

Invicta Aero Club

Winter 2024 newsletter



As we finish another season of flying at the Aero Club I reflect on the adventures flown this past year. We have seen aircraft in Scotland landing on the beach on Isle of Barra, Southern France, the Channel Islands, all across Europe into Croatia and as far East as Romania with Sorin in the Arrow IV. I myself enjoyed my first taste of VFR mountain flying, heading through the Alps in both directions, and my Son Nathan has kindly written a piece for you all to enjoy.

I would like to thank those members who supported this newsletter with articles and their time to pass on their experiences to the remaining membership.

One of the biggest highlights for 2024 for myself was displaying our Pitts Special at a number of wedding venues. Listening to the guests cheer, and gasp in amazement gives me such reward for the hard work to obtain the approvals to conduct such activity. I hope this continues into 2025.

First solo's, new ratings, big European trips are all great for our membership.



Scotland May 2024

This year our fleet has also grown, with the recent addition of the Cessna 172 Reims Rocket, which I'm sure those who have already flown will agree is a great addition to our diverse fleet. The Cherokee six received its full avionics upgrade, and this really has changed the dynamics and capabilities of the aeroplane and we saw Ben completing his full IR earlier in the year with a first time pass, well done Ben.



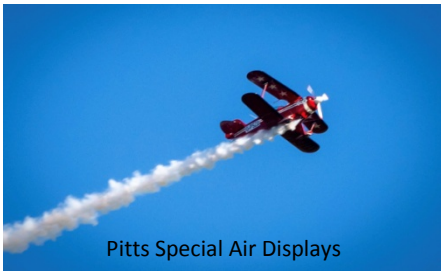
Cessna 172 Reims Rocket

Gary continues to lead our training team, and we are getting busier each month with new requests for additional ratings & courses. It's great to see PPL's, and some CPL's furthering their experiences and knowledge and I'm sure you will agree we strive to deliver intense, inclusive and detailed courses to ensure you are well prepared using our modern fleet and avionics.

Gary is the point of contact for applying for new courses and will allocate a suitable instructor from the team to assist. Gary also starts a major milestone in 2025, as he completes an Airbus 350 type rating for Virgin on their long haul fleet. We all wish him the very best in this new exciting role.

After a period of downtime due to maintenance our Pitts Special has been flying at displays again and experience flights throughout the summer. Positive feedback that bookings are strong for 2025. Of course if any member wishes to gain their Display authorisation, please speak to either Simon, Adam or indeed myself with regards to the process required (it is changing for 2025).

Formation Training will hopefully recommence in the new year, but of course this requires availability of a number of instructors and aeroplanes but we will endeavour to deliver on this again as we know this is popular with you all.



Pitts Special Air Displays

With the introduction of our own insurance policy, the Prang Club, we have seen an increase in reported incidents which ensure we all operate safely and learn from others and importantly this supports repairs. The Prang club funds have been used for minor repairs, heavy landing inspections and we await the return of the Spats for G-KAIR. I'm pleased to report that although a sufficient amount has been spent, we remain healthy and next year's voluntary joining fee will remain the same as 2024. Please remember though, to leave the aircraft in a state you would like to find it, and of course if any damage or indeed suspected damage is established then report it through a safety report to Gary and myself.

I am still planning some winter activities including Lydd basing so watch comms for more details in due course. The Christmas Social will be our next event at the Cock Horse Detling on the ~~14th~~ and you are all welcome with your guests.

Clive Benewith

Director, Instructor & Display Pilot
Invicta Aero Club

Head of Training Gary Merchant

Hi all, a quick update from the training team here at Invicta. It's been a great year with plenty of fly outs, new members, courses completed and also the continued growth of our fleet. Also great that we are now taking PPL students on.

Firstly I will take this opportunity to pass on some messages from the Airport management: -

- Please remember to Fuel and Go motto.
- Be ready when arriving on the pumps to climb in and start engines.
- The Yellow line for engine running.
- Please try and taxi off the apron after engine start (after initial checks complete) to conduct full setup on the Northern Parking area.

