

> GEOFF PAYNE

Originally inspired by Biggles, London Gliding Club's Geoff Payne has flown at sites all over the world, but considers Dunstable his favourite. He enjoys instructing and says that, although he planned a 750km at 75, he wonders if 790km at 79 might be pushing it?

Age? 79

Marital status? Celebrating our Golden Wedding Anniversary with Rita!

Where were you born? Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset.

Where do you live now? Ealing, London.

Occupation? I trained as an architect, but moved on to town planning and advising the United Nations, World Bank and governments on improving access to affordable housing, hoping to make the

Geoff Payne trained as an architect, but moved on to advising governments on improving access to affordable housing. He is currently writing a book about the global housing challenge

world a better place.

I've been fortunate enough to work in over 40 countries, including Cuba, India, Ethiopia and Vanuatu. I particularly like countries that have gliding clubs!

Did any of the gliders that you learnt on have enclosed cockpits?

No, it was all open cockpits and cravats!

How and when did you start gliding?

I was obsessed with flying as a child and still am. I joined the local Air Training Corps (621 Squadron), then based at Weston airfield. We flew T-31s and T-21s, which we kited off the winch with great success. I went solo at Weston in 1958.

Which pilots most influenced you?

Biggles was my initial hero! The ATC Squadron was led by my schoolteacher, Robbie Robinson. When I did an instructor course at the RAFGSA in the early 1960s, Andy Gough was brilliant. When I took up the sport again after a gap of 18 years, Brian Spreckley was a leading influence mainly because of his ability to know what each pilot was capable of and how to help them achieve it. Plus Tim Scott, who was great on sports psychology. Dave Caunt was amazing in achieving more 750s than anyone I know – some of them started from winch launches! I admired the staying power of John Jeffries and Derek Piggott. They all helped raise the bar.

Do you think it's helpful in gliding to be mechanically minded?

If it were, I'd never have been sent solo...

How many other family members glide?

I am the only obsessive-compulsive member of the family and am now flying through 3,300 hours.

Where and what was your most memorable flying experience?

How many pages do I have?! When I was working in Lesotho, a local surveyor who owned an ASW 20 that he kept at Goldfields Gliding Club at Welkom Airfield, near Bloemfontein, South Africa, kindly let me





use it whenever I wanted and the club was very welcoming. Some of the most exciting and challenging flights were in the Alps, particularly at La Motte with a group from Dunstable led by Bill Craig.

Do you still enjoy instructing?

Yes, instructing keeps me on my toes and brings joy, especially in meeting the pupil's needs and introducing others to the joy of gliding.

When our club needed a new hangar roof and we had to raise matching funds, many club members sponsored a flight for youngsters nominated by social services. One boy of about 12 was apparently being bullied at school. We flew a K-21 together and he briefly took the controls. I was touched to hear later that after his headmaster announced at assembly that 'he had flown a plane' he was never bullied again. It's nice to think that we can make a difference.

What are your favourite gliding sites in Britain?

Dunstable and Llanbedr, both set in

gorgeous countryside. Dunstable is extremely welcoming to families and pilots of all ability and interest. The club has a great committee, manager Andy Roch does well at keeping positive under pressure and members are incredibly supportive – and great at banter!

What are your favourite sites in Europe?

I have vivid memories of Le Blanc and La Motte in France, Cerdanya in Spain and Aero Club Skopje in North Macedonia. However, the annual Dunstable visit to Saal in Germany has been a diary highlight for many recent years. The conditions usually provide for great flying and club members arrange dinners every evening at which they join us, making the whole expedition a fantastic holiday. I hope very much we can return in 2022.

What is your favourite site in the world?

Dunstable, of course!

Who do you admire most in the sport?

Mark Newland-Smith has become a leading cross-country pilot and also makes

The perfect soaring day for Geoff Payne, pictured at Dunstable with his ASW 27B 'GP'

■ Geoff was interviewed by Mark Harrison and Rupert Robertson

■ Recent photographs by Tony Hutchings Photography

■ Is there someone you would like to nominate to appear in S&G's pilot profile? Send your nominations to editor@sailplaneandgliding.co.uk detailing why you have nominated them.



✎ a massive contribution by being active on the committee and taking charge of Dunstable's thriving cadet scheme to help youngsters get into gliding.

What piece of advice would you give to an aspiring competition pilot?

Imagine yourself in a fix having made one or two poor tactical decisions. Rather than getting frustrated, take it as an opportunity to demonstrate the power of positive thinking and see if you can recover from such a situation better than others (Brian Spreckley said it helped him win the world championships).

What has been your most interesting competition day so far and why?

At a Dunstable Regionals, I struggled around a task. On landing back, I assumed I was last and that everyone else had packed up and gone home, only to find when called to control to confirm that I'd indeed rounded all the turnpoints that I had, in fact, won the day!

What do you always pack for a comp?

The usual, plus a tent. In the glider I take an anorak, carrots, a book (just in case) and mint humbugs!

When not gliding, what do you do for recreation?

Tennis, walking our dog, gardening and playing with our grandsons, one of whom calls GP 'Grandad's Plane'.

What book are you reading at the moment?

I am currently completing writing one about the global housing challenge, so most of my reading is connected to that.

What is your favourite film?

Belleville Rendez-vous (2003), a life-enhancing animated French film.

What is your favourite piece of music?

Beethoven's awesome *Ninth Symphony*.

What would your motto be?

Do as much as you can, as well as you can, as long as you can. Also, gliding is the best way of getting high legally!

What's your next challenge?

I had planned a 750km flight at 75. A 790km flight now might be pushing it.

Geoff continues to enjoy introducing others to the joy of gliding (Andy Sampson)

