

Let's stop the rot

Since January of this year I have noticed a number of aircraft being mentioned on social media that are lying unwanted in various trailers, hangers and the odd barn. These aircraft have served us well, kept us safe and deserve a better end than slowly disintegrating and coming to a lonely end.

So, why should we be worried about this? Well, firstly they might not be as far gone as you might think. They may have been forgotten, but they might have been stored in a dry and rodent free environment and could still be saved. Secondly, if un-saveable they could be a source of much needed 'Donor' spare parts to keep other aircraft of the type flying, canopies, skids, metal parts, flying surfaces plus to many parts to list here.

We all know how difficult it is to get new parts made or sourced, so using replacement parts is much easier and quicker.

So what can I do to help you ask yourself? Well there must be at least one Vintage Glider Club member at every club, so can I ask you to take some time and have a walk round your airfield? You can tell if a trailer has not been opened for some time, or an aircraft has been sitting at the back of the hanger, or even in the rafters.

Make a few discreet enquires, the owners might still be at the club or maybe they left years ago. You might hear of an aircraft that is off site in a barn or out building, if so, may I suggest that you then let me have the information? I will then produce a list of these aircraft so that we can keep tabs on them before they go 'missing'. Let's do something before the committee decide to have a clear out with disastrous results.

The main problem with this sort of project is what to do when we find one of these 'lonely' aircraft. Before venturing further let me put my hat in the ring by saying I do not mind trying to contact the various people involved.

So, the first thing to do is find out who is the current owner or owners of the aircraft. Are they still at the club, or have they just moved on or disbanded? Once found then discussions can take place. This will turn out to take more time than you think, you may find one syndicate owner, but the others are not around anymore.

The person that you have located may not know where they are, but with someone showing an interest in the aircraft, the thought of a sale comes to the fore. I can understand that they may think that the aircraft has a high monetary value, but they will often not consider the time, cost and effort that can be involved in returning the aircraft to the sky.

More discussions will have to take place, because in their eyes, if you are not buying, then as far as they are concerned, it can stay in the trailer until someone else comes along who will. Can you see where this is going? The glider is still sitting in the trailer,

remember the trailer is not at its best, damp and mould abound, insects and rodents will also find these conditions very favourable for food and homes, timber, cushions, with straps a particular favourite. The important thing is to save the glider.

Another avenue is to try and persuade the owner to let you take it out of its trailer, give it a good clean, remove any inhabitants and hopefully get it stored in more favourable conditions, ideally in another trailer, or in the back of the workshop or hanger for a whilst discussions take place. The glider has now been saved.

If you cannot find the owners then the next stage would be to talk to the Club Chairman. They might be able to help with the first stage, but if not then the second stage is to contact the BGA (this is always a good starting point for tracking down absent owners).

It is very important that you make every effort possible to locate the owner of the aircraft as there is a legal process that the committee or club needs to go through before they can simply give someone else's property away. They are legally obliged to serve the rightful owner with notice, especially if there are outstanding dues or charges, or at least be able to prove that attempts have been made to do so and that adequate time has passed without a response. Until then one must assume that it is still legally the owner's property.

So if you are unable to make contact with the owners and the aircraft has been sitting on club land some time, chances are the committee would probably would like it moved on.

Remember, in some cases, the glider may have lain forgotten for some time, and it may be down to your actions that they have even remembered that the glider is even still there! Now to the question of whether it owes the club money for unpaid rent? The aircraft is worth nothing, the trailer also has not moved for a long time, so is the money owed worth the time and cost that you will be paying out? This is the problem and the aircraft could then possibly be taken out and 'disposed' of, which is what we are trying to avoid in the first place.

So, we now need to persuade the club to let the aircraft be taken away with no comeback on them. Most clubs will be grateful for the extra space in the trailer park and would probably like it moved as soon as possible. An ideal situation I know, but it could happen.

Then there is the next stage of where to put it? You do not want it to be seen as an eyesore at your own airfield, so once on site, thoroughly clean the trailer inside and out. Maybe a new coat of paint will not go amiss. Now that the trailer looks tidy, it will will give the impression to onlookers that it should be there.

Of course what normally happens is the trailer is so far gone that it cannot be safely moved. Simply borrow a trailer from your own club and bring it back in that, removing any parts from the old trailer that might be useful. The old trailer can then be consigned to the bonfire that every club seems to have and disposed of. Then discuss

with your club where you can put the aircraft for a while, the back of the hanger would be fine, thank you Mr Chairman, let me buy you a beer or two! Again, an ideal situation I know, but it could happen.

So we now have the saved aircraft at your home base. The next stage becomes the most interesting, what do we do now? If the Editor lets me, then I will continue the story in the next issue. If you have any thoughts on the subject, then please contact me at:

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