I am aware that there have been times of the month when it is difficult to get hold of an FI, Clive and I are doing our best to source other FIs, but please bear in mind that the quality of our FIs is very high and anybody that joins the team must have the similar calibre and passion for what Invicta does. Hopefully by next spring we will have a good selection of fully qualified FIs who can teach all of the disciplines plus a team of CRIs that will have their own disciplines. At present the training team is listed below, and the contact details are listed on the FlyClub App.

Gary Merchant
Clive Bennewith
Ben McAlonen
Rod
Simon
Jim
Adam
Stuart
Duncan
James
Brian

Head of training
Responsible manager
Safety Officer

FE, SEP, Night, Tailwheel, Aeros, IR, Complex.
Instructor, SEP, tailwheel, Complex & Aeros.
PPL, Aeros, Tailwheel and Pitts Pilot.
FE, SEP, Night, IR & Complex
FE, SEP, Night, Tailwheel, Aeros, IR & Complex.
FE, SEP, Night, Tailwheel, Aeros, IRr & Complex.
Instructor, SEP, Tailwheel, & Complex.
Instructor, Night, SEP & Complex.
Instructor, Night, SEP, IRr & Complex (C172 lead).
Instructor, SEP, Tailwheel & Complex
Ground Examiner



In the meantime we will have INV 08, G-KAIR, based at Lydd from the 1st December for training and private hire. Whilst it's there we shall be continuing the IRR (IMC) courses and running night courses. Obviously please try and utilise this to ensure the additional expenses is justified and covered.



I know that Clive will probably touch on this in the letter elsewhere but we have had a spike in CAS infringements, in fact it's our biggest safety occurrence that is currently being reported. Please use the CAA take 2 Initiative when planning, 2nm and 200ft away from any CAS and fly this as a limit. Consider it an Invicta SOP.

Please contact Clive or myself in the first instance if you require any training or want to discuss a particular course and don't forget, we can tailor any course to your needs if there is something that you want to do that isn't written down, I can design a bespoke course just for you. Finally a gentle reminder, please can everybody make sure that your ratings medical etc are up to date on the app, and always remember to check that you are in currency before flying.



Merry Xmas and New year flying.

Gary Merchant. Head of Training/CFI

Imperative Rating (Really!)

Why fly in cloud? I want to see the beauty of England from the skies. Who wants to go on a day trip in bad weather? These thoughts, amongst others, including medical issues, led me to think the LAPL was the licence for me. Sometime later, in my hand, was a freshly printed LAPL. Someone gave me two tickets to the Large Model Show at RAF Cosford. My dad and I decided to go together and fly there. I set about knocking off the 10 hours solo I needed to take passengers.



Thereafter, I was glued to the weather forecasts, praying for clear skies between Rochester and Halfpenny Green. On the day it was sunny in Rochester, reasonable VMC conditions at Halfpenny Green but maybe a bit of cloud in between. But we can go round/under that, can't we?! As we approached Wycombe, the cloud started to descend. "I will just go under it." Probably, at this stage, those of you who have read *The Killing Zone*, will have had the same thought I had many times reading that book. "No. Don't do it! What happens next is so obvious!" Idiot me had not set myself a minimum altitude below which I would turn back. As the clouds

got lower, so did I. The time came when I could go no lower and the clouds were still descending. I turned back but, to my horror, we were surrounded by cloud. I circled looking for a gap or an airfield. Then, as I turned to stay within the small patch of not cloud, it happened, we went into the cloud. Whiteout! All the statistics of inadvertent VFR into IMC went gushing through my head. It was terrifying. I set a reciprocal course. Within seconds, we were back in the clear. As I began looking for airfields again a gap appeared. To my relief, there was a way out... and it was towards Wolverhampton... We had a great day out and, thankfully, the trip back was far less eventful.

Not wanting to be in that position again, I decided to upgrade to a PPL to get an IR(R). By the end of June 2023, I had my PPL. On one damp autumnal morning in October 2023, I began. The first lesson was eye-opening. The instructor told me to close my eyes, he threw the aircraft around and then told me to tell him the attitude of the aircraft. Easy! "Nose high, left wing low", I announced. "Open your eyes!" We were diving to the right! We did that a number of times. I was half right once. It really brings home how your senses play tricks with you when you do not have any visual input.

