



# BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

*News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005*



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## BIGGIN HILL AIR SHOW 2009



The International Air Show is here again and looks set to be another event not to be missed. Sadly though, we don't have our own exclusive pilot meeting point anymore. Hopefully, this will be compensated for by the appearance of the restored Vulcan Bomber which has had some technical problems in the past. For those who have not heard this aircraft close up, are in for some real noise. Let's hope, it makes it to the show.



Remember it was these aircraft that flew directly to the Falklands to

bomb the airport at Port Stanley during this famous conflict to deny the Argi's use of this valuable landing ground. Three Vulcans were deployed, staging from the Ascension Island which was 3,516nm from Stanley. This successful raid was carried out during the night, flying for 15hrs 45mins for the round trip with in-flight refueling several times.



25th Anniversary of the FALKLANDS CONFLICT The RAF joins the conflict

This commemorative envelope was produced in memory of this British achievement by the RAF bombers.



Some of our members for 2009 have taken the option of viewing the show from the grandstand with tickets at £14. This is a prime viewing area and probably the best meeting point for finding old friends. Consider buying these tickets early to avoid disappointment. If you are driving to the show the secret is to arrive early ahead of the anticipated heavy traffic, frayed tempers and overheating radiators, this will ensure a good parking spot as there is no parking near the entrance due

to the current building work being undertaken at the Rizon hangar. Arriving early will also give you a chance to look around the many exhibits before the crush.



With aircraft of WWII on static display to view close up, as well as, other classic military vehicles including many old classic cars.



Can you identify this classic British



Car?, or this classic aircraft?



Both of these classic machines were produced in the UK, 60 years ago. Whilst on the other side of the Atlantic other classics, but more modern for its day were being produced by a company of the 1920's. With many still flying.



## FLYING INTO BAD WEATHER

This is easier than you think...!

It probably won't happen to you, because you would put safety first and turn back. Unfortunately by the time you decide to turn back it's too late. This story happened many years ago around Xmas time and started out as a simple VFR flight from SOCATA Tarbes, which is situated at the foot of the Haute Pyrenees, for Toussus Le Noble, Paris with two Rallye aircraft. With a French colleague we got airborne for Limoge, our refuelling stop. The weather was reported to be good with improvement as we climbed into the blue sky. These aircraft had very basic instruments, ASI, ALT, VSI, T&S, No Radio – strictly VFR. After an hour into the flight we encounter rapidly rising mist and deteriorating visibility. Flying in close formation with me as the leader we only have hand signals as our sole means of communication. We had just flown past the ancient town of Pégreueux. After a few minutes things aren't looking too good, a thumbs down signal is exchanged and we head for the local airfield. We find a room in a beautiful old Chateau on the Dodogne River, real luxury. We had a tour of this ancient town which has a Coliseum (similar to Rome, but smaller). Well rested,

we awake in the morning and look outside – there is thick fog. Remember it is just before Xmas and we need to get home. It would be 1100 hours before there was any sign of the fog lifting, although it looked blue up above it was still very misty. We decided to climb above the airfield with me as leader again and if things were not good, we would land. We climbed out of the mist into a beautiful blue sky at 3,000 feet, with not a cloud in sight, wonderful..! A reassuring thumbs up sign, we set course for Paris. Prior to departure, we had agreed that should we run into bad weather, we would head NW as the weather was known to be clear and the ground was lower. Limoge was just 44nm ahead as we approached the last of the high ground which had a positive clear gap below a layer of cloud – we confirm with a thumbs up sign, looks good..! Before you can say fog, we are in thick cloud, almost touching wingtips with our close formation. The next thing is, my colleague on my right begins to disappear, and then he is gone. We never ascertained who, lost who. The priority was to stay level, maintain heading and height until crossing the known high ground ahead. After a while I estimate that it is safe to descend, reducing speed to a minimum, selecting full flap, keeping the ball in the middle and the turn indicator near the vertical and watching the compass like a hawk for any deviation in direction, I commence a slow descent. Finding a very large field, taking note of which side is north and fly around it with the intention of landing. Then I thought, how to explain my arrival here. During this time in relative safety, I studied the map and found two valleys which headed northwest. I continued cautiously whilst conditions improved, looking for any road signs indicating a road toward Paris. Finally after some time I came across an airfield with the name painted on the roof 'Saint

