

YP-Moving on....at speed!

With Mark & I very busy with work and family life it has been over two years since we tried to do a trek into France and, in the mean time, Mark joined a group on a TB20 Trinidad & I also got off my backside and did my 'complex' training on the Arrow IV at Henlow (Thanks Paul).

The rot started with Mark and two of his other group members inviting me to go to Dijon for a weekend in late April (Friday afternoon to Sunday morning). I was paying baggage but had a great time and was lucky enough to be put on the aircraft insurance for a very modest sum once we returned.

So Mark is now keen to use the aircraft again and we booked to go away Thursday 18th June to the following Sunday. Very relaxed a la YP, fly a bit stay the night fly a bit more. Mark was coming straight from a Directors meeting but both of us could be at Biggin to fly out by about 1400 so we planned for a longish first leg to somewhere with customs. In the mean time I booked up with 'Roger' the groups TB20 check pilot/instructor for a quick check out on the Wednesday (day before the trip).

In the few days before the trip I trawled the French NOTAMS via

http://www.sia.aviation-civile.gouv.fr/default_uk.htm

and also dug out my old FRANCE VFR (2006), I have tried to get an up to date version but they seem no longer available but you can use

<http://www.aviation-pilote.com/vac.cfm> which has VFR & IFR plates for everywhere in France, all free!

The NOTAMS were a bit of a worry as they said that some of the planned airports had limited hours for customs.

So we planned to go either to Le Touquet and then see where we went after that or Rouen (not if we could help it!) or Deauville or Caen.

Later in the week Mark e mailed to say that a fellow Director (Verner) was going back to Bergerac, but because of Ryanair schedules was going to be stuck in an Hotel overnight, and we could get him home a day early by flying him there. Opportunity too good to miss and reason enough to go.

My info was that Bergerac would be closed for customs after 1600 but I could not find any info on whether this was UTC or local. So I planned Le T as a quick customs stop and it only added about 20 minutes flying time to the journey. Mark in the mean time had rung Bergerac and discovered that the airfield & tower would be open til 2100 local time.

I filed the flight plan whilst I was at Biggin for my check ride and all was ready.

There was a minor tech issue (isn't there always?) with the main relay on the a/c but the maintenance people at Air Touring were going to look at it on the Wednesday or Thursday before the trip. (They replaced it altogether)

Day 1: I arrived early to collect the aircraft from Air Touring and take it round to it's normal hangar so we could load up. Mark was running a bit late so it was a toss up as to whether I should refuel whilst waiting. I didn't in the end so that added a bit more fumble factor. Once Mark and his co-director were on site we loaded up and sorted out our gear as well as a brief for our passenger who had not flown TB20 before. Charts etc all stowed within easy reach we started to taxi for fuel. First problem, I could not transmit for taxi clearance, I could hear OK but it was clear that all the tower was getting was carrier wave. Mark tried, same result. So we stopped to sort out the problem which was so simple, in the sorting out of the cockpit we had swapped

headsets by mistake (the sockets are all in the centre consol) and the transmit button was therefore working the wrong mic! Error realised we proceeded normally, fuelled up and off. First leg with London Info to LFAT climbing over the channel to about 3500' before a long descent for a straight join to downwind runway 32. Pretty normal stuff except we were steaming along at 145Kts and it was only 25 minutes total. Customs at LFAT were their normal sleepy selves and we were quickly on our way again this time without the life jackets on. As we became less busy with flying and a bit more relaxed we noticed a slight vibration through the airframe which neither of us could remember from our trip in April so we resolved to investigate once back on terra firma.

Now the TB20 in question is a very well equipped ship with Bendix King everything including HSI, RMI, ADF, ILS, traffic alert, terrain map, weather radar, and full autopilot. This is a handful to learn and I spent a good bit of the trip to Bergerac asking Mark how to work XYZ. This did not fill our passenger with confidence but he did say that between us we seemed to know what was going on, little did he know! To be truthful most of the flight was spent in planning the next event and getting frequencies, waypoints and airspace sorted out well ahead of the aircraft, we were only too well aware that we were cruising much faster than our brains were used to. The route was LFAT, LFOP (Rouen), passing Evreux Military (Closed), Tours, Poitier and Limoges to arrive at Bergerac LFBE at 1930 Local, temperature 27C.

Verner's wife arrived with their car to take us for dinner with a stop at their lovely home for a quick bottle of champagne, not sure if this was to celebrate deliverance in one piece or his normal routine, ...oh! normal routine more bottles to follow! Dinner was at a very local Michelin guide restaurant with excellent food and drink and a wonderful host. We were being put up in rooms over the restaurant so no worries about how much we put away. I won't bore you with the seven courses and two puddings... Oh all right... Fois Gras, Smoked Salmon, Parma Ham breadsticks, Sea Food Salad, Fillet of Beef, Cheese board, Cognac Soufflé, Crème Brule. Very happy to bed that night.