For the next 9 months, I only got to see out of the window up until about 400ft after take-off and a little over 1,000ft returning to base. All those in the WhatsApp group were posting how beautiful the views were. All I saw was instruments, hearing: "Maintain your scan rate!" That said, I loved it. Flying a route, following a VOR/GPS, recovering from unusual attitudes, with no reference to the outside world, relying only on instruments, sometimes a partial panel, was enormous fun and rewarding! On one occasion, several months in, the instructor said: "Have you flown VFR recently? Take the hood off whilst we fly back to Rochester." It made me realise how relaxing and enjoyable VFR flying is.



Instrument flying is great fun, but it is challenging and requires a lot more concentration. I felt I picked up the aircraft handling quickly. Once the instructor even asked me if I had turned on the autopilot! One tip, though, for those contemplating the IR(R), make sure you fly in real cloud during your training. It is very different from being under the hood. Under the hood, there is still some peripheral vision, and brightness turning towards the sun. In cloud, white out. No visual references at all. The first time is quite disconcerting, so best done with an instructor.

More challenging was the workload on an instrument approach. Following the instruments was fine but doing everything myself, with no assistance from the instructor, was initially overwhelming. Doing my iceFREDA and landing checks, Southend come on the radio: "Are you ready to copy your missed approach instructions?" Stop the checks, copy the instructions, readback, back to the checks. Southend again: "Turn heading 050 degrees." Stop the checks, readback, set bug, turn onto heading, carry on with the checks. After several more interruptions, instructor: "Have you set your course?" Set the course. Southend calls again. I found the workload relentless but with enough practice, I got quicker flitting between checklists, readbacks and setting the avionics for the approach.



So, was it worth it? Absolutely. Flying IFR added another dimension to my flying, made me much more confident that I could go flying, could go on a day trip, and get home again. On completion of the course, I got checked out on the new avionics in FRAG. I booked her for a solo sortie. That day, the cloud base descended (not VFR but above IFR minima). I thought about cancelling. But what was the point in the IR(R) if I was going to do that? Took off and into cloud at about 1,150ft aal, out from under the Class A airspace, climb to 5,000ft, breaking cloud at about 4,500ft. Clear blue skies, a carpet of cloud below. Stunning. Not possible without the IR(R) but here I was basking in sunshine. Back to Rochester, under the cloud into VFR at about 1,200ft over

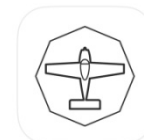
Sittingbourne, weather still closing in, cloud base at Rochester about 900ft aal. Bad weather circuit and safely down. Fantastic to put the training to use. An enjoyable flight that would never have happened VFR. A few weeks later, I took my wife, 9-year-old twins and Dad to Duxford. The weather was fine in the morning but forecast to close in later. Took off for the return journey in rain. Climbed into cloud. Cruised back to Rochester at about 3,000ft, in cloud most of the time. Went through Southend's airspace on an IFR clearance, listening to all the VFR pilots below negotiating with ATC their routing to stay in VMC. I admit, I did feel a little smug. Breaking out of the cloud into blue skies to land at Rochester. We had a great day out at Duxford we would not have gone if I had had to make a call on the weather in the morning applying VFR.

I cannot recommend the IR(R) rating enough, especially with the sort of weather we get in this country. It is liberating. An Imperative Rating (Really!).

Martin (PPL IRr rated)

Michael, Student to PPL Solo

Joining - Joining the Aero Club was easy, I had known Clive through work and was aware that he had his own flying club Invicta. I was sent the required paperwork and after filling in a few documents and settling any fees I was away. Clive matched me with one of the Club instructors and I was then ready to embark on my first steps towards my PPL.



FlyClub App



First Steps - Taking those first steps towards my PPL was an amazing feeling. I had dreamt of becoming a pilot for so long and now that it was actually happening I was overwhelmed with joy and excitement. I was first introduced to my instructor Adam who put any pre flight nerves at ease, Adam conducted a ground briefing with me and then began the pre flight checks, I then jumped into G-FLIP for the first time and we took off from Rochester. Adam introduced me to basic flight controls and the affect they have on the aircraft, it was a very informative lesson and one that would lead the way for my future in Aviation.