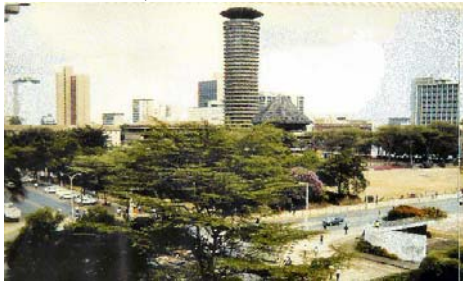
Denis', an airfield I knew well. I set course directly for Toussus Le Noble. Arriving safely, I strolled into the SOCATA hangar at Toussus, to be greeted by my colleague who had arrived 15 minutes earlier. He remarked, "I was just preparing my story" thinking that something had happened to me. He explained, when he lost sight of me, he had carried out a similar procedure, reducing speed, paying attention to the balance (ball in the middle) full flaps maintaining height until he estimated he was clear of the high ground. He came out of cloud and flew on a northerly heading. After 30 minutes he recognized a section of road that he had marched along during his military service, and set a direct course for Toussus. He hadn't realised that it took me a little longer to locate my accurate position. Tragically he was killed a couple of years later in a road traffic accident, in a road tunnel near Versaille. He was a good friend and a very good pilot, always prepared for travel at a moments notice. The moral of this story is - *be fully prepared with your flight plan, written or mental.* Even VFR, you can find yourself in cloud in a split second, particularly, if you think you can remain clear of the cloud above and the ground below, during those narrow margins of flight..!

## AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES



Ashu Metha, 'ASH' as he is known to one and all, was born in Croydon, UK in 1964 (*British to the core*). Having an interest in aviation from an early age, believing this was the answer for his desire for travel. This, he

admits now, was his 'first mistake' in aviation. He has been working at Biggin Hill for the past 22 years!! Having a keen interest in electronics a natural career path to follow appeared to be *avionics*. (aircraft-electronics). 1982 he enrolled into the Brunel Technical College at Bristol and attained a Diploma in Avionics and Aerospace studies and the knowledge required to take CAA avionic licenses. (*at 20 years old he was too young to take the exams, 21 being the minimum age*). Mid-way through the course, during a six week holiday in Kenya, he had an opportunity to spend time at Nairobi, Wilson Airport, where his interest in General Aviation was further aroused. (Downtown Nairobi with



the Jomo Kenyatta building situated in the centre of town). Returning to the UK and leaving college, Ash sought employment in the aviation industry which proved to be very difficult. Somewhat devastated and desperate to work he ended up in a research and development department of a company that made beer and cider counter mounts for pubs, which was a job, but, not quite what he had in mind, although it aroused a latent interest that he has retained to this day – Alcohol !! Around 1985, BH Avionics, had a small radio shop within the confines of the original Air Touring Services hangar and run by Dave King and Tom Cummings, they were advertising for an apprentice. Ash applied for this position and got the job, with a massive cut in salary to get back to his first desire, to be able to work with aircraft. When he enquired as to his duties in this new role, DK explained that he would learn as he went along, but

more importantly, it was critical to sweep up the workshop every Wednesday evening because the CAA always paid "us" a visit on a Thursday. It was several weeks before Ash realised that the CAA visits were definitely not a weekly occurrence and that DK had a subtle way of getting things done!. Ash gradually developed his skills in avionics, cutting down on sweeping up. He has many memorable experiences working with DK and TC, one that will not be forgotten was his first flight in a light aircraft investigating an intercom defect on G-BDEL, Quantel's Sia Marchetti in August 1986. The fault could not be replicated on the ground (*as is usual !*). Gordon Franks, Quantel Chief Pilot, suggested that a test flight was required. Strapped into a 5 point harness, nerves jangling, Ash had diagnosed the problem by the time the aircraft had taxied to the hold. Ash had expected the flight to be aborted with a gentle taxi back to the hangar – he was mistaken, "fancy a quick spin" said GF "er, yes, ok" Ash mumbled, "do you like aerobatics?" GF asked, "er, I'll let you know" grinned Ash. The next half hour was a blur, not to be forgotten, with rolls, spins, loops and other manoeuvres that Ash can't remember being performed. Fantastic! To this day, he has not had a flying experience to beat that one flight with Gordon. Travel ambitions not yet kerbed and finding that GA had not offered any further travel opportunities. Ash decided that he would try and see some of the world under his own steam. He with a close friend (Ken Deal, later to be his best man) from childhood conspired to go touring planning a route through Europe, into Africa, over to India, the Far East, Australasia, the Americas and back to Croydon. Some journey considering their lack of experience for this task! Neither of them had the benefit of a credit card or massive savings.

