so any interest from rotary pilots out there for being Mentors? →



Mentoring: lessons learnt

‘Nothing to worry about...’

Two AOPA members put mentoring to the test – the mentee’s viewpoint, by **Pat Malone**

Okay, put your money where your mouth is. Timothy Nathan proposed the mentoring scheme, I’ve supported it all the way – who better to flight-test the concept? Timothy’s got an ATPL and more hours than you could shake a stick at and he’s flown his Aztec across the North Pole, so he ought to be able to help me find Prague, given a fair wind.

Aero Expo in Prague seemed to be a good target for a mentoring trip; it would widen my horizons and increase my confidence in my ability to fly long distances across foreign territory. The Czech Republic is a faraway country of which we know little; there was no question of me undertaking the flight without trustworthy help. I’ve got over 1,000 hours but most of them are on helicopters, and we just don’t do distance. I hadn’t filed a flight plan since they built the Channel Tunnel. We don’t lean the mixture (we don’t like heights), we don’t fiddle with the kit in flight because all three hands and both feet are otherwise engaged, we rarely make standard circuits – airfields tend to squeeze us in through some ad hoc back door – and above all we don’t do IMC because no matter how skilled you are, IMC in an unstabilised small helicopter means a quick death, and don’t let anybody tell you different.

One fundamental departure from the mentoring concept; we agreed that we were definitely going to get there. So if necessary, Timothy would take over and we’d go IFR. To that end, I put him on the insurance. Under normal circumstances a mentoring flight would not be undertaken unless it was wholly within the abilities and privileges of the mentee.

There’s a lot of planning to be done. Aircraft hours okay, Garmin 430s updated, spare battery for the headphones, spare specs, Euros, Czech kroner. My medical okay, LPC okay... approach info for our destination, Letnany, acquired from the Aero organisers. Jepp charts acquired; a couple of weeks before the off, Timothy and I took a helicopter down to Eastwell Manor hotel in Kent to have lunch and discuss lines on maps. “Nothing to worry about,” said Timothy. “It’s easier than you think.”

At home I stretched out the charts and got to work with the pencil. Redhill, Koksijde, Liege to do the Schengen bit – then due east for 340 miles, via the FUL VOR near the old Iron Curtain, and Bob’s your uncle. Note down the FIR boundaries, work out the times... nothing can possibly go wrong. The CAA provides a guide on how to complete a flight plan form in CAP 694, ten bleedin’ chapters of it, and five annexes, brain-curdling stuff (with notes for further reading). “It’s easier than you think,” Timothy says. “Just put this here... and that there...” I filed to Liege via DVR and KOK, using the helpful chaps in the tower at Redhill – they also took my GAR form. The Met showed good weather almost all the way to the Czech border then PROB40 thunderstorms, which seemed acceptable. Timothy input the flight plan into the 430s, moving a VOR to keep us out of the Brussels zone, and as we



Above: Timothy on arrival at Letnany, where an almighty thunderstorm almost prevented our landing

climbed to 5,500 feet in my DR400 to coast out at Dover we could see not only France but Belgium too, all the way to Ostend. We descended towards Koksijde in the bosom of Brussels Info, who gave us traffic now and then while we tootled along with the S-Tech autopilot doing the work. I have a basic working knowledge of the 430 but Timothy was able to explain and demonstrate its arcane recesses, including use of the OBS functions, time settings, and the AUX setting I never use. Playing around with the S-Tech we found that ‘Hi-track’ was too sensitive and kept us weaving, ‘Lo-track’ was better, but switching to Hdg and flying on the bug was best of all. On approach to Liege I kept the speed up on finals in deference to a 737-load of Thomsonfly customers at the hold, hauling off knots and adopting a landing configuration over the fence; Timothy thought this was “bloody stupid” because an asymmetric flap deployment at 100 feet would certainly ruin my day and probably Thomsonfly’s too; point taken, and something you’d expect any pilot to mention, if it struck him.