Studying - Studying for the PPL can be hard work at times and getting my head around some concepts could be challenging however Invicta has a large network of instructors and pilots that could always answer my questions or help me understand. Adam my instructor would also help me on lessons or offer ground study time to prepare for my upcoming exams. Everything is online at Invicta, and this offers a modern way of studying and learning which fits my busy work schedules.



First Solo 12th Aug 2024

First Solo - My first solo was an amazing experience and to achieve after only 8 hours of lessons was incredible. As the wheels left the ground I was confident and I knew what I had to do to complete a safe circuit of the airfield, I cannot put into words how amazing it felt to take flight on my own for the very first time ! Once I had landed my instructor Adam could breathe a sigh of relief. We conducted a debrief and discussed what we would be working on next. I'm proud to be a student of Invicta Aero Club and couldn't ask for a better instructor or facilities.

Michael PPL Student

It has been great to see our new members utilising the aircraft to their full potential throughout 2024, with the C152 completing initial PPL training with our students to our more experienced pilots flying across Europe to fulfil some lifetime memories with their families. This has all been possible with the support of our training team who remain flexible and adapt to our modern world, and of course my family who continue to assist in the operations behind the scenes. Our Aero Club doesn't run by itself, it takes time passion and dedication and I'm sure we will see some young Bennewith's in the PIC seat soon enjoying their hard work.



Clive.

A Long-Awaited Journey: My Romania Aviation Adventure

My aviation passion began with my dad, a radar ATC in Romania. As a child, pre-9/11, I often accompanied him at work, soaking up knowledge about aviation through observation, reading, and Microsoft Flight Simulator. This love led me to earn my PPL in 2015. A trip to Romania had been on my mind for years, but I never found the time or access to the right airplane—one that was well-maintained, fast, and equipped for the task.

When 2024 began and my dad announced his upcoming retirement, I knew the moment had come. This was my chance to fulfil a dream: flying to Romania and speaking to him on frequency one last time before he officially stepped away, something I could only dream of doing. I planned the trip for mid-August, just 2 weeks before his retirement.



Preparing for the Journey

The missing piece was an aircraft, which Clive and the IAC graciously provided in the form of the Arrow. A week before departure, Clive checked me out in INVICTA 04, going over the aircraft's specifics and iPad setup. This preparation helped ease some of the pre-trip jitters and ensured I felt confident on the trip.



With the plan set, the first day would take me to EDMA (Augsburg) and LHUD (Szeged) before reaching Bucharest. However, Europe's unpredictable summer weather quickly threw a spanner into my plans. Western Europe was clouded over, but Austria remained clear. Adjusting on the fly, I filed LOAN (Wiener Neustadt) as my alternate and departed from Rochester. (678nm nonstop)

Navigating Challenges in the Air

Crossing the Channel and navigating Belgian airspace at FL120, I realized how critical it was to stay flexible. The weather over EDMA forced me to continue to LOAN, completing the first leg of the journey in 5 hours and

20 minutes. The Arrow's exceptional range was invaluable—without it, the first leg would not have been possible without a possibly massive detour, time delays and expense.

Staying overnight in Neustadt proved wise, as thunderstorms were showing over Hungary. The next morning, I set off for Bucharest, tackling Romania's 8500ft mountains and summer thunderstorms. My dad, though not officially on shift, joined his team for the day to monitor my route and assist. Thanks to his guidance, I was vectored ahead of some converging CBs, and I got to tell him I love him on frequency. That moment alone made the trip unforgettable. Adding to the day's magic, it was also my mum's birthday so a surprise for everyone.

Heading Home: Lessons and Highlights

After a couple of days in Romania, it was time to start the journey back. A storm moving into Europe was making the last leg into the UK a bit of a challenge. So we decided on a stop in Linz (LOWL) on Friday night, lunch in Friedrichshafen (EDNY) on Saturday, and an overnight stay in Düsseldorf (EDDL) on Saturday to wait out the weather.