Day 2: We were invited back to Verner's for lunch and a swim if it was hot, or snooker if not. It turned out to be overcast with some spots of drizzle so we lunched inside and then played snooker. Later in the afternoon we were driven back to the airport with the intention of dropping our bags and then sightseeing in the main town. As ever with aviation things did not go to plan. The customs officers wanted to know when we had arrived, how long we were staying, where we had been before etc. All very polite and nice but it was still a nervous moment. I opted to have a quick look at the aircraft to see if there was anything to account for the vibration and after a little look round I discovered that the RH gear door was a little bit loose and could be moved easily by hand whereas the other one was quite stiff. After telephone calls & e mails to London we had the on site engineers look at it and a temporary fix effected. In the mean while we had told our hosts of the problem and they went off shopping as we now planned to leave that evening for somewhere else, but by the time all this was sorted out I felt that a night in town was called for so we unpacked everything and took a taxi into town, blagging a bottle of wine from the taxi driver the while! Mind you we were taken, not to our requested destination but to the railway station where the proffered hotel was 2* and the room stank of fags and booze. We were on our way out again when the taxi driver arrived to collect his commission! We walked off to find a tourist info office where they found us a very nice hotel.

We sat down for a beer, and then Mark got taken over by work, who were in the throws of taking over a company in the US, so we drank beer through an hours worth of phone calls to Bermuda! The two really exiting looking restaurants in the old town were both full so a few beers and wine, dinner of Pizza (Mark) and Veal (Me) in a small square above the town and then we wandered for a few hours before a pleasant stay in Hotel de Bordeaux just off the old town.

Day 3: Lazy start, there was a market outside our hotel so we took a short stroll along taking in the sights and smells of a busy town, then back for breakfast in the hotel. Look at the charts to plan the day, we wanted to be a bit further North to make the Sunday trip home shorter as it was Fathers day and we both wanted to be back for a bit of family time. We opted for a place called Libourne LFDI which has an 800m concrete runway. We took another taxi back to Bergerac to load some fuel and get on our way. 20 minutes later we were paying the landing fee at LFDI and talking to a very nice Air France captain who spoke good English and offered his car if we wanted to see the local area. There was also a Chipmunk in excellent condition which turned out to be for sale at a reasonable price so if any of you know anyone? We had a coffee whilst looking at the charts to see 'where next' and we then stayed for lunch of green salad with Oysters, King Prawns & Tuna, lovely. We finally decided on La Rochelle LFBH which looked a bit complicated, with lots of avoid areas and other local airfields, but had fuel and customs for flight direct to UK in the morning and was only another 85NM up the coast.

On departure from Libourne we shot some circuits to polish up our manual flying & landing techniques and then flew on to LFBH. The cloud gradually got lower, so we gradually cruised down on George (The Auto pilot) from 6000, down to 2000. We expected a 'point south' arrival but were routed along the coast past the centreline and then in for a normal RH downwind for 28, flying over some pretty built up areas, following the motorway around, landing just on an hour of flight. Parking sorted out we were frisked by the airport security and then found we had to go back air side to file a flight plan and had to go through it all again twice. They have a nice self briefing area in the base of the tower with an internet connection for weather, NOTAMs, flight plans etc and the programme even takes you through it all step by step, all for free. Why don't we have that in UK?

We used the tourist info service outside the airport entrance to book a hotel & the taxi into town. Once checked in we, once again, strolled around town & the dockside but this time shopping for gifts to take home and I bought some more polo shirts as the weather had been hotter than expected and I had run out of clean ones. An offer for polo shirts for 8 euro, was spectacular, until I discovered it was a monster price less 8 euro! Dinner was on the dockside, where all the night life seemed to be, before returning to the square outside the hotel for some coffee and Cognac. It was to be an earlyish start in the morning so we set an alarm and crashed out for the night.

Day 4: Up at 0800 local to look for breakfast in the town, not much open so we rejected the expensive hotel offering and took a taxi to the airport buying some local soft cheeses at the Sunday market on the way. Breakfast consisted of a poor cup of machine coffee in the deserted passenger terminal. Once through customs and security we decided to load a bit more fuel 'just in case' and got airborne just about on time at 10:00 local (0800 UTC). Turning right after take off we were quickly cleared to the approach frequency and then 'on route' to Nantes, Rennes & Deauville. Climbing for most of the time to keep above the building fair weather cumulous but eventually

having to start back down again just short of Deauville. Crossing the channel direct to the Mayfield VOR and then skirting Gatwick Zone we reported at Sevenoaks with information Alpha for a rejoin to runway 03 finally taxiing for fuel, customs, cup of coffee and taxi back to Air Touring to leave them to look at the U/C doors.

313NM just over 2.30 minutes flying time from LFBH.

In total I think we did 7 hours flying and covered 915NM averaging 131 Knots.

Happy Landings.

Scott