

CHIPMUNK FORMATION TRAINING WEEKEND UK 2008
SEPTEMBER 26th. – 28th.

Report by Rod Brown

Unlike most good ideas which seem to hove into view through the bottom of a beer glass whilst conversing with good aviation friends, this one was borne out of the frustration and withdrawal symptoms of not having flown any formation manoeuvres since Chipmeet May 2008 at Zoersel in Belgium.....it was now early August with not too much of the “flying season” remaining.

So how to go about organising something nearer to home and where to start ?What about a venue and the date?would instructors be available and how many? how many Chipmunk drivers and their mounts could be expected?what about food and somewhere to stay could it be run on the same lines as in Belgium where Tony & Edith de Bruin provide such a slick backup to the facilities provided by Pascal and the members of the Flying Club at Zoersel?

Running a flying school organisation does have its compensations in that a lot of friendships develop over the years and so a call to Jeff Bell at ATC Sywell soon had the venue and dates sorted with the good news that the Aviator Hotel on the airfield could provide evening food, overnight accommodation and the all important breakfast – the Pilot’s Mess adjacent to the tower would be available during the day for teas and light refreshments. Two classrooms with projectors and whiteboards were also available to us in the Brooklands School of Flying over the whole three days for the all important pre-flight briefings – now for the instructors!!

Robert Miller, the garu of Chipmeets since their inception with over 4000 hours on the type, was the man to contact and he soon came back to say that it was possible but ... “how many aircraft and drivers would there be”?

With a nucleus of regulars attending Zoersel in May, emails were soon sent out to them plus any Chipmunk contacts in the UK with whom I regularly correspond and early replies indicated half a dozen definites and with emails being forwarded on by them to other owners this was expected to grow by a few more. I then had the idea one dark and rainy weekend to go through the list of Chipmunk owners on the CAA G-INFO website and send out invitations to those within a reasonable flight time of Sywell52 letters were duly despatched by snailmail but only four replies were received which was very disappointing but in view of the limited time scale not entirely unexpected. There are other things in life besides aviation !!

I then realised that there was a lot more background organisation required if this was going to be a success and enlisted help from Janice & Paul Doyle(G-APYG) who live not too far from Sywell – Janice has organised events for the British Womens Pilot’s Association and ably took on the task of finding alternative accommodation in the local

Sywell area as well as liaising with the hotel and pilot's mess over menus and pricing for the various items.

By the end of the first week of September the confirmed numbers had risen to nine aircraft and twelve pilots with sufficient instructors promised – a quick phone call confirmed that bookings were being made at the hotel. Three local flying areas had to be drawn up and submitted to ATC Sywell for their approval and advice on places to avoid and then these were located and marked on the maps being produced for distribution at the event. Each flying area requires its own radio chat frequency and arrangements were made and agreed with Silverstone, Little Staughton and Bruntingthorpe. As flying was to start on a Friday other local airfields such as Cottesmore and Wittering needed to be notified and NOTAMS submitted.

The highlight of the May Chipmeet is the flypast at Antwerp airport of the Stampé Aircraft Museum by as large a formation as can be mustered on the Saturday afternoon usually comprising some twelve aircraft and attendant photographic aircraft but where within a reasonable distance of Sywell could we hope to achieve the same thing? – the spotlight fell on Cranfield !! Here once again the aviation contacts came up trumps and having worked at Cranfield not too long ago it was soon agreed that the Sunday morning around 11.30am. would be a good time to pass through there at 500ft. and the SATCO gave his blessing.

With some ten days to go consideration now began to turn towardsTHE WEATHER. Long term forecasts on the various websites were not looking very promising but with the weekend looming fast the USAFE website, which has five day satellite information, began to show some high pressure was a distinct possibility. I must admit to being a great enthusiast of this service over the years and found it to be rarely incorrect and by the Wednesday the forthcoming weekend was looking ...ON. This was just as well as I had advised all those confirmations that the Wednesday evening would be the make or break decision time.

Friday 26th. dawned with blue skies and reasonable visibility over southern UK south of Luton but the METARS showed anywhere north of there was FOGGY with the Sywell website showing 400 metres and OVC 001. So having arrived at Denham at 08.30 all we could do was to get G-ATHD out of the hanger and taxi to the tower where tea and coffee plus a met information computer were available and wait for the sun to do its work. Eventually the temperature and dew point began to creep apart and the situation improved and we got to Sywell at 13.00 to find G-APYG(Lt.Gransden), G-BCPU & G-HAPY (Wycombe Air Park), G-BWNL(Wickenby) and G-BWVY (White Waltham) already arrived and having lunch in the Pilot's Mess. Robert Miller, Pete Thorn, Dickie Duke and Guy Pearce of the instructors had also arrived by road and were raring to go.

And so the meeting began with two sorties of three aircraft each being flown plus one solo aerobatic instructor flight which put 1.9 hours on the board.

Saturday morning was forecast to be a repeat performance of FOG and the first sortie did not get airborne until three minutes short of 13.00 but this was followed by five others of assorted two and three ship formations depending on the type of training and currency requirements plus one aerobatic sortie.... hours flown by the end of day two now totalled 8.4 hours.

Several aircraft departed homeward to their local airfields with some seven aircraft secured at the end of the day on the concrete hard standing and both crews and instructors retired to the Aviator hotel for drinks and a chat about the afternoons flying - this very friendly atmosphere continued over a good meal well into the evening.

Sunday morning showed a vast improvement on the two previous days with nothing like as dense a fog as forecast and it quickly lifted into a 1600ft. cloudbase which meant the decision was made to cancel the flypast at Cranfield for safety reasons. With arrival back at Sywell of locally based aircraft around 10.15, formation flying training got underway again soon after 11.00 and a further four sorties were flown including the only four ship which took place at the end of the session around 15.40.

Total formation flying achieved was 11.9, aerobatics 1.0 which works out to be 30.5 Chipmunk hours flown over the three days.

So finished a great and very successful weekend with many friendships made or renewed and my thanks go to all the crews and instructors and the boys and girls in the tower who made it all possible. In preparation for the May Chipmeet 2009 in Belgium it is hoped to have another formation training weekend in February or March.

Those who were there.....

G-BWNL	Stewart Smith, Dennis Baldry, Ken Kelso	G-BBRV	Jim Colster
G-PVET	Ken Fraser	G-HAPY	Harold Preiskel
G-APYG	Janice & Paul Doyle	G-BCPU	Peter Waller
G-ATHD	Owen Cubitt, Rod Brown	G-B WVY	Peter Tuplin
G-BXCV	Trish & Dennis Neville	G-BYHL	Charlie Brown
G-BBND	Carol de Solla Atkin		

Instructors:- Robert Miller, Pete Thorn, Guy Pearce, Mike Roe, Dickie Duke, John Plummer, Andy Tomlin.

Visiting for the event:- Chipmunks G-BBNA & G-BVTX from Husbands Bosworth and Pacer G-BTLM with Bill Fisher for air to air photography