The return legs were filled with unique experiences: mountain flying in Austria, a Stuttgart airspace transit at FL70, and a Frankfurt transit at FL90. These moments highlighted the importance of preparation and adaptability. Listening to ATIS, understanding airspace dynamics, and knowing what to request made for a smooth day. I'll always be grateful to the Langen Info ATC, who coordinated my Frankfurt transit—a surreal experience flying under traffic following STARs just 1,000 feet above me.



The final leg on Sunday, from Düsseldorf to Rochester, was uneventful apart from some cloud dodging near Ostend. A friendly Border Force officer at EGTO made an appearance and we had a curious chat about the trip and he took a peek at my German grocery shop. (2544nm round trip ✓)



Reflections on a Dream Fulfilled

This trip was more than a series of flight legs; it was a personal journey that involved increasing my comfort level with such a long trip, flying over some of Europe's tallest mountains to hearing my Dad's voice on frequency. This whole experience reminded me of why I fell in love with aviation in the first place and why I am constantly thinking about it.

Sorin PPL @ Invicta Aero Club.

Summer vacation with G-FRAG



As we left the UK on our trip around Europe, I felt a little apprehensive about doing it in our own plane. I know that smaller planes like the Piper Cherokee 6 can face more challenges with weather than planes such as a 737 my Dad normally fly's across Europe. But needless to say, we were all excited. Flying over Brussels with huge airliners beneath us was crazy to see, and we all took many pictures before descending into German airspace. The German man on the radio was very informative and helped us with our arrival into the airfield.

Our first leg was to a reasonably small airport just south of Cologne called Bonn Hangelar. We stopped to clear customs and have lunch in a nice little café in the centre of the town (Bonn). After we had walked back to the plane passing a ME109 on the apron we started on our next leg down to Stuttgart in the south of Germany in nice clear weather. It is a fairly large city that is home to Mercedes and Porsche. We spent a couple of days there walking around the museums before heading off to Salzburg. However the weather was somewhat challenging as we cleared Munich.



Mercedes 300SL



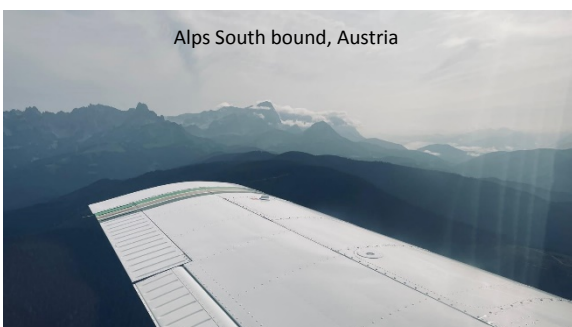
Porsche 911 GT3 RS

Dodging thunderstorms high up in the clouds took a lot of concentration to find the best pathway through. We popped out the clouds to see the mountains and a huge runway in front of us.

Whilst we were in Salzburg we went to the Red Bull hangar. My dad was especially excited to go here because he wanted to see all the props, they use for all of their events. We all love watching the events like the air racing, bike racing and the perilous soapbox racing of which the large hangar has a bit of everything in.

After our quick pitstop in Salzburg we continued our journey through the Alps and down towards Split. It was quite scary flying through the mountains whilst constantly hearing "Terrain, Terrain" every 10 seconds but we made it through without incident and certainly saw some of the most picturesque views in Europe. We left Ljubljana area heading South descending down low over the water and began a long smooth cruise along the Croatian coast.

Suddenly Dad tipped the plane up on the left wing, and there below was a 'Heart' shaped island, it was amazing!



Alps South bound, Austria

We arrived in the small town of Sinj just outside of Split. We were greeted by the friendly owner who had arranged a car for us, and he also told us a bit about where was best to get food etc. After this brief conversation we began a short drive to our villa which overlooked a beautiful lake and hillside, well when I say hillside, it was a 5000ft mountain.

We quickly settled in, unpacked and began a very relaxing week, (my Mums favourite part of any holiday) whilst my brother and I dived in the pool, again, again and again.

Croatia is a very picturesque country and it wasn't long before we were itching to explore.

On one day we took a road trip to Krka falls which is a beautiful lake and waterfalls just 50 miles north of our villa.