Money would be earned en-route by finding work. Prior to departure cash was liberated by selling their individual cars. They both gave notice to their respective employers and three weeks later their adventure started. (£400.00 each, a one way flight to Faro, Portugal. £28 each), was the first stage of their journey. The following ten months provided them with a book full of experiences. Doing odd jobs to make ends meet, they ended up living on a boat at Gibraltar for a time doing painting and decorating jobs locally – and their washing !



All together things seemed really good, the sun shone everyday from sunrise until darkness. Eventually they bought one way tickets to Athens, ending up as Orange 'pickers' in Greece.



Ash poses as the 'thinker' at the Acropolis in Athens. After taking in the sights around these historical places they take a cheap flight to Cairo, making their way to the famous Pyramids, and other historical monuments in time.



From the sands of Egypt they made their way southward to the vast green country of Tanzania.



Following this they flew back to Moscow, spending 4 days courtesy of Aeroflot and visiting the Bolshoi. The lust for travel partially satisfied it was time to re-asses his career in aviation. Returning to the UK a quick visit to Air Touring Services Ash was fortunate enough to get his old job back. BH Avionics had by now become part of Air Touring Services, with aircraft being imported with basic instruments and one radio, these would be kitted out to customer requirements by Ash. During this time Ash developed his installation skills and lead to the first of many visits to Socata factory at Tarbes, to study further techniques related to avionics. Whilst on holiday in Ibiza, with some friends, Ash would meet his future wife and has been married for 15 years with two beautiful daughters. Who says holiday romances don't work! In 1989 Carl Beaman bought Air Touring Services from Fred Bennett and Richard Vipond. Helicopter maintenance including G-HEMS was added to the capability list. A new hangar was constructed next to the old hangar, the work force increased and all was well for a couple of years. Sadly Dave King had passed away by this time and Ash became the sole Avionics man. Finally in 1995 this company failed. Ash consequently became redundant. Avionic jobs were few and far between, but fortunately, Ash was offered some workshop space by Tony Westbrook. (T.W.Avionics). A.M. Avionics was born. Client base increased steadily and business was good. Another travel opportunity emerged during a visit to Adams Aviation (Biggin Hill). Ash entered their building and was

immediately accosted by Robin Walsh (*sales and marketing development manger*) who was trying to sell a full avionics stack to a customer at the front desk. It transpired that the customer, Mr Isaac Livni was renovating a Piper Dakota at Lusaka, Zambia. Isaac requested installation drawings so that he could install a complete IFR package into this aircraft. Ash explained that the installation could be quite complex, a ten minute discussion ensued which resulted in Isaac promising Ash a return ticket to Lusaka and a handsome payment if the work could be completed in 10 days. An offer Ash couldn't refuse. True to his word the ticket arrived and Ash found himself back in the jungle completing the said installation. The trip ended with a 2 day stay on the Zambezi River very close to the Victoria Falls. The beauty and raw power, of these falls, needs to be experienced, he says, to appreciate the thunder of water falling 100 metres which can be heard a mile away and the many rainbows that are formed in the mist being carried aloft up to 200 feet above the falls, which falls back as heavy mist soaking one to the skin. Umbrellas and plastic



capas are supplied.



It is hard to imagine the volume of water that continually flows over these falls which are 1,708 metres wide. Ash was treated to a flight

above the falls as his ultimate treat.



Ash would return to Lusaka to fit a similar avionics package in a PA28 that this customer had renovated for his son, which Isaac then flew to the UK. TV fame finally came in 2001 when AM Avionics featured in 'A Plane is Born' a 15 part series for Sky TV on building a 'Europa' kit plane. Ash featured in episode 12 "instru-mental" building and installing the aircraft instrument panel. This programme has been shown several times world wide and Ash still gets cries of help from kit builders struggling with instruments and avionics. The following picture shows the quality of Ash's work – the Europa panel.



Air Touring would be taken over again by Mike Pearce in 1998 retaining the SOCATA agency and adding the TBM series to their sales division. Although enjoying success at A.M. Avionics in 2001 the offer to head up an avionics department with Air Touring appealed to Ash – more travel? This was an opportunity to work with larger exotic aircraft and modern technology. The avionics department became successful. Ash and his team now look after the avionics on most of GA aircraft at Biggin Hill with customers throughout the UK and Europe. Success in the Avionics department led to promotion to Engineering Manager in charge of all engineering and avionics aspects of the business. The business continues to go from strength to strength – long may it continue.