

pilot profile No. 196 Terry Aspinall

Terry started hang gliding in 1973. He flew a lot with early pioneer David Cook, later to become the first pilot to cross the English Channel on a foot-launched powered hang glider, and designer of the remarkable Shadow microlight. Terry joined the Norfolk club around 1976 and helped pioneer many East Anglian sites. Many club members lived in the south of the region and a new club, the Suffolk Coastal Floaters, was formed in 1979 in which Terry was a major influence. Eventually he strapped an engine to his Birdman Cherokee in pursuit of wider horizons. With help from others including David Cook he built his own trike, powered by a 160cc Valmet engine, and never looked back. At an early microlight fly-in at Woburn Abbey he won six of the eight prizes on offer (David Cook picked up the other two). He is still fascinated by the history of hang gliding and runs a very useful website covering the early years of the sport. Although resident in Australia for many years he is still remembered with respect by the pioneer pilots of East Anglia.



Age? 66

Where were you born? Near Ipswich in Suffolk. At the time my father was doing his bit to help chase Rommel out of North Africa.

Where do you live now? My day time job took me and my family to New Zealand, but I finally settled down in the beautiful city of Brisbane in Australia. We have a saying here: It's beautiful one day and perfect the next.

Occupation? Electrician.

Previous occupations? I wired out many of the so-called nuclear bomb-proof shelters on British and American air bases throughout East Anglia. I ended up working as a maintenance electrician, was sent to New Zealand to help construct a new factory, then headhunted to Australia.

How and when did you start flying? I picked up my very first hang glider from Ken Messenger's Birdman factory at Marlborough. Ken spent ten minutes running over how to rig it up and how to fly it, but I couldn't remember a thing. It was all word-of-mouth stuff in those days as there were no books on the subject. But I was lucky and stumbled into David Cook, who introduced me to the delights of the 30ft cliff at Sizewell in late 1973 or early 74.

Which pilots most influenced you? Bob Wills was flying at Mere on the day I picked up my glider from Marlborough and his flying was very impressive. On a local level David Cook has been a great influence, and his determination to win whatever the odds has rubbed off on me. But the greatest influence was Paul Whitley, an amazing local flier

who pioneered several of the early sites in Norfolk. For Paul there were no trumpets to be sounded, just the enjoyment of flying. He simply turned up, had a couple of great flights and went home. In those early years Brian Woods also stood out from the crowd. His position of being the man to beat was taken over by Bob Calvert. I spent many hours watching his every move, but to no avail!

Where and what was your most memorable flying experience? The very first time I conquered Sizewell. It was the cliff I had learnt to fly on and I had dreamed of soaring it for several years. David Cook had been flying his fixed-wing VJ23 there for some time but it had an L/D three times greater than my Cherokee. It was such a sensation to be soaring a 30ft sand dune.

What is your favourite flying site in Britain? The Cromer to Mundesley run on the north-east coast of Norfolk.

What is your favourite site in Europe? Somewhere near Waterford in Ireland. A small group from the Suffolk Coastal Floaters flew there in a competition sponsored by Murphy's Brewery. After the comp we were treated to a big booze-up at the brewery which had allotted 17 pints of beer per person, but had to up the quota halfway through the night. Few of us felt like flying the next day but we were saved from further embarrassment when the day was blown out.

Who do you most admire in the sport? Those people behind the scenes who help keep the clubs and the sport alive for others to enjoy.

What trait do you most deplore in yourself? I talk too much. I'm the guy who receives a two-sentence e-mail from my friends and sends them two pages in reply.

What trait do you most deplore in other people? Maybe it's my Royal Marine Commando training, but I'm a stickler for time. If you say you are going to be somewhere at such and such a time you should be there.

When not flying, what do you do for recreation? I run 12 websites, love playing boogie-woogie piano, play bass guitar in a band most weekends and dabble in the art of Magic and cards routines.

What is your favourite piece of music? *Crime of the Century* by Supertramp will never be beaten.

What is your favourite book? I became a Huckleberry Finn fan when a teacher read *Tom Sawyer* to us at primary school. And having been on active service in Borneo I like to read anything to do with soldiers of fortune and Special Forces: *Devil's Guard* by George Robert Elford and *The Five Fingers* by Gayle Rivers and James Hudson.

What is your favourite film? My wife loves *Notting Hill*, and having been made to watch it half a dozen times I have to admit that I do enjoy the film.

What is your greatest fear? Ending up a vegetable in a hospital bed. I hope if that happens the machines can be switched off with something like a TV remote.

What is your idea of perfect happiness? I haven't got one and often wonder if it exists.

What would your motto be? Do unto others as they would do unto you... only do it first.

How would you like to be remembered? As somebody who tried to help others for no financial reward.



Terry Aspinall in the early 1980s