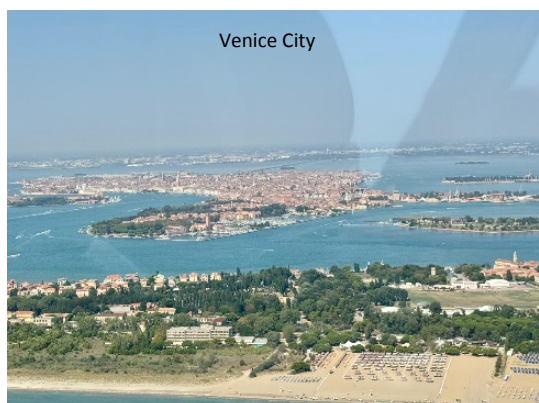
Another day we met members - Wayne, Jon, Pawel & Adam who travelled out to take G-FRAG on a mini European tour. Lucky they returned before we made our return north.



Another time we decided to spend the day at the beach. We drove to the airport, checked FRAG, and took off towards the Island of Brac, there we snorkelled in the sea, had a lovely dinner in the harbour before filling up with fuel and heading back to the mainland. I was allowed to fly as we crossed over the mountain ridge, and it certainly made me concentrate.

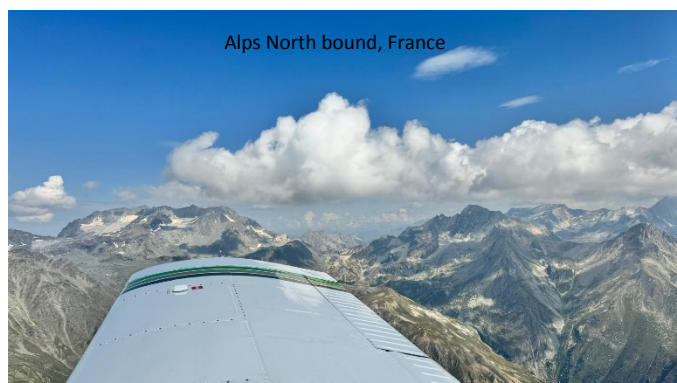


After our week in Croatia, we set off to Italy, specifically Venice. We were to spend only one day here, but it was enough. It was smelly, extremely busy, and VERY hot. Needless to say, it was a great experience. After taking the bus boat through the Grand Canal we walked back through the City and stopped in St Mark's Square for dinner. The next day we returned to the airport that was a short hop across to the island of Lido where we continued our journey to lake Garda, landing at Aero Club Verona. Northern Italy was extremely hot, and finding buses and the next place to stay was somewhat difficult. We met with some Aero Club Verona members and had a business meeting over dinner while overlooking the lake, truly spectacular.



After a couple of nights in lake Garda we headed back to the Aero Club. It was 38°C OAT, and poor FRAG didn't want to start despite a tight cut off for our flight plan into France.

We set off round Milan and into Alps on our way to Annecy. This was one of the most scenic flights of the entire trip. We flew around Mont Blanc near where we ski'd in February, and then into Annecy international airport. We only spent one night in the city, but vowed to return very soon.



Nathan (aged 13 ½)

This was the first time I'd taken an aeroplane on an extended tour, and there is a lot to learn on these travels, the ease of Garmin Pilot for international flight planning made matters a breeze, but logistics of transport on arrival and of course ad-hoc hotels for some of the stays were challenging. The Lake Annecy hotel wasn't booked until we arrived in the FBO, I didn't want any pressure to push on, potentially through weather in the mountains, and this resulted in many options available in the air whilst enroute, passing the many diversions in the plan.

The Aircraft performed faultlessly throughout the 16.5 hours, and sitting behind a modern well equipped panel certainly made the sectors enjoyable.

The Alps crossing was truly breath taking, with mountain tops several thousand feet above us passing our wingtips as we traversed down the valleys.

2025, where will we end up ???



Thank you for supporting Invicta Aero Club throughout 2024, I wish you and your families a merry Christmas and healthy New Year. I look forward to leading the team into 2025 as I'm sure there will be more exciting adventures, members obtain more ratings, and we all enjoy the freedom of flight. Happy landings - Rgds, Clive.