Fuelled and flight-planned we set off east across Germany, talking first to Langen Info, then to Munich. After a couple of hours, a cloud no bigger than a man’s hand resolved itself into a bank of cloud straddling our path, and below us the wooded hills of Thuringia began to rise out of the earth. I was increasingly conscious of being caught between hammer and anvil and would have turned back but for the comforting presence of my mentor. “Don’t like this much,” I informed him. “Best to climb out of it,” he said. “No future in scud-running.” So we began a climb to 5,500, which considering my hard-wired rotary aversion to IMC was interesting. We managed to maintain a semblance of VMC and

Right: flying home over Germany we kept an eagle eye on the Batt gauge and a ready finger on the Alt switch

came out on top, while left and right bad news came from aircraft diverting hither and yon as thunderstorms broke out all over.

Congratulating myself on my foresight (and abandoning the concept of mentoring) I asked Timothy to arrange a landing where there was an ILS; but the biggest and nastiest thunderstorm was sitting right over Prague and our nearest ILS-equipped airfield, Kbely, had switched off its ILS because of lightning. Happily we were once again in good VMC, but at this point I lost the overall plot because Timothy began talking to Prague in ICAO codes – it turned out they were advising us to make an IFR approach to Vodochody, north of Prague, and their vectors began with a climb to 7,000, which IMHO was too bloody close to the base of an enormous swirling black cloud which was lending a night-like quality to the Czech countryside. But soon we were descended to 5,000, then 3,000 and vectored south as lightning crackled off the left wing. “Don’t worry,” said Timothy, “it’s at least five miles away.” Suddenly, between two walls of filthy vis, we saw the concrete runway at Kbely shining in the rain. “Quick, do a 360,” said Timothy, and I turned sharply towards the lightning while he parleyed with Prague for a visual approach to Kbely. The request was granted, but wheeling out of the turn we spotted our destination, the grass field of Letnany, sticking out of a Niagara of rain. “Why not head for that?” said Timothy, once again striking up an urgent conversation with Prague.

“Do you reckon we’ll get there before the rain?” I asked.

“Probably,” said Timothy, and he was almost right. As we crossed the fence, the visibility came down to something really silly and the rain hammered on the canopy. I set her down carefully, keeping straight on the DI. Eventually we came to a halt and a chap on the radio, who’d only seen our landing light shortly before we crossed the fence, confirmed we were at Letnany.

“There,” said Timothy. “Told you there was nothing to worry about.”

So of course I wasn’t worried when, the day before our return journey, the Met showed a gang of thunderstorms lined up like muggers in an alley along our route home. “Don’t worry too much about the Met until shortly before departure,” said Timothy. And indeed, early that morning the picture had improved radically, and we hardly saw a cloud all the way across Europe. But an hour out of Prague, the ‘low volt’ light came on as the battery started to drain. I cycled the alternator switch,



the light went out and the battery recovered, but 20 minutes later it happened again. "Let's divert," I said. The nearest field of any size was Erfurt, in the former East Germany. They were most helpful but they had no engineers, although they could direct us to Hof, where they might possibly have an engineer tomorrow – today was Sunday. I had horrible visions of being trapped for days while engineers with whom I could not communicate did monstrously expensive things in foreign currency.

"Can we continue as per flight plan, but make sure they know they might lose us on radio?" I asked.

"Better than that," said Timothy, "we can file a non-radio flight plan and stay out of controlled airspace."

So we did that, filled up at Erfurt and resumed our journey – and while the alt tripped out a couple of times, it always came back and we never lost radio, GPS or squawk. We landed at Redhill 3.8 hr out of Erfurt and wheeled the Robin into the premises of known,

trusted and English-speaking engineers. (New alternator required).

And thus did mentoring work for me. I went where I would not have gone, I flew in weather conditions that were close to the limits of my qualifications, and I dealt with an in-flight problem which, had I been alone, would have stopped the show. I learned more about the kit in the aircraft, and although no instructing was involved, lessons were learned, experience was gained, and I'm a better pilot for it. Mentoring worked for me!

Mentoring: lessons learnt

The mentor's view

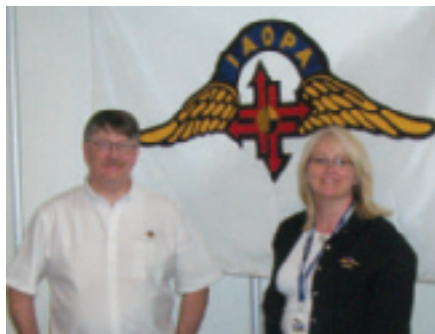
by Timothy Nathan



Although one of the purposes of our trip to Prague was mentoring, and a sub-plot of that was to try out the AOPA Mentoring Scheme, we also had two other agendas, to attend Aero Expo, representing AOPA, and to go to the dinner hosted by Charles Strasser. I think that had we not had those other items to consider, and it had been a pure mentoring exercise, we would probably not have continued to Prague. Although we did not enter cloud, there were a number of times when we were not strictly VMC, and indeed at one point changed our flight plan to IFR, so we did exceed Pat's privileges and therefore were flying on mine. It was to that end that we had insured me on the aircraft.

Thus we broke the first two rules of AOPA mentoring, that the mentee remains PIC and that we should remain within the PIC's privileges. There are, of course, exonerating circumstances, but this does demonstrate that mentees must be careful not to be painted into a corner where the only way out is for the mentor to take over. We had ensured that that course of action would be legal, by having me insured, but normally it would not be so. There is always the spectre of liability claims and, while the mentee may be happy to waive them, his widow may be less kind.

The question of the dicky alternator is also vexed. I have had a lifetime of failures on aircraft. I expect all parts of an aeroplane, but particularly engine, electrics, avionics and instruments, to fail at any time and I have built up over the years a reasonable feel for what spells the end of a flight and what does not. Funnily enough a friend and I went down to Switzerland in another Robin a couple of years ago and, just for a laugh and a challenge, we covered or switched off everything except the altimeter, the standby compass and the ASI.



**Top: Timothy Nathan with DR400 in Liege
Above: IAOPA's representatives in Prague,
Martin Robinson and Mandy Nelson
Right: Timothy with Garmin's Steve Gubbins
at Aero Prague**

He flew accurately and I navigated accurately and we demonstrated that you can cross large swathes of Europe without any help and remain clear of controlled airspace and any other problems.

Thus, when it was clear that the alternator was not going to be fixed in Erfurt ever, or indeed anywhere in Germany until the next day, I was quite content to fly home without electrics. I doubt if Pat would have undertaken such a trip (and indeed I think it made him a little nervous) and therefore the question must arise as to whether it was in the spirit of mentoring; but in this case I come down on the side of "yes", because it was within Pat's privileges and capability, I was simply providing a bit of confidence and map-reading, just what the scheme is for.

The decision to return (potentially) non radio and to file an N/N flight plan did give us

another problem. The headwinds were a little stronger than forecast and it became clear that the flight was going to land more than 30 minutes after flight-planned ETA. I was concerned that, under the circumstances, Redhill might start initiating overdue actions. Thus I had to make sure that London Information would pass the new ETA on. This is not a big deal, but something that the average mentee may not think of.

Another minor learning point is that Pat had said that he would get the charts and I had assumed that that would extend to destination and alternate airfield plates. It so happened that the instructions for arrivals at Letnany had all the instructions required, and an airfield map, so we were OK, but I was remiss in my duty to explicitly tell how to download airfield information from national AIS sites. I think that the mentor is probably beholden to have all the documentation (charts, plates, weather, NOTAMs) quietly in his briefcase ready to whip out if the need arises.

Pat raises the question of my bollocking him for applying full flap as we came over the hedge. Again, this maybe crosses the line between mentoring and instruction, but I do think that it is fair game if the mentor sees something that could and should be improved in handling. If the skill required cannot be picked up without training, it is definitely necessary for the mentee to be advised to see an instructor. Thus if the mentor considers cross-wind technique to be poor, it goes to an instructor, but if it's just a question of "I suggest that you use the pitot heat" or "the electric fuel pump should generally be switched off so that it doesn't mask a



mechanical pump failure" then it is good mentoring.

Finally, Pat mentioned my suggesting that you look at the weather only shortly before you depart. I suggest this because there is no point in the pilot having a sleepless night worrying about thunderstorms or fog that fails to materialise in the morning. My experience is that unless you have a lot vested in an early cancellation, the only time that it is worth looking at the weather is just before you leave the hotel. I think that this comes into another area of mentoring which I guess I would describe as pastoral care. That is, to pass on a regime whereby worry and concern are replaced by fact based decision making. ■